

**UNEA-6 Highlights:  
Monday, 26 February 2024**

On Monday, 26 February 2024, the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) opened at UN Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, with an ambitious plan for the week ahead. Throughout the day, delegates met in plenary, and as the Committee of the Whole (COW), which initiated two contact groups aiming to finalize 19 draft resolutions and two draft decisions forwarded by the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR). Work continued on resolutions in five clusters, as previously considered by the OECPR: abating pollution; halting and reversing loss of nature and ecosystems; international environmental governance; addressing root causes of the triple planetary crisis; and procedural, budgetary, and administrative matters.

**Plenary**

**Opening:** UNEA-6 President Leila Benali (Morocco) acknowledged the hard work leading up to UNEA-6 and highlighted three inflection points which permeate the work and atmosphere at this Assembly. She noted major conflicts which are having serious impacts on the world; pointed out that in 2024 fifty percent of the world's population will vote in elections which may give way to populist movements posing a threat to the work to be done at UNEA-6; finally, she stated that UNEA-6 is an opportunity to restore trust in multilateralism and humanity.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UNEP, called on the record number of delegates attending UNEA-6 to unite in their efforts to tackle the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution by transcending political differences. She urged for crafting strong resolutions that will shore up environmental foundations for a peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future to build on.

Emphasizing policy commitments to sustainable environmental stewardship, Zainab Hawa Bangura, Director-General, UN Office at Nairobi (UNON), elaborated on future plans to refurbish the Nairobi campus with environmentally sustainable features, including reforestation, and solar, and waste management retrofitting.

Roselinda Soipan Tuyu, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry, Kenya, warning that the world is currently not doing well, urged a change of course as nature is declining.

Many regional groups welcomed the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the Global Framework on Chemicals (GFC), and the agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) with one calling for its rapid ratification. Many also welcomed the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on an international legally binding instrument on plastics pollution scheduled to be completed later this year.

Ethiopia, for the AFRICAN GROUP, added desertification, deforestation and land degradation to the challenge of addressing the triple planetary crisis.

The State of Palestine, for ASIA PACIFIC, called for more synergistic action to address the triple planetary crisis, which can

otherwise hamper efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Barbados, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARRIBBEAN GROUP, invoked the spirit of Nairobi, to find compromise on important issues, including addressing the vulnerability of coastal ecosystems and the ocean; and to provide developing countries with additional means of implementation and capacity building.

The EUROPEAN UNION, on behalf of its 27 Member States, with GEORGIA, MONTENEGRO, and UKRAINE aligning, stressed a sense of urgency since none of the UNEA-6 resolutions to date have been agreed to, with some not even having completed the first reading at OECPR, and called for a strong ministerial declaration.

Malaysia for G-77 AND CHINA, noting the group's sixtieth anniversary and the outcome document of its third South Summit under the theme of Leave No One Behind (January 2024, Kigali, Uganda), called for collective action taking into account all principles in the Rio Declaration, emphasizing common but differentiated responsibilities.

The US, also on behalf of AUSTRALIA, CANADA, CHILE, GEOGIA, JAPAN, NEW ZEALAND, NORTH MACEDONIA, NORWAY, SOUTH KOREA, SWITZERLAND, TÜRKIYE, UKRAINE, and the EU, condemned Russia for its unjustified full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, causing loss of human life, destruction, environmental degradation, and use of sea and land mines. He welcomed UNEP's continued work in Ukraine and called on Russia to withdraw its troops. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, exercising their right of reply, denied allegations made by the US, stressing that UNEA should not be politicized.

ALGERIA highlighted the challenges of desertification and land degradation, access to resources, and diverse scientific approaches as priorities for his delegation. COLOMBIA cautioned against one-sided solutions and market-based approaches that exacerbate other environmental challenges and deepen inequalities. FIJI cited fragmented finance and called for resource allocation for Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Assuring UNEA-6 of increasing collaborative approaches, the BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY MAJOR GROUP emphasized the private sector as an important community in making vast investments to address global environmental challenges and creating progressive green and sustainable jobs.

The CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP reported on the Youth Environmental Assembly hosted prior to UNEA-6, and called on UNEA to ensure this becomes institutionalized at every biennial meeting.

The FARMERS MAJOR GROUP noted with alarm replacement of the terms "agriculture and farmers" with "food systems and frontline actors" in UNEA-6 draft resolutions.

The INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP called on UNEA-6 to respect the collective rights of all Indigenous Peoples to their land and their intellectual property, which should underpin all resolutions. Pointing to the ancestral knowledge systems that have provided sustainable solutions for generations, she emphasized the importance of distinguishing between local communities and Indigenous Peoples as rights holders during negotiations.

The LOCAL AUTHORITIES MAJOR GROUP expressed concern about solar radiation modification (SRM) and experimentation in this regard, and the lack of integrated

environmental policies in resolutions, calling for greater inclusivity and advancing a just transition.

The NGO MAJOR GROUP supported the reservations about SRM and other potentially harmful inventions, and called for protecting Mother Earth and silencing firearms, noting that “peace is not a word, but a behavior.”

The SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL MAJOR GROUP supported introducing stronger language in the resolutions, and on nature-based solutions reiterated calls for banning SRM and open-air tests.

The WOMEN MAJOR GROUP urged phase out of highly hazardous chemicals entirely, as the impact on women and children is disproportionate. She urged UNEA-6 to follow expert advice on global non-use of SRM and to include language on gender equity and women knowledge on sustainable practices.

REGIONAL FACILITATOR, MAJOUR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS, WEST ASIA, noted ongoing human rights violations globally and stressed importance of food sovereignty and recognizing rights of nature.

RAPPORTEUR OF THE SIXTHS CITIES AND REGIONS SUMMIT reported on successful city initiatives to tackle triple planetary crisis and called for removing obstacles to increased financing.

**Adoption of Agenda and Organization of Work:** The Assembly adopted the agenda (UNEP/EA.6/1) and organization of work (UNEP/EA.6/INF/1). The Assembly elected Norbert Kurilla, Advisor to the President of Slovakia, as the COW Chair and Sérgio França Danese, Permanent Representative of Brazil to UNEP, as COW Rapporteur.

**Report of the Committee of Permanent Representatives:** CPR Chair Firas Khouri (Jordan), reported on the outcomes of the OECPR-6. He noted that the draft ministerial declaration was forwarded to UNEA-6 for further consideration alongside 19 draft resolutions and 2 draft decisions.

### *Committee of the Whole*

**Opening and adoption of the agenda:** Chair Norbert Kurilla (Slovakia) opened the first plenary of the COW with the mandate to agree on draft resolutions and urged delegations to show willingness to compromise, noting that there is very little time left to conclude their work. He presented, and delegates agreed to, both the agenda (UNEP/COW.5/1) and the organization of work. The Secretariat explained that the COW contact groups have the same sequencing of clusters as the OECPR working groups, and each cluster will be led by the same co-facilitators as during OECPR, now serving as co-chairs.

Chair Kurilla then proposed the following general approach and criteria to harmonize the work of the committee for each draft resolution: each contact group first decides on the basis of which document to work with. In the absence of agreement, they will use the most recent version of the respective L.doc at the end of OECPR; delegates are urged to respect the time assigned by the co-chairs to each resolution, encouraged to give priority to operative paragraphs and to refrain from proposing any new ideas and concepts. It is recommended to give sufficient time to review new drafts; additional informal informals are encouraged and the co-chairs are asked to coordinate across contact groups in regard to agreed legal concepts and definitions.

Following extensive discussions among delegates on how to integrate text edits worked on over the weekend and drafts negotiated at OECPR-6, delegates agreed that negotiations shall proceed based on the most recent version of the L.doc and if available integrate the content of the non-paper as alternative formulations.

Chair Kurilla closed the COW plenary, sending the contact groups out to start work and urging delegates to step up their efforts and not have the perfect stay in the way of the good.

### *Contact Groups*

**Contact Group I:** Cluster A was co-chaired by Yume Yorita (Japan) and Nana Ama Owusua Afriyie Kankam (Ghana). On the air pollution resolution, the Co-Chairs suggested, and delegates accepted, to start working off the non-paper text. Delegates showed some spirit of cooperation and cleaned up several sub-paragraphs, with brackets remaining around language on a reference to local cities and subnational level pending clarifications from the Secretariat on the agreed language. There

was some debate on referencing capacity-building, technical, and financial support.

On the SRM resolution, delegates had divergent views on whether to reference 1.5 °C pathways or, more broadly, the Paris Agreement temperature goals, with many noting that language around 1.5 °C pathways was already agreed on at UNFCCC COP-28. A number of the suggestions revolved around stressing the risks associated with SRM and ensuring that SRM is not seen as an alternative to adaptation and mitigation.

In negotiations on the resolution on sand and dust storms, most original paragraphs were replaced with alternative text proposed during the OECPR working group negotiations. There was some stalled discussion over whether the terms North-South and South-South could not simply be referred to as international cooperation.

Discussing the resolution on highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs), delegates mostly debated how to properly reflect participation in the global alliance on HHPs under the GFC, as well as whether Executive Director reports on the resolution implementation progress separately or as part of all chemicals and waste resolutions.

**Contact Group II:** Cluster C was co-chaired by Karin Snellman (Sweden) and Alejandro Montero (Chile) starting in the afternoon with a discussion of the resolution on climate justice. A number of delegates raised concerns with a change of focus in the previous co-facilitators proposal from climate justice to climate action, including in the title of the draft resolution. The proponent of the original resolution also noted the marked difference in the proposed actions, and the loss of the proposed forum for the most vulnerable states. Regarding the operative provision calling on UNEP to explore organization of informal dialogues to enhance the understanding of climate justice, some wanted to limit it to one initial dialogue in the context of UNEA, whereas others asked to also look at this in the broader context of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

On the draft resolution on enhancing the role and viability of regional environment ministerial forums and offices, proposed by the previous co-facilitators, delegates resumed review of the operational paragraphs focusing considerable discussion on text regarding the mobilization of financial resources through regional offices to provide support for the participation of developing countries to attend the meetings outlined in the resolution title. There was an impasse as to how Member States can unilaterally provide support to regional meetings that they are not a part of. Delegates agreed to most of the remaining operative paragraphs and Co-Chair Montero expressed hope that agreement could be reached through further discussions.

Cluster E was co-chaired by Tobias Ogweno (Kenya) and Nader Al-Tarawneh (Jordan). On the draft decision on the dates of UNEA-7 delegates agreed to the dates of 8-12 December 2025 and the following explanation that recognizes that these dates have been agreed on an exceptional basis as they do not allow for holding UNEA-7 on a biennium basis and have impacted the term of office of its Bureau. They cleaned up the remainder to the decision accordingly, confirming the dates of OECPR-7 to be 1-5 December 2025.

### *In the Breezeways*

The record attendance of UNEA-6 provided a hum in the packed plenary and filled the air with a buzz of anticipation that “faith in multilateral environmental agreements will be restored.” Eloquent rhetoric from the leadership contributed to the sense of imminent progress ahead.

The sun was especially glaring today on the UNEP campus as press gathered, ribbons were cut, red carpets were laid, and musical performances permeated the grounds with a sense of celebration. Still, it was not lost on most, that concurrent to official events, a silent protest overtook the famous steps of the courtyard. Placards denounced armed conflicts and called out the persistence of environmental injustice. Delegates, meanwhile, returned to tired and visibly cleared out conference rooms re-visiting overly-familiar text of draft resolutions that remained heavily bracketed.

The duality which thousands of delegates experienced today is no doubt a reflection of the world as it stands today – hopeful in some ways, contending with struggles in other ways. When Inger Andersen pointed out in her opening remarks that at previous UNEAs, the world was watching, but today, the world was here at UNEA, she could not have been more right.