



UNEA HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 23 JUNE 2014

On Monday, delegates convened for the opening plenary of the first session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) of UNEP. In the afternoon the Committee of the Whole (COW) convened. Delegates considered draft decisions submitted by governments and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR).

OPENING PLENARY

Hassan Abdel Hilal, outgoing GC-27/GMEF President, Minister of Environment, Forests and Physical Development, Sudan, welcomed participants, stressing that UNEA represents a ground-breaking platform for leadership in environmental policy, and is set to make strategic decisions, provide political guidance and promote a science-policy interface.

Sahle-Work Zewde, Director-General, UNON, said the first UNEA marks an important milestone in the implementation of the Rio+20 outcomes and in the upgrading and strengthening of UNEP.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP, welcomed delegates to a global conversation “at the environmental capital of the world.” Assuring delegates that “together we can move forward,” he expressed hope that discussions would focus on substance to make a difference during the five-day meeting.

Noting growing global environmental challenges, Judi Wakhungu, Minister of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, Kenya, urged delegates to provide leadership for the attainment of sustainable development objectives.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: The plenary elected Oyun Sanjaasuren, Minister of Environment and Green Development, Mongolia, as the first UNEA President. Judi Wakhungu (Kenya), Mahmoud Samy (Egypt), Sargon Lazar Slewa (Iraq), Attila Korodi (Romania), Khatuna Gogaladze (Georgia), Idunn Eidheim (Norway), Chris Vanden Bilcke (Belgium), Mariano Castro Sánchez (Peru) were elected as Vice Presidents. James Fletcher (Saint Lucia) was elected Rapporteur.

Sanjaasuren reminded delegates of the grave environment and development challenges that stem from an increasing global population projected to hit 11 billion by the end of the century. She highlighted UNEA’s unique position to deliberate on two priority areas: sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 development agenda, and the illegal trade in wildlife. The provisional agenda (UNEP/EA.1/Add.1/Rev.1) was adopted.

Delegates agreed to the establishment of a COW chaired by Fernando Lugris (Uruguay) and a Working Party on the rules of procedure and stakeholder policy chaired by Julia Pataki (Romania).

POLICY STATEMENT BY THE EXECUTIVE

DIRECTOR: UNEP Executive Director Steiner underscored UNEP’s progress towards transparency and accountability through results-based planning, budgeting and reporting. He said this is a profound moment of change in the UN and that UNEA’s high-level segment can shape that change by focusing on SDGs, the post-2015 development agenda and sustainable consumption and production (SCP).

Steiner highlighted the illegal trade in wildlife – a US\$200 billion per year market – and connected it to human and arms trafficking, stating that it not only threatens endangered species, but human livelihoods, and that more attention should be given to the judiciary.

Noting that today 85 people have as much wealth as the poorest 3.5 billion people on earth, Steiner urged delegates to look at inequality and “unsustainable development” in an effort to try and come to the root cause of global problems.

INTERVENTIONS: Thailand, for the G-77/CHINA, stressed the importance of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) and the need for means of implementation for achieving sustainable development. Emphasizing UNEP’s role in the implementation of the Rio+20 outcome on SCP and on chemicals and waste management, he called on member states to make financial contributions to allow UNEP to achieve the goals in its programme of work.

Egypt, for the AFRICAN GROUP and the AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION, called for: collective ownership of a member state driven post-2015 agenda; means of implementation; and a strong monitoring and reporting system to ensure fulfillment of commitments.

Algeria called for an official decision to establish a specialized UN agency on South-South cooperation.

Colombia, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP, highlighted the need for, *inter alia*: a global framework for sustainable development based on economic equity; substantial funding and provision of appropriate technology; strengthened institutional and technical capacity in developing countries; developed country leadership; and effective cooperation at regional and sub-regional levels.



On governance, the EU said that the rules of procedure and stakeholder policy must be implemented in line with the mandate from Rio+20. The Russian Federation noted UNEP must step up its work with states, other UN bodies and civil society.

Japan, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, welcomed as “timely” the high-level meeting to discuss clear goals for the post-2015 agenda, and advocated decisions on chemicals, waste and air pollution that call for concrete action.

Emphasizing the “historic significance” of the session, Farmers, on behalf of MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS, urged UNEA to deliver a “bold and forward-looking” outcome and stressed the centrality of a human rights and science-based approach in transitioning toward a new paradigm of development in harmony with nature. He called for a “robust and inclusive” policy on stakeholder engagement and respect for the people’s right to live in a healthy environment.

Sunu Soemarno, Chair of the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR) reported on the work of the CPR in preparation for the first UNEA session, including on stakeholder engagement, amendments to the rules of procedure of UNEA, and preparing 12 draft decisions.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

In his welcoming remarks, Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, said the first session of UNEA offers an opportunity for delegates to define the characteristics of the sustainable world they would like to see and what UNEA’s role in it should be.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK: Mahmoud Samy (Egypt) was appointed as COW Rapporteur. Noting the heavy workload, COW Chair Lugris called for delegates to work efficiently and introduced the proposed schedule of work (UNEP/EA.1/CW/CRP.1), to which delegates agreed.

DRAFT DECISIONS FROM GOVERNMENTS: Chile introduced proposed decision UNEP/EA.1/CW/CRP.2, submitted by Chile, the Dominican Republic and Mexico, on a regional process to strengthen the Declaration on the Application of Principle 10 (participation and access to information) of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, and noted it is a step towards strengthening environmental democracy in the region.

DRAFT DECISIONS BY THE CPR: The Secretariat introduced UNEP/EA.1/L.1 containing a compilation of draft decisions. BOLIVIA, with ECUADOR, lamented the absence of reference to traditional knowledge and practices of local communities and indigenous peoples in the draft decisions and called for a greater balance within UNEP in this regard. The US, NORWAY and the REPUBLIC OF KOREA supported improving the science-policy platform.

On GEO 6, the EU, supported by SWITZERLAND, emphasized that sufficient time is needed to define the scope, objective and process for GEO 6 and welcomed the intergovernmental meeting scheduled for September 2014. She also stressed ownership of data as pertinent and called for clarification on whether UNEP’s data rules are sufficient in this regard. Highlighting the region-specific nature of policy recommendations, IRAN suggested an initial feedback process by policymakers prior to the finalization of the “summary for policymakers.” Emphasizing the need for wide participation of diverse stakeholders in the multilateral consultation process on GEO 6, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY also noted data could be enhanced with citizen data and open data dissemination.

On ecosystem-based adaptation, UGANDA highlighted changes made during the intersessional period, including a greater emphasis on food production and security, and BOLIVIA said that UNEA is not the forum to discuss “matters related to climate change.”

On chemicals and waste management, the Secretariat introduced the documents UNEP/EA.1/5; UNEP/EA.1/5/Add.1; UNEP/EA.1/5/Add.2; and UNEP/EA.1/L.1. Uruguay, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, *inter alia*: said new and additional funds are required to address emerging policy issues; underscored the value of regional centres; and reiterated the importance of developed countries’ obligations related to funding, technology transfer and capacity building. Tanzania, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, said chemicals and waste management should be reflected in the sustainable development agenda and called for a strong management mechanism. The US urged delegates to focus on the outcomes of the process on enhancing cooperation and coordination within the chemicals and waste cluster and the consultative process on financing chemicals and waste. KENYA called for integrated finance to be a standalone decision. The EU urged delegates to endorse the outcome of the consultative process on financing and, supported by CUBA, VENEZUELA, IVORY COAST, COLOMBIA and SWITZERLAND, called for finalizing the terms of reference for the Special Programme to support implementation of the chemicals conventions at the national level.

ARGENTINA stressed the importance of external financing to promote the mainstreaming of chemicals management in national budgets. SWITZERLAND called for continuing the programme of work on lead and cadmium. COLOMBIA supported this, with the understanding that this will not generate a process for negotiating a legally-binding instrument on these substances. WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS, on behalf of WOMEN, NGOs, FARMERS, LOCAL AUTHORITIES, CHILDREN AND YOUTH and INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, lamented slow progress on chemicals and waste, lack of information on related risks, and many countries’ lack of regulatory capacity. BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY expressed support for the multi-stakeholder approach established under the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management and the Special Programme to build national capacity for chemicals management.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

As delegates began coming to terms with the heavy agenda, it did not escape their attention that “horse trading” over the SDGs would also begin in earnest next week during the High-Level Political Forum in New York. Some noted that it lends a sense of urgency and purpose to this first UNEA, as delegates are aware of their duty to ensure that the environmental pillar of sustainable development is strongly embedded in the outcome.

However, expectations appear mixed; one participant in the GMGSF pre-meeting said that Major Groups are, perhaps, stronger believers in UNEA’s potential as a “game-changer” than some member states. With a clear thematic focus for the High Level Segment on Thursday and Friday, many expressed hope that UNEA will lend impetus to UNEP in the post-2015 process.

Nevertheless many delegates conveyed their delight to participate at the birth of UNEA, and some said that the meeting is a timely opportunity to address key global environmental challenges that are growing in number and complexity.

Some said they were expecting challenging discussions on the green economy and finance and technology, as well as new reports on key environmental issues, including from major stakeholders. One delegate pointed to “a full force” of participants “present for discussions on chemicals” and said Norway’s proposal on microplastics is likely to spur lively discussion.