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Summary of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum at UNEA-6: 24-25 February 2024

Demonstrating genuine solidarity with victims of ongoing conflicts; maintaining a focus on the human rights of the most vulnerable and those excluded on the road to sustainability; and managing the organizational challenges of providing high quality and streamlined input on a raft of draft resolutions while maintaining the distinct identities and priorities of diverse stakeholder groups. These are just a few of the challenges that organizers of the 20th Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum (GMGSF-20) had to balance in their preparations for the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6).

In a moving “solidarity moment” on the first day, three first-hand accounts highlighted the environmental and humanitarian impacts of armed conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and the Darfur region of Sudan, emphasizing the need for coordinated global action and accountability. This theme resurfaced in several discussions over the two days, with many expressing disappointment at the absence of resolution language to match the scale of “genocide and ecocide” taking place in full view of the global community. As one speaker put it, “we cannot achieve harmony with the environment if we cannot live in harmony with one another.”

A key component of the GMGSF agenda was an in-depth review of the 19 draft resolutions and two draft decisions to be finalized at UNEA-6, which are organized into five clusters: abating pollution and promoting the sound management of chemicals and waste; halting and reversing the loss of nature while restoring ecosystems; international environmental governance; root causes of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution; and procedural, budgetary, and administrative matters. Key themes in discussion related to: solar radiation modification (SRM) to reduce global warming, and proposals to convene an expert or scientific group on SRM; enforcement of the polluter pays principle for hazardous pesticides; environmental governance in conflict zones; and the rights of waste workers and other vulnerable groups in the transition to circular economies.

Among their recommendations, Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) called for stronger enforcement of environmental rights, protection of Indigenous Peoples’ rights, and bringing more stakeholder groups into the MGS “tent” – including the creative industry, people with disabilities, and those

affected by conflict. There were strong calls to recognize the role of citizen scientists and other local actors in bringing new and innovative solutions as well as more inclusive governance models to environmental governance.

This contribution of MGS to the UNEA-6 negotiations was acknowledged and appreciated by UNEA-6 President Leila Benali and UNEP Executive Director Inger Anderson during a session with MGS, where they underlined that MGS are instrumental in developing policies, acting both as think tanks and watch dogs.

The importance of multilateralism and MGS engagement was another key point during the discussions, with the UNEA and UNEP leadership, and MGS members, underlining it as a key response to global environmental challenges. Calls were made for ambitious outcomes, accountability, and broad-based participation in UNEA sessions. Participants also engaged in a wide-ranging discussion with the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights, Marcos Orellana.

In addition, MGS held an exchange with Member States on a proposed “group of friends of MGS” in order to: enhance civil society engagement in UNEP processes; and provide a platform for continuous collaboration between Member States and MGS on emerging environmental issues and priorities.

The Forum featured updates from relevant stakeholder processes, including: the just-concluded Global Youth Environment Assembly; the Cities and Regions Summit; the 2024 Summit of the Future; and the *ad hoc* open-ended working

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group (OEWG) preparing proposals for a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

Overall, the Forum highlighted the urgency of addressing environmental challenges through collaborative efforts involving diverse stakeholders, while emphasizing the need for equitable and inclusive approaches to achieve sustainable outcomes.

GMGSF-20 took place in a hybrid format from 24-25 February 2024 in Nairobi, Kenya, with more than 600 registered participants.

A Brief History of GMGSF

The first UNEP Global Civil Society Forum—later rebranded as the GMGSF—took place in Malmö, Sweden, in 2000. An associated meeting to UNEA, the Forum serves as a convening platform for exchange between UNEP-accredited organizations and other interested observers. Because of disruptions due to COVID-19, two virtual GMGSF meetings convened in February 2021 and February 2022 to prepare for the two-part session of UNEA-5.

GMGSF-18 developed a joint global statement titled “Building Forward Better: Action Is Urgently Needed,” and collated input towards preparatory conferences commemorating the 50th anniversaries of the 1972 Stockholm Conference (Stockholm+50) and the establishment of UNEP (UNEP@50).

Convening ahead of the resumed UNEA-5.2 in February 2022, GMGSF-19 was organized around five thematic clusters aligned to UNEA-5.2 draft resolutions on: marine and plastic pollution; biodiversity and nature-based solutions (NBS); chemicals and waste; green recovery and circular economy; and strengthening international environmental governance. At the meeting, MGS adopted two outcome documents: the Joint MGS Statement [The UNEP We Want](#) and the [Global Joint Statement Towards UNEA-5.2](#)

Report of the Meeting

On Saturday morning, 24 February, Dalia Márquez, Co-Chair, Major Groups’ Facilitating Committee (MGFC) and Co-Facilitator, Women’s Major Group, welcomed participants to GMGSF-20. She urged all attending to be respectful of one another’s opinion, highlighting that the Forum is an opportunity to hear from all Major Groups, including those facing armed conflict and war.

Mohamed Abdelraouf, Co-Chair, MGFC, and Co-Facilitator, Scientific and Technological Community Major Group, underlined that MGS possess important knowledge on the ground, and that their engagement brings valuable research and advocacy to the conversations around the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. He noted that increasing the collaboration between UNEP, Member States, and MGS will result in a stronger UNEA and bring global change and harmony. He urged UNEP to avail sufficient resources for MGS engagement. Abdelraouf further explained that the Forum’s key



Dalia Márquez, MGFC Co-Chair

messages will be communicated to UNEA-6 A, Member States, and the media.

Patrizia Heidegger, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Europe, and Co-Organizer of GMGSF-20, outlined the organization of work for the two days of the Forum. She noted that the draft of the joint global statement, which will be the Forum’s main outcome, had been circulated and encouraged stakeholders to review and help streamline the statement.

The opening segment concluded with a brief icebreaking session facilitated by Sascha Gabizon, Women’s Major Group.

Solidarity with Participants Living Under Armed Conflict and Violence: Three speakers representing the NGO, Farmers, and Children and Youth Major Groups provided first-hand accounts of escalating conflicts around the world.

Joining online, Hannah Khomechko, NGO Major Group, Europe Region, outlined the continuing toll of Russian aggression in Ukraine, now marking its second year, referring to it as a catastrophe for humanity and ecosystems. Among environmental impacts, she noted that: 30% of Ukraine’s territory is mined with explosive substances that will take decades to remediate; one-third of Ukrainian forests have been burned; and the war has caused unprecedented damage to regionally- and globally-significant biodiversity and endangered species. She called for



View of the room during the Opening Session



Mariam Al Jaajaa, Farmers Major Group, West Asia Region

the consolidation of global efforts to pursue legal accountability for the damage, including through collecting empirical data on its environmental impacts and exploring the role of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) in addressing the consequences of war-driven damage.

Mariam Al Jaajaa, Farmers Major Group, West Asia Region, presented on the human and environmental costs of the ongoing war in Gaza, stressing the cumulative impact of more than seven decades of “settler colonialism, apartheid and brutal repression” of Palestinians’ human rights. She discussed, among other impacts, severe food insecurity affecting more than 90% of the population, as well as unprecedented air, water, and soil pollution from the dumping of “over three times the firepower of Hiroshima.” Stressing that this is not a regular conflict, she urged a coordinated global campaign to prevent further genocide and ecocide.

Alaaeldein Yousif, Children and Youth Major Group, Africa Region, spoke on the “forgotten crisis” in the Darfur region of Sudan, describing it as the world’s largest wave of forced movement that has displaced an estimated nine million people since April 2023. He highlighted some elements of a worsening humanitarian and environmental crisis in the Darfur region, with close to 20,000 fatalities, rising food insecurity and malnutrition, massive destruction of key infrastructure including hospitals and



Ayman Cherkaoui, Africa Regional Co-Facilitator for MGS

learning institutions, and large-scale deforestation, air pollution, and water contamination from the use of chemical weapons.

Linking UNEA-6 to Other Important Fora: This segment on Saturday morning was facilitated by David Munene, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Africa.

Clive Dunley, Children and Youth Major Group, reported on the just-concluded Global Youth Environment Assembly. He noted the Assembly adopted the [Global Youth Declaration on the Environment](#), which calls on UNEP, UNEA, and Member States to: institutionalize intergenerational equity in environmental governance; develop systemic policy solutions informed by the best available scientific evidence; and commit to environmental multilateralism.

Joy Belmonte, Mayor, Quezon City, the Philippines, shared key outcomes from the Cities and Regions Summit held the previous day, noting calls for a unified front to tackle the triple planetary crises, and the need for multilateral and multi-level action from all levels of government and society.

Ayman Cherkaoui, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Africa, highlighted outcomes from the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 28), noting adoption of the UAE Consensus that, *inter alia*, called for transitioning away from fossil fuels, included targets on tripling renewable energy and doubling energy efficiency, and operationalized the new loss and damage fund.

Silvia Ribeiro, NGO Major Group, expressed concerns about some of the COP 28 outcomes, noting for instance, the promotion of “poor solutions” such as carbon capture and storage, nuclear energy, and hydrogen energy, which undermine real solutions that address the root causes of the climate crisis. Regarding the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), she also lamented the “financialization” of action and the promotion of biodiversity offsets, saying these will delay real solutions.

Mara Murillo Correa, UNEP, discussed the process towards the 2024 Summit of the Future, noting that a [zero draft](#) of the proposed “pact for the future” is now available. She underlined opportunities for stakeholder involvement in the process, including the various regional forums being organized by the regional commissions.



Joy Belmonte, Mayor, Quezon City, the Philippines

Consideration of UNEA Resolution Clusters

Participants then embarked on a review of the five resolution clusters under negotiation at UNEA-6 on Saturday morning. For each cluster, MGS Cluster Co-Facilitators and UNEP Technical Focal Points provided an overview of the status of negotiations at the close of the sixth meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR-6), as well as key outstanding issues for MGS. Additional insights were offered by focal points for the different resolutions followed by general discussion to highlight key outstanding issues and proposed text revisions. Informal consultations to develop precise language and input towards joint MGS statements to UNEA-6 continued over the two days.

Resolution Cluster A: Abating Pollution and Promoting the Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste: This session was co-facilitated by Anna Odur, NGO Major Group, and Sarojeni Rengam, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Asia Pacific. Rengam outlined discussions on highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.9), noting that this Africa-led resolution responds to the massive impact of HHPs on Africa's smallholder agriculture sector, with an estimated 385 million farmers and workers affected every year. Pointing to the inclusion of HHPs in the recently adopted Global Framework on Chemicals, she underscored the need for stronger regulation backed by a global alliance of stakeholders, with a role for UNEP in supporting institutional and technical capacities to strengthen monitoring and compliance.

Introducing the SRM resolution (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.14), Neth Daño, Women's Major Group, reported that proposals to establish an independent expert group to critically examine current proposals, as favored by MGS, have not found sufficient traction. She emphasized that proposed speculative geoengineering approaches "cannot meet the scale of the planetary crisis and could even threaten survival." She urged UNEA-6 to provide information on the impacts and risks of SRM, drawing on available studies and the lived experiences of communities where open-air experiments have taken place so far.

Maarten Kappelle, UNEP Technical Focal Point, outlined progress on the sand and dust storms (SDS) resolution (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.17), stating it is linked to ongoing work under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), where parties are considering calls for a new international mechanism to strengthen the science-policy interface to respond to the global scale of SDS. He highlighted new language calling for special attention to women, girls, and other vulnerable populations, as well as references to: the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR); South-South and international cooperation; and additional resource mobilization to address the growing global impacts of SDS.

Maria Cristina Zucca, UNEP Technical Focal Point, provided an overview of the draft resolution on regional cooperation on air quality resolution (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.16), noting it builds on two previous UNEA decisions and related World Health



Dianna Kopansky, UNEP, Melissa De Kock, Deputy Director, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, and Ole Vestergaard, UNEP

Assembly resolutions. She said the resolution encourages Member States to redouble past efforts and establish a global knowledge network to strengthen collaborative approaches to tackle air pollution. She further highlighted language calling for: increasing regional and global cooperation by existing bodies and platforms; making links to the triple planetary crisis; and highlighting the global costs of inaction on air pollution.

Sascha Gabizon, Women's Major Group, and Bert de Wel, Co-Facilitator, Workers and Trade Unions Major Group, supported proposals to ban chrysotile asbestos, noting its close links to the draft resolution on conflict-induced environmental damage. They expressed concern that while there is broad international support to list the chemical, efforts have been thwarted by a handful of asbestos producing countries that also apply political and economic pressure on poor countries.

Issues highlighted during discussions on this cluster included:

- the importance of rights-based governance that recognizes the harmful impacts on communities exposed to harmful chemicals and waste, including through respecting their right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC);
- the need to raise ambition on air quality standards by "matching or exceeding" World Health Organization thresholds; and
- recognizing the crucial role of local authorities and other local stakeholders.

Resolution Cluster B: Halting and Reversing the Loss of Nature While Restoring Ecosystems: This session was co-facilitated by Natasha Dokovska Spirovska, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Europe, and David Munene, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Africa.

Melissa de Kock, Deputy Director, UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre, introduced the NbS resolution (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.10). She noted it aims to further build on the UNEA-5 resolution that defined the concept of NbS by developing a set of common criteria, norms, standards and guidelines to implement NbS in support of sustainable development. She reported that following a lack of consensus on initial calls to establish an open-ended working group, the draft



David Munene, Africa Regional Co-Facilitator

resolution proposes convening a broad-based group of experts to facilitate this process, drawing on existing guidelines.

Sascha Gabizon, Women's Major Group, highlighted additional issues of concern for MGS, notably: proposals for NbS criteria to be voluntary, which could contribute to increased offsetting, greenwashing and conflicts over natural resources; and the need to engage rights holders in assessing guidelines and safeguards, including through their participation in the proposed NbS expert group.

Dianna Kopansky, Coordinator, Global Peatlands Initiative, UNEP, introduced the resolution on strengthening water policies (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.24), which merges related draft resolutions initially proposed by Sri Lanka and the EU. She noted significant Member State support for the resolution, which underscores the interlinkages between water, human health and wellbeing, livelihoods, and ecosystem services. Stressing that most water-related targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are far off-track, she said the resolution: calls for increased efforts to safeguard the global hydrological cycle; and highlights opportunities to tackle water challenges through integrated management of fresh and marine ecosystems, including through transboundary approaches.

Natasha Dokovska Spirovska, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Europe, outlined additional inputs from Major Groups, including calls for: explicit language on fair and equitable benefit sharing; gender-disaggregated data; context-specific capacity building initiatives; ensuring equitable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services, including menstrual hygiene; and integration of water policies into One Health frameworks.

Ole Vestergaard, UNEP Technical Focal Point, discussed the resolution on strengthening ocean and seas governance (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.20), noting that steady progress was made during OECPR-6. He highlighted opportunities for synergies with the recently adopted High Seas Treaty, which builds on regional seas conventions and action plans as key vehicles for implementation. Among emerging elements in the discussions, he noted the role of Indigenous Peoples in governance at all levels, and proposals for strengthening the "science-policy-society interface" in decision making. On remaining sticking points, he highlighted divergent views on the role of UNEP in global ocean governance,

jurisdictions of Member States in managing transboundary marine issues, and how to integrate regional governance mechanisms.

Abdelkader Bensada, UNEP Technical Focal Point, and David Munene outlined discussions on the land restoration and drought resilience resolution (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.6), noting it: takes into account the land tenure rights of women, smallholder farmers, and other vulnerable groups; addresses the land degradation-conflict-migration nexus; and recognizes the important role of working animals in community resilience. Bensada reported that there are no major contentious points, with remaining consultations primarily focused on ensuring harmonization with the respective strategic frameworks of the UNCCD and the CBD to enhance synergies in pursuing the SDG target of land degradation neutrality.

Other issues raised in general discussions highlighted the need to:

- consistently refer to "Indigenous Peoples and their communities" – and their knowledge systems and way of life – as a distinct entity not to be conflated with local communities;
- adopt a human-rights lens in large-scale restoration initiatives to avoid resource-based conflicts, food insecurity, and other impacts at the local level;
- recognize civil society contributions to land restoration and sustainable land management, including through forging synergies across the Rio Conventions and other MEAs;
- include references to groundwater, which does not receive as much attention despite being the main source of fresh water; and
- explore opportunities for nested processes to develop more contextualized NbS standards.

Resolution Cluster C: International Environmental Governance: This session was facilitated by Ayman Cherkaoui, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Africa. Mozaharul Alam, UNEP Technical Focal Point, introduced the four resolutions under this cluster: increased cooperation between UNEP, UNEA,



Mozaharul Alam, UNEP

and other MEAs (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.7); role and viability of regional environment ministerial forums and regional offices (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.8); synergistic approaches to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, and support sustainable development (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.12); and climate justice (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.4).

On increased cooperation between UNEP, UNEA, and MEAs, one participant underlined the central role that citizen science plays in supporting resolutions and Member States to deliver the objectives of UNEA resolutions. He called for a framework for integrating citizen science into the UNEA resolution process.

Noting that many nations do not respect the fundamental human rights of their citizens, one participant called for universally determined targets within a legally-binding framework to serve as a basis for countries' nationally determined targets. Commenting on the negotiations so far, one participant noted lack of reference to the contribution of different stakeholders in the implementation of MEAs.

On the role and viability of regional environment ministerial forums and regional offices, one participant lamented the lack of practical activities for implementing the contents of the resolution and underlined the need to recognize the importance of grassroots activities and organizations. Other participants underlined the need for: participation of citizen scientists and local groups; engagement of more MGS in the negotiations; clarity about the role of MGS in the regional forums; a special fund for the participation of MGS; periodic environmental review to assess regional performance and define environmental priorities; and increased collaboration between environment and finance ministers for effective implementation of UNEA resolutions.

With regard to implementing synergistic approaches, parties lamented the removal of reference to the local level in the new non-paper submitted by Japan. Another noted the need for mechanisms for integrating synergistic approaches and proposed text on establishing ministerial-level coordination to promote a whole-of-government approach for synergistic approaches. One participant underscored that “exclusion cannot be the basis of a synergistic approach” and that Indigenous Peoples' and their human rights are being sidelined in the negotiations.

On climate justice, one participant urged not reinventing the wheel, and highlighted that tools exist, such as the UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Recommendation on Open Science. Another participant called for reference to work under the UNFCCC on just transition pathways with a labor focus and based on International Labour Organization guidance. He further urged implementing climate justice by providing climate finance and engaging with affected peoples such as local communities.

Resolution Cluster D: Root Causes of Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss and Pollution: This session was facilitated by Rachel Mash, NGO Major Group and MGS Cluster Coordinator, and Ahmed Fathy, Children and Youth Major Group. Rachel Mash introduced the five resolutions under



Rachel Mash, Anglican Consultative Council

this cluster: accelerating the transition to circular economies (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.19); environmental aspects of minerals and metals (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.15); environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflicts (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.3); behavioral changes towards sustainable lifestyles (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.11); and circularity of a resilient sugarcane economy (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.21). On the final resolution, she said that due to concern about its single crop focus, a new non-paper consolidating it with other related resolutions was under discussion.

In initial reflections on the cluster, Mash described this set of resolutions as “the most relevant” for civil society as it focuses on root causes of the triple planetary crisis, including overconsumption, materialism, greed, and our throw-away economies that are based on abuse of the environment and violations of the rights of workers and other vulnerable groups. She welcomed the broad coalitions of Member States co-sponsoring each resolution, explaining that this offers hope of reestablishing our relationship with Mother Earth through “other ways of thinking and being.” Referring to the withdrawal of Bolivia’s resolution on this topic, she noted links to the sustainable lifestyles resolution, saying its inclusive approach is broadly welcomed by MGS.

In ensuing discussions, participants emphasized the importance of a focus on sustainability and human rights in the circular economy to protect producers, workers, and consumers. Solutions proposed ranged from universal labelling, developing traceability mechanisms for wood products, and reducing plastics production. One speaker welcomed the reference to just transition in a non-paper on circularity tabled by the EU and stressed the importance of recognizing and protecting waste workers. Diverse views were also expressed on the role of plastics in the circular economy, with many cautioning about the high levels of endocrine disrupting chemicals embedded in them.

On the minerals resolution, facilitators noted “extremely slow progress” on the text, with a key sticking point being the opposition of some Member States to the proposed open-ended



Djatougbe Aziaka, Co-Facilitator, NGO Major Groups

expert group. One participant called for reinserting deleted text on environmental and social risks associated with mining activities.

Regarding sustainable lifestyles, participants noted the need to include references to food systems and sustainable consumption and production more broadly.

Discussion on the conflict resolution elicited diverse views, with many MGS representatives expressing support for robust language to enforce existing international standards and legal frameworks in conflict-affected settings. Concern was expressed about attempts to weaken the text, including by limiting the scope of the resolution to international humanitarian law only, or limiting civil society participation in data gathering and monitoring mechanisms.

Resolution Cluster E: Procedural, Budgetary and Administrative Matters: This session was facilitated by Djatougbe Aziaka, Co-Facilitator, NGO Major Group, who introduced the draft resolution on amendments to the instrument for the establishment of the restructured Global Environment Facility (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.22), as well as two draft decisions on: dates and the provisional agenda for UNEA-7 and OECPR-7 (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.2); and management of trust funds and earmarked contributions (UNEP/OECPR.6/L.1).

Aziaka noted Member States were yet to agree on the date for UNEA-7, with proposals including December 2025 or February 2026. She also urged more stakeholders to follow the negotiations on these resolutions. Concurring, one participant stressed the resolutions' importance for MGS, for instance, because some of the trust funds allow funding for civil society. Another participant stressed the need for MGS to be ready to participate in OECPR-7 and UNEA-7, whenever they take place.

Informal Dialogues

On Sunday, Major Groups engaged in a series of informal dialogues with UNEA and UNEP leadership, representatives of Member States, and the UN Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights.

Dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights: This morning session was moderated by Sascha Gabizon, Women's Major Group and Co-Organizer,



Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director, Women Engage for a Common Future, and **Marcos Orellana**, UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights

GMGSF-20. In introductory remarks, Special Rapporteur Marcos Orellana traced the origins of this independent role to a 1995 UN Commission on Human Rights mandate responding to growing concern about the dumping of hazardous waste across boundaries, which was later expanded to focus more broadly on chemicals and waste. He stressed that a human rights approach is primarily about filling gaps in existing MEAs through regular monitoring, reporting, documentation, and awareness raising. Among examples of this, he highlighted: the issuance of Thematic Reports, such as a forthcoming edition on Gender and Toxics; visits to countries to strengthen compliance; and emerging work on toxic release and transfer registries.

During the ensuing discussion, speakers highlighted, among other issues, the importance of developing robust legal indicators to support access to justice for affected communities and protecting environmental rights defenders and others involved in gathering human rights data.

Responding to a question on how to enforce the human right to a healthy environment, Orellana said the biggest challenge is making the needed "conceptual paradigm shift" in the face of corporate capture and weak institutional capacities. He further stressed that solutions to the climate crisis must not violate human rights, and that actions must be guided by the precautionary principle.

Further MGS concerns highlighted in the discussion included:

- revising international pesticides codes to take into account the impacts on Indigenous Peoples and their Communities;
- pursuing reparations for both historical and current chemicals-related war crimes; and
- holding producers and financers of toxic weapons accountable.

Orellana concluded by commending MGS for their advocacy role, stressing that without them "the human rights-based approach would be meaningless."

UNEA-6 President and UNEP Executive Director: This session on Sunday afternoon was co-moderated by Lena Yanina Estrada Asito, Co-Facilitator, Indigenous Peoples and their



UNEA-6 President **Leila Benali**

Communities Major Group, and Ayman Cherkaoui, MGS Co-Facilitator, Africa. In her opening remarks, UNEA-6 President Leila Benali underlined the crucial role of MGS in the success of UNEP and UNEA, noting they amplify the voices of those most likely to be affected by the environmental crises and highlight the emerging issues that require the attention of governments. She stressed that since becoming UNEA President, she has consistently engaged with MGS because they are instrumental in developing policies, acting both as think tanks and watch dogs.

Benali described the timing of UNEA-6 as a golden opportunity for action, amid current complex geopolitical conflicts and crises that are exacerbating the suffering of the planet and the people, and distracting governments from addressing emerging and urgent environmental crises. She further emphasized the importance of multilateralism in addressing the multiple environmental crises that humanity is facing. She highlighted that the draft ministerial declaration clearly states and recognizes the role of MGS in addressing environmental challenges, and would contain a specific paragraph on the Youth Assembly. Benali concluded by urging MGS to champion ambitious outcomes and effective implementation of UNEA-6 and beyond.



Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UNEP

Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UNEP, said MGS hold the mirror up to the world of environmental crises, point out what these crises are, and bring them to the attention of UNEP, Member States, and scientific bodies. She underlined that multilateralism is the only thing that can help tackle global challenges, by providing a platform that brings everyone together, across boundaries and factions, to tackle the triple planetary crisis. Andersen further underlined that multilateralism must be effective and inclusive, and based on strong science, Indigenous Peoples' wisdom, intergenerational knowledge, equity, and rights. Andersen urged MGS to be part of the demanding chorus that asks for ambition, calls for accountability, and helps to deliver.

In response, the NGO Major Group urged Benali and Anderson to help guide the negotiations in a way that avoids conflicts of interest and reflects the interests of the planet. He supported a call for peace and an end to conflict, noting "we cannot achieve harmony with the environment if we cannot live in harmony with one another."

The Farmers Major Group urged moving from a "think tank" to a "do tank" mentality, noting for instance, that it is possible to end hunger but there is just no will or imagination to do so.

The Indigenous Peoples and their Communities Major Group underlined the role of Indigenous Peoples as stewards of nature, but stressed they are subject to attacks on their individual and collective rights. Noting that world leaders are pushing for a green transition, but that many natural resources are located in territories managed by Indigenous communities, she asked what key steps UNEP will take to protect their rights in line with the FPIC principle.

The Local Authorities Major Group called for multilateralism to be implemented by UNEP and other UN agencies, noting it could be a key to unlocking more action and achieving more concrete impacts for citizens at the local level.

The Women's Major Group underscored the importance of gender especially in the context of chemical exposure and health, stressing that women and children are the most impacted, and called for including language on gender in UNEA-6 resolutions.

The Scientific and Technological Community Major Group acknowledged that NbS are key to many issues confronting the world, but that robust evidence, good governance, and certification are required. On SRM, she called for adopting a "no use and no open-air experiments" policy, saying "pollution on a global scale cannot be the solution to pollution on a global scale." The Group also urged UNEP to promote citizen science across all its endeavors.

The Business and Industry Major Group emphasized that business and industry are, in many ways, implementers of solutions and resolutions. They called on UNEP and UNEA to use their convening power to ensure that business is seen as part of the solution to environmental challenges.

The Children and Youth Major Group called for formalizing the Youth General Assembly ahead of UNEA sessions and stressed the need to implement "urgent, good faith multilateralism."

The Workers and Trade Unions Major Group stressed that workers and trade unions are crucial for building trust in society but that these groups need to see results and progress from UNEA sessions. He called for actively engaging Major Groups in the UNEA process, beyond simply listening to them, and for urgent action to address the issue of asbestos and other chemicals.

David Munene, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Africa, suggested that regions should be better included in processes, such as through the various regional offices. He expressed concern about how SRM could affect African populations in relation to knowledge transfer, capacity, and natural resource control, noting the global nature of climate.

Ajay K Jha, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Asia Pacific, called for more meaningful MGS participation beyond delivering statements. He urged UNEP to broaden MGS to include other groups such as people living with disabilities and those affected by conflict.

Andrea Nakova, speaking on behalf of the Regional Facilitators, Europe, advocated for a robust mandate for UNEP to establish a comprehensive governance framework to address the environmental repercussions of minerals and metals extraction. Underlining that these minerals are crucial for the energy transition but that their extraction negatively impacts rural and marginalized communities and their environment, encroaching on heritage sites and Indigenous Peoples' territories, she called for a global response that acknowledges regional views.

Mauro Pereira, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Latin America and the Caribbean, called for implementation of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement).

Jennifer Garard, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, North America, noted that regional consultations among regional stakeholders and the preparation of regional statements usually take place before Member States submit their UNEA resolution proposals. She highlighted this as a missed opportunity for MGS to comment on these resolutions and called for better streamlining of the process.



Faisal Al-Fadl, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, West Asia



Patrizia Heidegger, Regional Co-Facilitator, Europe

Faisal Al-Fadl, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, West Asia, questioned why there is a lack of cooperation, loss of confidence, and lack of community engagement in the region, with so many opportunities not exploited or expanded.

Member States: This brief session on Sunday afternoon was moderated by Patrizia Heidegger, MGS Regional Co-Facilitator, Europe, and Christopher Chin, Co-Facilitator, NGO Major Group. The session focused on ways to increase meaningful participation by MGS in UNEP meetings and processes and continued the dialogue on establishing a “group of friends” to strengthen collaboration between Member States and MGS.

Miguel Antonio Luis, Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal to UNEP, and Pedro Leon Cortes Ruiz, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Colombia to UNEP, welcomed all participants to the dialogue and reiterated the crucial role of MGS in the UNEA process. They encouraged suggestions on how to enhance this crucial role, underlining that the connection and participation of civil society is essential for a peaceful and sustainable world.

Patrizia Heidegger introduced the emerging “group of friends” of UNEP MGS, which aims to: strengthen collaboration between Member States and MGS; enhance participation in different UNEP processes and inclusive environmental agenda setting, planning, and implementation; and increase civil society engagement in all UNEP work. She clarified that the group would serve as a point of contact between Member States and MGS during the intersessional periods to hold discussions, find synergies, and increase collaboration.

Most Member States and MGS in attendance expressed their willingness to join the group of friends. Norway underlined that her country provides space for MGS ahead of UNEA sessions by meeting with MGS representatives to gain insight into their positions and concerns, as well as by having a MGS representative as part of the Norwegian delegation to UNEA. Noting that one of the best ways to enhance participation is through engagement, Norway signaled her country's intention to join the group of friends.

Colombia stressed the need to systematically engage with knowledge systems such as Indigenous Peoples, and African



Pierre Boileau, Head of the Global Environment Outlook, UNEP

and local communities. He expressed his country's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, and described efforts to, for instance, incorporate and recognize all women in their diversity.

MGS also provided suggestions on how to increase their participation, as well as possible functions of the group of friends. One speaker called for more space for observer interventions in the UNEA process, and another said the group of friends could also serve as a platform for exchanging practical ideas and solutions. Another speaker urged consolidating information about independent representatives and how they can be supported within the system. Regarding enhancing MGS participation in the UNEA process, one speaker highlighted the need to engage early in the process, and another urged ensuring the UNEA process is not taken over by lobbyists. Another participant underlined the importance of meaningful engagement with the creative arts.

Other Sessions

GEO-7: What Is It, Where Are Preparations and the Way Forward: This Sunday session was facilitated by Mohamed Abdelraouf, Co-Chair MGFC, and provided an overview of preparations towards publishing the next UNEP Global Environment Outlook (GEO) in 2026.

Pierre Boileau, Head, GEO, UNEP, presented an update on the seventh edition of the GEO (GEO-7), its solutions focus, and its digital transformation. He provided an overview of some of the policy findings of the GEO-6, including that policies which try to conserve or clean up the environment cannot keep pace with the rate of environmental degradation, and that a transformational change is therefore required that addresses the root causes of degradation. Boileau highlighted other GEO-6 key messages, including the need to: phase out 80% of fossil fuels use by 2050; eliminate about two-thirds of the environmental impact of the global food system by 2050; and achieve a near-zero-waste economy by 2050. He clarified that GEO-7 would focus on developing solutions pathways for achieving these goals, building on GEO-6 and other major assessments.

Boileau underlined that GEO-7 aims to produce a clear analysis of how transformation happens and how to make it happen intentionally, also explaining and dissecting the

entrenched barriers to change, such as conflicts of interest. He further provided an overview of the process to prepare GEO-7, outlining that all major steps to produce the first order draft have been completed and that authors have produced an internal draft of all chapters, which have also been reviewed.

In the ensuing discussion, participants:

- called for replacing “Indigenous and traditional knowledge” with “Indigenous and local knowledge”;
- noted that many farmers are selling off their land due to a lack of support and financial benefits; and
- underlined the importance of faith communities in contributing to the required behavioral change.

On the Road to OEWG 3: Science-Policy Panel to Contribute Further to the Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste and to Prevent Pollution: This session on Saturday

afternoon was facilitated by Sherika Whitlocke-Ballingsing, Women's Major Group. Participants received updates about the progress of the work of the OEWG to prepare proposals for a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

Gudi Alkemade, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to UNEP and Chair of the OEWG, reported on preparations for OEWG 3, taking place in June 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland. She underlined the importance of this session to enable establishment of the panel as soon as possible.

Nalini Sharma, UNEP, outlined UNEP's work ahead of OEWG 3, including the preparation of foundational documents for establishing the panel, relating to, among other things, scope and institutional arrangements. She also highlighted some intersessional activities to be undertaken, including capacity-building webinars.

In the ensuing discussion, participants called for:

- a youth consultative meeting ahead of OEWG 3;
- creation of a bond that will finance projects in Indigenous and local communities, which help solve the chemicals and waste problem;



Mohamed Abdelraouf, MGFC Co-Chair



(L-R): **Sherika Whitelocke-Ballingsing**, Caribbean Poison Information Network; **Gudi Alkemade**, Chair, OEWG on a science policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and the prevention of pollution; and **Nalini Sharma**, UNEP

- establishment of a board that includes all stakeholders and that will consider the certification of industries and assess their release of waste; and
- giving the Scientific and Technological Community Major Group the opportunity to nominate three independent scientists to join the panel.

Working Session to Finalize the Joint Global Statement:

This session took place on Sunday morning, with additional discussions taking place in the closing session in the afternoon. Key sticking points for MGS highlighted by speakers included preambular texts referring to food systems, environmental education, the One Health approach, and peace and security. Participants also exchanged views on language calling for new economic growth paradigms, with many noting that the called for deep economic transformation requires addressing the root causes of economic and social inequity, as well as colonial legacies that foster exclusion and conflict.

Several speakers called for more attention to the role of citizen science and Indigenous knowledge systems in multilateral environmental governance. Revisiting the contentious SRM resolution, most Major Groups reiterated their opposition to deleting language calling for an inclusive and independent science-policy body. They expressed concern that mandating an existing expert group, as called for by the proponents of the resolution, could open the door to the geoengineering lobby, and expose vulnerable communities to greater risks.

Expressing concern that the current conversation focuses on technology without addressing the governance aspects of SRM, several Major Groups asserted that there is already sufficient evidence that adopting SRM technologies would be catastrophic. They underscored the importance of the precautionary “no use” approach, as proposed by the African Group, and respecting FPIC to ensure that existing knowledge is shared with all rights holders. While expressing support, one Major Group noted interest in developing “a robust tool box” to offer a wider range of technology options. Other speakers cautioned that adopting SRM would encourage the fossil fuel industry to continue business as usual. On the way forward, the Co-Facilitators informed MGS that the draft statement would be finalized based on input received prior to forwarding it to UNEA-6.

The session closed with a proposal for Forum participants to hold a silent protest at UNEA-6 to convey their solidarity with the victims of the wars in Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan, as well as in other conflict zones.

Closing of GMGSF-20

On Sunday afternoon, following an organizational session to discuss strategies for effective MGS engagement during UNEA-6, the MGFC Co-Chairs thanked participants for their valuable contributions and declared the meeting closed at 5:30 pm.

Upcoming Meetings

2024 Arab Regional Forum on Sustainable Development:

This meeting will take place ahead of the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). Organized by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the forum will convene on the theme “Delivering for Sustainability and Peace.” In line with HLPF 2024, it will discuss sustainable, resilient, and innovative solutions for reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises. **dates:** 5-7 March 2024 **location:** Beirut, Lebanon **website:** afsd-2024.unescwa.org/

2024 UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable

Development: This meeting will take place ahead of the 2024 HLPF. Organized by the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), it will convene under the theme “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Economic Commission for Europe region in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.” **dates:** 13-14 March 2024 **location:** Geneva, Switzerland **website:** regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2024

2024 Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Forum on Sustainable Development:

This meeting will take place ahead of the 2024 HLPF. Organized by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the forum will provide the space for an in-depth review of the SDGs to be reviewed by the HLPF in 2024: SDG 1 (no poverty); SDG 2 (zero hunger); SDG 13 (climate action); SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions); and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals). **dates:** 15-18 April 2024 **location:** Santiago, Chile **website:** foroalc2030.cepal.org/2024/en

23rd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous

Issues: The 23rd Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII 23) will focus on the theme, “Enhancing Indigenous Peoples’ Right to Self-determination in the Context of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Emphasizing the Voices of Indigenous Youth.” The session will discuss the six mandated areas of the Permanent Forum (economic and social development, culture, environment, education, health, and human rights), with reference to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. **dates:** 15-26 April 2024 **location:** New York City, US **website:** social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/unpfi/23rd-session

ECOSOC Youth Forum 2024: The UN Economic and Social Council’s (ECOSOC) 2024 Youth Forum will take place in April 2024, during ECOSOC’s 2024 session. The 2024 Forum’s discussions will be guided by the overall theme of the 2024 ECOSOC and HLPF on “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.”

dates: 16-18 April 2024 **location:** New York City, US **website:** ecosoc.un.org/en/events/2024/2024-youth-forum

2024 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development:

The 2024 Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development will take place ahead of the 2024 HLPF. Organized jointly by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and Egypt, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and UN system organizations, the forum will focus on the theme, “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.”

dates: 23-25 April 2024 **location:** Cairo, Egypt **website:** www.uneca.org/eca-events/arfsd2024

UN Civil Society Conference: The UN Civil Society Conference will focus on the theme, the “Summit of the Future.” The Conference outcomes will serve as a contribution for Member States as they work towards the Summit of the Future, and the expected outcome of that Summit, Pact for the Future.

dates: 9-11 May 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **website:** www.un.org/en/civil-society/2024-un-civil-society-conference

Summit of the Future: This high-level event will bring together UN Member States, UN agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations, academic institutions, the private sector, and youth

under the theme, “Summit of the Future: Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow.” The Summit aims to forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like, and what we can do today to secure it. **dates:** 23-24 September 2024 **location:** New York City, US **website:** www.un.org/en/common-agenda/summit-of-the-future

For additional upcoming events, see: sdg.iisd.org

Glossary

FPIC	Free prior and informed consent
GEO	Global Environment Outlook
GMGSF	Global Major Groups and Stakeholders
HHPs	Highly hazardous pesticides
MEA	Multilateral environmental agreement
MGS	Major Groups and Stakeholders
MGFC	Major Groups Facilitating Committee
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NbS	Nature-based solutions
OECPR	Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP
OEWG	Open-Ended Working Group
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRM	Solar radiation modification
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

