

## UNEA-4 Highlights Wednesday, 13 March 2019

Delegates raced to complete negotiations on all outstanding draft resolutions today. The Committee of the Whole (COW) convened in morning, afternoon and evening plenaries, and approved texts on food loss, biodiversity, and UNEA-5. Informal discussions took place during the day on other draft resolutions, resulting in approval of resolutions on the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) process, single-use plastics, and marine litter and microplastics. UNEP launched the Sixth GEO report (GEO-6) today, and delegates convened in plenary to deliver national statements.

### Committee of the Whole

In the morning, COW Chair Fernando Coimbra (Brazil) outlined to the plenary several items for consideration and approval. Working Group and Contact Group chairs reported two agreed resolutions on: food loss and waste (UNEP/EA.4/L.3) and innovations on biodiversity and land degradation (UNEP/EA.4/L.11). The COW approved and forwarded the agreed drafts to the UNEA-4 plenary, as well as compromise text on UNEA-5 (UNEP/EA.4/L.29), with no further comment.

The EU and MALAYSIA objected to compromise texts prepared overnight on single-use plastics and marine plastic litter, respectively. Interested parties proceeded to informal consultations led by Contact Group 2 Chair Martin Gronda (Argentina).

Working Group 2 Chair Julia Pataki (Romania) reported that consultations on the texts on deforestation and geoengineering required further time, and interested parties likewise proceeded to informal consultations, facilitated by Pataki and Agus Justianto (Indonesia).

On GEO-6, Lukáš Pokorný (Czech Republic) reported a compromise proposal had been discussed informally and awaited approval from capitals.

Following consultations, plenary reconvened in the afternoon. Gronda reported that compromise texts had been agreed on both Addressing Single-use Plastic Products Pollution (UNEP/EA.4/L.10) and Marine Plastic Litter and Microplastics (UNEP/EA.4/L.7). The COW approved and forwarded both resolutions to UNEA-4. JAPAN, NORWAY and SRI LANKA welcomed adoption of the resolution, with JAPAN stressing the role of UNEP in implementing the marine plastic litter resolution and the need to collaborate with the Basel Convention and International Maritime Organization. INDIA and the EU expressed disappointment that the single-use plastics resolution was weakened, and warned this should not affect the agreed language on the same issue in the draft Ministerial Declaration.

Co-facilitators Pataki and Justianto requested additional time to address remaining issues on deforestation and geoengineering. Chair Coimbra announced that Marcus Davies (Canada) would facilitate the GEO-6 discussion, due to Pokorný's impending departure later that day.

The COW convened again in the evening. Gustavo Baptista (Brazil), on behalf of Davies, reported consensus had been reached on a compromise text on Enhancing UNEP's Science-Policy Interface and Endorsement of the GEO (UNEP/EA.4/L.27). The resolution was approved and forwarded to UNEA-4.

Facilitator Pataki reported no consensus was reached on the draft resolution on deforestation and agricultural commodity supply chains. The EU, expressing disappointment that not all delegations accepted the concept behind the resolution, namely, that agricultural supply chains are a major driver to deforestation, said it had chosen to withdraw the resolution. They pledged to return to this issue in other forums and future UNEAs. COLOMBIA and BOLIVIA expressed regret that the draft resolution was not adopted, and pledged support for similar proposals in the future.

Facilitator Justianto reported that no consultations had been held on the resolution on geoengineering, and SWITZERLAND said it chose to withdraw the resolution. He expressed regret that several delegations had been unable to accept the final compromise proposal, and anticipated further discussions beyond UNEA on this issue. NEW ZEALAND, BOLIVIA, NORWAY, and the EU paid tribute to Switzerland for its efforts, and BOLIVIA regretted that the precautionary principle had not been sufficiently recognized in relation to this issue.

Coimbra expressed pride in the achievements of the group in addressing emerging environmental issues, noting that the new POW adopted will support their ongoing efforts.

**Provisional agenda, date and venue of UNEA-5:** Coimbra noted that this item was already addressed, with the approval of the draft resolution UNEP/EA.4/L.29 earlier in the day.

**Adoption of the rapporteur's draft report of the meeting:** Coimbra invited delegates to consider the draft procedural report of the COW by rapporteur Putera Parthama (Indonesia), and to adopt the report on the understanding that the final version to be completed by the Secretariat will include an account of the closing plenary. Delegates adopted the draft report of the Committee of the Whole (UNEP/EA.4/CW/L.1).

**Closing:** Coimbra expressed warm thanks to Parthama and the UNEP Secretariat, and conveyed his highest appreciation to OECPR Chair Francisca Ashietey-Odunton and all members of the CPR for their work in presenting "a mature set of decisions" that had enabled work to be completed this week. He gavelled the meeting to a close at 8.41 PM.

## Global Environment Outlook

**Interactive Dialogues:** In the morning, the GEO-6 team presented the GEO-6 report findings. Moderator Nadya Hutagalung, UNEP Goodwill Ambassador, opened the session, highlighting the importance of science-policy interfaces.

Jian Liu, UNEP Chief Scientist, said that all UNEP reports pointed to the need to change, “for ourselves and for the generations to come.”

Paolo Soprano, Co-Chair of the High-level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group (HLG), explained how the GEO-6 report had been prepared in an 18-month process culminating in January 2019, when the Summary for Policy-Makers was negotiated and approved at a four-day meeting in Nairobi.

HLG Co-chair Yi Huang highlighted the report’s relevance for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the fight against climate change.

Pierre Boileau, Head of the GEO-6 Unit, UNEP, explained that the report had considered progress toward 93 SDG indicators and that data was lacking on more than 40 indicators, highlighting the need for more data and information to adequately assess progress toward global goals.

Joyeeta Gupta and Paul Ekins, GEO-6 Co-Chairs, introduced the theme of the GEO-6 report, “Healthy Planet, Healthy People.” Gupta highlighted the drivers of an unhealthy planet, and presented statistics on the crosscutting issues of chemicals, waste, resource use, energy consumption, and food waste. She gave examples of quantifiable impacts of an unhealthy planet, such as the seven million deaths per annum that result from air pollution.

Ekins discussed policy innovation, noting that GEO-6 contains case studies of policy effectiveness on environmental issues. He welcomed the current groundswell of bottom-up efforts to realize the SDGs and other multilateral environmental agreements, and warned that current trends suggest, “this is not the future we want.”

Bob Watson, Chair, Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), noted that the message of all global assessments from the GEO process, IPBES and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is the same: that without rapid transformative change, global warming, biodiversity loss and land degradation will continue. He encouraged ecosystem-based approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, and the restoration of ecosystems.

**GEO-6 for Youth:** In this panel discussion, authors of the GEO-6 for Youth report highlighted issues including the need for systems thinking, environmental education in schools, relevant work skills for green jobs, and action on plastics. Speakers from the floor proposed many ideas for action, and urged participants to bear in mind “the power of human emotion” to bring change.

Lewis Pugh, UNEP Patron of the Oceans and endurance swimmer, told the audience about his first-hand experiences witnessing the degradation of oceans around the world.

**Transformational change:** This panel discussion focused on the possibility of everyday actions to promote sustainability, focusing on the need for solutions to various categories of waste, including plastics, wastewater, and e-waste, and on the roles of states, local governments, and the private sector in promoting behavioral change.

**Other reports:** The group reconvened in the afternoon for the launch of three reports on global resources, chemicals, and waste management.

International Resources Panel Co-Chair Janez Potočnik presented findings of the Global Resource Outlook 2019 report, which was launched on 12 March. He underlined that global resource use has more than tripled since 1970 in 2017. Panelists

focused on the urgency to decouple natural resource use and environmental impacts from economic activity, and outlined related national initiatives, such as: a 2018 Circular Economy Strategy in Colombia; the Netherlands’ 50% reduction target on primary resource use by 2030; and the EU’s 2018 Circular Economy Package.

Ligia Noronha, UNEP, moderated a panel discussing key lessons from the Global Chemicals Outlook II and Regional Waste Management Outlook reports. On the former, panelists touched on the increasing size of the chemical industry and complexity of global supply chains; the health, environmental and economic impacts of these activities; and the linkages between chemicals and waste management and the SDGs. On the latter, panelists highlighted the value of regional reports in capturing the different challenges faced by diverse regions.

## UNEA-4 Plenary

In an afternoon plenary, delegates continued delivering national statements. Speakers addressed themes of SCP, waste management challenges, extended producer responsibility, and climate resilience, as well as other issues. NICARAGUA issued a rousing call for concerted global action on climate and the environment, on the scale of the global movements that abolished slavery, ended colonial rule, and established labor rights. A full set of speeches and written statements can be found here: <http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/statements#>

## In the Breezeways

Delegates awoke Wednesday to chairs’ compromise texts that sought to break the diplomatic logjam on an issue inspiring passion among many: plastics. India, following up on Prime Minister Modi’s pledge to phase out single-use plastics by 2022, sought a resolution endorsing similar action by other Member States. Norway, Japan and Sri Lanka, like many other Member States, wished to bring coherence to existing initiatives on marine plastic litter and microplastics, and to take the next step, namely, creating a body that will lay out possible governance options at UNEA-5. However, long negotiations in formal and informal sessions during the OECPR-4 the previous week and UNEA-4 this week were stymied by firm resistance from a handful of countries.

Thus, it was not a surprise that the proposed compromise texts contained greatly diluted proposals. As the result of opposition voiced by the EU and Malaysia in the COW, these texts were sent back into informal consultations. According to some participants, rather than face an angry plenary with delegates lining up to decry the lack of a viable compromise on these two issues, negotiators finally struck bargains that resulted in new texts all could endorse.

The compromise worked out on single-use plastics encourages Member States to develop and implement national or regional actions to address the environmental impacts of single-use plastic products, and for UNEP to support them in developing national or regional action plans upon request.

“It’s a glass half-full thing,” said one delegate. “Not what we wanted, but our foot is in the door.” Another, more philosophical, pointed out that this was only the first round of consideration on single-use plastics, “so there’s always UNEA-5.”

On marine plastic litter, the compromise extends the mandate of the *Ad Hoc* Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics to UNEA-5 and creates a multistakeholder platform within UNEP, but does not establish an ongoing Open-Ended Working Group, as some had called for. The proponents stressed the key was not to let the resistance “force us into stagnation or a step back.” As one delegate concluded, with patient resignation, “As long as there’s forward momentum, even if it’s just the bare minimum, we’ll find a way to work with it.”