

**OECP-6 Highlights:  
Monday, 19 February 2024**

On Monday, 19 February 2024, the sixth session of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECP-6) opened in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates made general statements and discussed organizational matters before breaking into two parallel informal working groups. Working Group 1 (WG1) began discussions on draft resolutions related to abating pollution. Working Group 2 (WG2) focused on draft resolutions relating to international environmental governance. In the evening, delegates also met to discuss the resolutions relating to halting and reversing the loss of nature while restoring ecosystems, and relating to procedural, budgetary, and administrative matters.

**Plenary**

**Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda:** The meeting was opened by Ambassador Firas Khouri (Jordan), Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. He welcomed delegates to OECP-6. Chair Khouri introduced the meeting's agenda (UNEP/OECP.6/1) and delegates adopted it without amendments.

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen said that in these times, multilateralism must demonstrate its ability to transcend geopolitical strife and deliver action on the triple planetary crises. She highlighted recent successes and work undertaken by UNEP and various multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) to illustrate UNEP's focus on being global and fit for purpose. She concluded that this meeting will be an opportunity for member states to build a bridge between UNEA and the Summit of the Future to be held later this year.

**Organization of work:** Chair Khouri introduced the organization of work and the establishment of two working groups to negotiate draft resolutions grouped in five clusters. The clusters are organized as follows: abating pollution and promoting sound management of chemicals and waste (Cluster A); halting and reversing loss of nature while restoring ecosystems (Cluster B); international environmental governance (Cluster C); addressing root causes of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution (Cluster D); procedural, budgetary, and administrative matters (Cluster E).

SAUDI ARABIA expressed concern about the little time allocated for discussions on the ministerial declaration.

Chair Khouri presented which cluster of draft resolutions will be discussed in each working group until Wednesday when progress of work will be reviewed in plenary. Delegates then agreed to the organization of work contained in Annex II to the provisional agenda (UNEP/OECP.6/1/Add.1).

**General Statements:** The EU highlighted three draft resolutions it submitted on: water policies, ocean and seas governance, and the circular economy.

Algeria, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for the ministerial declaration and resolutions to acknowledge the right to

development, the importance of sufficient and predictable financing, and the means of implementation. He noted the variety of resolutions tabled by African countries, including on pesticides, cooperation between UNEA, UNEP and MEAs, and enhancing the role of regional environment ministerial forums and regional offices. He called for UNEP's work programme to include enhancement of UNEP's support to African countries.

UKRAINE expressed concern over environmental degradation resulting from the war in his country, and commended UNEP's efforts in helping address it. COLOMBIA encouraged countries to update their national biodiversity action plans. BRAZIL pointed to the draft resolution on the circularity of a resilient and low-carbon sugar cane agroindustry, stressing its contribution to mitigation of air pollution. CUBA said that the results of UNEA will be essential for environmental multilateralism to address the triple planetary crisis, stressing the need for technology transfer and funding. COSTA RICA spoke to the draft resolution on strengthening oceans and seas governance, which it tabled together with the EU. INDONESIA recognized UNEA as an important vehicle belonging to all that can undertake inclusive actions and strengthen science policy interaction.

KENYA welcomed delegates to Nairobi and stressed how climate change impacts productivity making it even more difficult to reach the SDGs, calling for more action and coordination through UNEP. MALAWI took note of the outcome of the Global Youth Environment Assembly 2024 and called for recognition of the principle of intergenerational equity. ZAMBIA said it expects an action-oriented approach and collaboration to advance the SDGs. The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO pointed to regional and sub-regional calls for more cooperation between UNEA, UNEP and MEAs.

SAUDI ARABIA pointed to the importance of the draft resolution on strengthening international efforts to halt land degradation, restore degraded lands and increase ecosystem and communities' resilience to drought. EGYPT called for a consolidated collective response at UNEA-6 and implementation of previous resolutions. Calling for work according to the Rio Principles, CHINA pointed to common but differentiated responsibilities. INDIA stressed the collective responsibility to address ongoing challenges and build sustainable lifestyles. FIJI and the PHILIPPINES stressed the inequity of those who least contribute to climate change being most impacted by it and called on member states to reflect on this continued inequity at this meeting.

Representatives from MAJOR GROUPS called for recognition of stakeholders' role and their inclusion in decision-making and welcomed proposed resolutions. The CHILDREN and YOUTH MAJOR GROUP celebrated achievements from its second Global Youth Environment Forum held just prior to OECP-6.

The WORKERS AND TRADE UNION, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, and FARMERS MAJOR GROUPS and the SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY all

urged greater consideration and participation of their respective groups to effectively adopt decisions that are inclusive, cross-sectoral and based in science. The WOMEN and INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUPS called for incorporating gender dimension in the resolutions and gender disaggregated data for improved decision-making. The INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP called for the establishment of a voluntary fund to support its participation at OECPR and UNEA meetings and for recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems on par with scientific knowledge systems. The BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS MAJOR GROUP highlighted successful initiatives led by business and called for more beacon projects from around the world.

**Budget and Programme Performance:** UNEP Deputy Executive Director Elizabeth Mrema presented the UNEA-6 documents (UNEP/EA.6/2-13) consisting mainly of reports of the UNEP Executive Director on the progress in the implementation of respective past UNEA resolutions. The EU pointed to a number of areas where more work could be done and proposed suggested additions and changes, which will be tabled in writing. Chair Khouri proposed to take note of the working documents for UNEA-6 and closed the agenda item.

**Administrative and budgetary matters:** UNEP Deputy Executive Director Mrema further presented information on the implementation of UNEA decision 5/4 on the extension of the programme of work for the period 2022-2023 by two years, (UNEP/EA.6/13), with the budget and targets being pro-rated accordingly. She also noted that OECPR-6 may wish to consider the draft decision on the date and venue of the seventh session of the Environment Assembly (UNEP/EA.6/INF/17) containing different options for timing of UNEA-7 and approval of a new programme of work. Chair Khouri deferred this to informal consultations under cluster E.

Contributions of the Environment Assembly to the meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development: Chair Khouri proposed the OECPR is given the mandate to determine the contributions outlined in this agenda item. With no objections, Chair Khouri closed discussion of this matter.

**Preparation of decisions and outcomes of the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly:** Chair Khouri outlined the work to be undertaken by working groups, and added that plenary would resume on Wednesday to take stock on progress and determine time needed for the remainder of the week.

### *Working Group I*

**Cluster A:** This cluster was co-facilitated by Yume Yorita (Japan) and Nana Ama Owusuaa Afriyie Kankam (Ghana). Delegates considered three resolutions: on sound management of chemicals and waste (L.13), on promoting regional cooperation to improve air quality globally (L.16), and on combating sand and dust storms (L.17). The Co-chairs proposed that each resolution be discussed paragraph by paragraph for one hour to ensure work is completed within the allocated three-hour long afternoon session.

On the sound management of chemicals and waste resolution, delegates managed to only cover two preambular paragraphs, prompting suggestions to tackle operative paragraphs first for the remaining resolutions. At the same time, multiple suggested edits illustrated positions and issues of concern for many countries: reference to human rights; capacity-building as well as financial and technical support; reference to right to economic development; and reference to specific sources of pollution, including products and munition.

On promoting regional cooperation to improve air quality globally, delegates discussed several preambular paragraphs. They debated several governance issues, including referencing the UN Commission on Economic Cooperation (UNECE) Convention on Long-Range Transboundary, and World Health Assembly

resolution on the health of Indigenous Peoples. On technical aspects of the resolution, they discussed possible reference to nitrogen dioxide, proper referencing of WHO guidelines, and wording on population impact.

On combating sand and dust storms, delegates covered several preambular paragraphs with multiple alternative paragraph texts introduced. Proposals included referencing early warning systems for prevention and mitigation, enhanced information sharing, welcoming Middle East Green Initiative, as well as noting various decisions and initiatives related to the matter.

### *Working Group II*

**Cluster C:** The cluster was co-facilitated by Karin Snellman (Sweden) and Alejandro Montero (Chile). Delegates first considered the preambular paragraphs of the resolution (L.7) on fostering national action to address global environmental challenges through increased cooperation between UNEA, UNEP and MEAs. Discussion focused on whether to refer to: synergies or cooperation, with some proposing to add collaboration and synergies as appropriate; and the triple planetary crisis or environmental challenges.

Delegates struggled to come to agreement on a paragraph noting the need for enhanced cooperation within and across the UN system. A developing country, supported by several other developing countries, asked to include a paragraph on reaffirming the principles of the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development, in particular common but differentiated responsibilities. Some developed countries urged not to single out one principle, while others preferred not to include such a provision at all. Other points of contention surrounded one country's desire to state that the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development required sufficient resources; however, others wanted to delete the whole paragraph. Discussion on the operative paragraphs was deferred to Tuesday.

Delegates then discussed the draft resolution on enhancing the role and viability of regional forums of environment ministers and UNEP regional offices in achieving multilateral cooperation in tackling environmental challenges (L.8). While some delegations urged focusing on operative paragraphs, others did not agree, with still others proposing to delete some preambular provisions or streamlining them. There continued to be divergence between several countries who found specific language on environment ministers should be retained while others advocated for more general language. Delegates debated adding references to specific major groups and stakeholders. Noting the special standing of Indigenous Peoples, some delegates urged referring to them separately, while others wanted to combine the reference to include local communities. Delegates drew comparisons to acceptable language in other processes, compared to what is normally used and agreed upon by the OECPR and UNEA.

### *In the breezeways*

As delegates arrived at UNEP headquarters in sunny Nairobi for the first day of OECPR-6, they faced a heavy workload of almost two dozen draft resolutions across five clusters. This first UNEA fully emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic was marked by a more relaxed setting for congregating delegates, combined with pillars of a new reality with a hybrid model of participation that seems here to stay. Despite this levity in mood, statements and sentiments were clouded by continued geopolitical strife and a feeling that action is not accelerating fast enough to combat the triple planetary crisis before it is too late. With this urgency in mind, working groups oscillated between the usual dissection of language in proposed draft resolutions, and calls not to lose any time and a spirit to work together, looking for compromise when needed.