

UNEA-4 Highlights Thursday, 14 March 2019

The High-Level Segment of UNEA-4 opened at mid-day, after the start of the morning's One Planet Summit at the UN Offices at Nairobi. Five country leaders, besides other dignitaries, addressed the opening plenary, and many environment ministers delivered statements. In the afternoon, two 90-minute dialogue sessions took place with ministers and civil society representatives, respectively.

High-Level Segment Opening

As heads of state and government made their way from the One Planet pavilion to the auditorium at UNEP Headquarters, delegates were welcomed by a choir performance, dedicated to the victims of the airplane crash on Sunday, while *en route* from Addis Ababa to Nairobi.

UNEA President Siim Kiisler (Estonia) highlighted that sustainable consumption and production (SCP) should be at the core of all countries' efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Referring to the sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) report's warning that the world has exceeded the Earth's carrying capacity, he called for collective efforts to find innovative pathways to achieve SCP with "a deep sense of purpose, fraternity, compassion and determination."

Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, welcomed all participants and stressed the importance of integrating traditional and cultural knowledge in pathways to SCP. He recognized the contributions of indigenous African groups and traditional spiritual leaders to natural resources management. He underscored Kenya's actions toward a circular economy and his country's commitment to reinforcing the role of UNEP in Nairobi, as the global leader for protecting the environment.

Emmanuel Macron, President of France, warned that the international community is not on track to limit global warming and reduce biodiversity loss. He spoke of the vision behind the third One Planet Summit, taking place in parallel with the High-level Segment, and the forthcoming UN 2019 Climate Summit, both of which seek to promote transformative change and avoid the "greenwashing" of existing economic practices. He cited several French-led multilateral efforts to advance these agendas, such as the intention to issue a "G7 Pledge" on environmental issues, rather than its usual communiqué, under the French G7 Presidency in 2019; and the push for the adoption of a Global Pact for the Environment at the UN, which he described as a legally-binding "compass" that would both endow citizens with a set of rights to a healthy environment as well as with the means to fight "anti-environment" behaviors worldwide.

Maithripala Sirisena, President of Sri Lanka, emphasized that all people have the right to live in a safe environment, and drew attention to society's joint responsibility for the sustenance of the Earth. He highlighted Sri Lanka's role in proposing UNEA resolutions on mangroves, waste management, marine plastic litter and food waste. He outlined his country's initiatives to protect and restore mangroves, limit motor vehicle emissions, minimize land-based sources of marine pollution, ban plastic bags, end the open burning of plastics, protect coral reefs, promote sustainable agriculture, increase forest cover, implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and create green cities.

Andry Rajoelina, President of Madagascar, underscored the importance of addressing climate change and presented efforts by Madagascar, a mega-diverse country, to use its biodiversity as "an engine for green growth." He emphasized his country's plans to shift towards renewable energy sources while doubling or tripling energy production and improving access to electricity, and the campaign to reforest 40,000 hectares a year on the island nation.

Édouard Ngirente, Prime Minister of Rwanda, welcomed the opportunity to define "new, green, clean, and climate-friendly" sustainable development models, highlighting the importance of implementing the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol. He called for innovative solutions to address water resources management and dependence on biomass, a source of cooking fuel in his country. He outlined his region's efforts towards a circular economy, including through: the African Circular Economy Alliance to facilitate exchanges of good practices and foster partnerships; and the African Green Growth Forum 2020 to be held in Kigali, Rwanda.

Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, highlighted the need for urgency and upscaling actions towards a sustainable future, especially in relation to biodiversity loss, climate change, and changing unsustainable consumption habits. She drew attention to the UN 2019 Climate Summit, and called for bringing youth, women and girls to the center of such efforts, in particular through UNEP's #SolveDifferent campaign.

Kristalina Georgieva, interim President, World Bank, said it was significant that an environmentalist such as herself was in this post, and spoke of the Bank's efforts to reduce environmentally harmful subsidies and align its mandate of eradicating poverty and boosting prosperity with environmental concerns.

Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director, UNEP, said Kenya's experience of scaling up a technology enabling payments using mobile phones was an example of how a single innovation can transform "the way we live and our economies function." She called on everyone to apply similar ingenuity to humanity's challenges.

National statements

Delegates delivered national statements through the afternoon, highlighting their national actions to address environmental challenges and undertake SCP, including zero-waste policies and reducing food waste. Some speakers expressed satisfaction with the resolutions approved earlier in the week, welcoming, for example, the resolutions on marine plastic pollution and sustainable mobility. Statements and video clips of the speakers can be viewed here: <http://web.unep.org/environmentassembly/statements>

Leadership Dialogue

Environmental challenges related to poverty and natural resources management, including sustainable food systems, food security and halting biodiversity loss: Moderator Nikhil Seth, UN Institute for Training and Research, introduced panelists and questioned how to address multiple environmental challenges in an integrated manner, referring to the GEO-6 report calling for urgent actions at a larger scale. David Nabarro, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, noted that participants at UNEA-4 are all “systems thinkers.” He stressed the need to accept different opinions and perspectives in order to align different stakeholders, in particular on action to transform the food system. Cristiana Paşca Palmer, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity, recommended mainstreaming the concept of natural capital into national planning, including through a better narrative on the role of ecosystems in economic activities. Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, highlighted that better data is needed, noting that currently it is only possible to estimate economic costs for about 40% of climate disasters. Joshtrom Kureethadam, Holy See, said he found hope in four groups: young people, indigenous communities, religious communities, and women.

Comments from the floor raised issues, such as: tackling illegal fishing; bringing food issues into the portfolio of environment ministries; the role of wetlands and soil conservation in ensuring food security; and the development of appropriate indicators for the sustainable management of ecosystems. Several Member States expressed their disappointment that UNEA-4 had not produced a high level of ambition and a sense of urgency on pressing issues, such as deforestation.

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue

Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Consumption: Moderator Solitaire Townsend, Futerra, invited the audience to propose words describing a sustainable lifestyle, via an app that displayed the most-used terms on a screen. Balance, caring, SDGs and mindfulness appeared as popular terms. She invited panelists to comment on why technology solutions are not enough to produce change.

Leyla Acaroglu, Disrupt Design, highlighted the need to design policies and conversations that will produce behavioral change, while still giving people choices, and to use tools such as life-cycle assessment.

Khawla Al-Muhannadi, Environment Friends Society, recounted the efforts of her organization in raising environmental awareness in Bahrain through a website with information that was simple, clear, and implementable, and activities such as a “Child and Environment” festival, which sought to introduce value change in the young.

Von Hernandez, Break Free From Plastic campaign, critiqued the view of plastic waste as a responsibility of individuals who litter, and the failure of waste management in the Global South.

He called for instead creating a culture in which plastic packaging produced by companies is no longer acceptable, noting that, while consumers can make choices, change will not happen without government leadership as well.

Townsend invited questions from the floor, which touched on the importance of: engaging youth; encouraging less consumerist behaviors; and using the power of social media to communicate the result of UNEA-4 in home countries.

João Campari, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), spoke of a commissioned study that showed a worrisome lack of awareness in society, including among the young, of the global food system’s role in carbon emissions and biodiversity loss.

Lena Pripp-Kovac, IKEA Group, said that what are needed are accessible and sustainable solutions that do not require consumers to make everyday decisions which they may fail to act on.

Desta Mebratu, African Transformative Leapfrogging Advisory Services, said sustainable consumption does not only apply to countries with high GDP, but also to Africa. However, he noted that the focus on Africa should be on wellbeing, social innovation, and building infrastructure that responds to environmental challenges.

In a second round of questions from the floor, participants asked whether those in attendance truly lived sustainable lifestyles, and why environmental philosophers, who “would be relevant in helping us answer fundamental questions,” had not been engaged in discussions throughout the week. In answer, the panel touched upon: the need for further engagement of not only environmental philosophers but also of anthropologists and sociologists; the lack of policy support for promoting sustainable product designs; and examples of lifestyle changes, including commuting and buying less.

In the Breezeways

With the hard slog of negotiations over, delegates took time to reflect on the successes and failures of the past few days. Several expressed disappointment over the inability to reach consensus on the draft resolution on deforestation, which was finally withdrawn on the evening before the High-Level Segment began.

While the EU had wanted to highlight large-scale agriculture as a driver of deforestation, several developing countries, considering themselves unfairly targeted, had stressed that agriculture is not the sole driver of deforestation, and highlighted their role in “feeding the world.” Negotiations had continued down to the last moments of the Committee of the Whole, “We redrafted the text to avoid all the red lines – but in the end, it just didn’t work,” recalled one delegate.

Some contrasted this episode with the tone of high ambition expressed in the Leadership Dialogue that was organized as part of the High-Level Segment. “When we negotiate, the content of the negotiation does not reflect what each minister says here in the leadership dialogue,” noted one minister. “What is the level of ambition here? Nothing!”

Nevertheless, the mood was upbeat as the conveners of the One Planet summit, the Presidents of France and Kenya, lent some star power to the opening of UNEA-4. “Our generation is the generation that must decide to act, forcefully and clearly, on the environmental agenda at the UN,” said President Macron of France to the packed auditorium – adding, on a less optimistic note, “When it comes to climate change and biodiversity, we will not be able to say that we did not know. We did know, and we will be held accountable.”

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of UNEA-4 will be available on Monday, 18 March 2019 at <http://enb.iisd.org/unep/oecpr4-unea4/>