

TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE UNEP GOVERNING COUNCIL/GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM: 5-9 FEBRUARY 2007

The 24th session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC-24/GMEF) opens today at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, and will continue until Friday, 9 February 2007. Ministers and delegates at GC-24/GMEF will discuss emerging policy issues of globalization and the environment, as well as UN reforms.

The GC-24/GMEF will also consider progress reports on: international environmental governance; the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building; strengthening UNEP's scientific base and financing; enhanced coordination across the UN system and the Environment Management Group; budget and programme of work for the biennium 2006-2007; updated UNEP's water policy and strategy; small island developing states (SIDS); environmental and equity considerations in UNEP's procurement practices; chemicals management; and gender equality in the field of the environment.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNEP GC/GMEF

As a result of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the UN General Assembly, in its resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 1972, officially established UNEP as the central UN node for global environmental cooperation and treaty making. The resolution also established the UNEP Governing Council (GC) to provide a forum for the international community to address major and emerging environmental policy issues. The GC's responsibilities include the promotion of international environmental cooperation and the recommendation of policies to achieve this, and the provision of policy guidance for the direction and coordination of environmental programmes in the UN system. The GC reports to the UN General Assembly, which also elects the GC's 58 members, for four-year terms, taking into account the principle of equitable regional representation. The GMEF is constituted by the GC as envisaged in UN General Assembly resolution 53/242. The purpose of the GMEF is to institute, at a high political level, a process for reviewing important and emerging policy issues in the field of the environment.

GC-19: The nineteenth session of the GC convened in two parts from 27 January-7 February 1997 and from 3-4 April 1997 at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates adopted the

Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of UNEP, which expanded the mandate to include: analyzing the state of the global environment; assessing global and regional environmental trends; providing policy advice and early warning information on environmental threats; and catalyzing and promoting international cooperation and action, based on the best scientific and technical capabilities available.

GC-20: GC-20 took place from 1-5 February 1999, in Nairobi, and adopted over 30 decisions on a range of topics, including: the Environment Fund, administrative and budgetary matters; linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions; and policy issues, including the state of the environment, coordination and cooperation within and outside the UN, UNEP governance and emerging policy issues.

GCSS-6 /GMEF: The sixth Special Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GCSS-6/GMEF) took place from 29-31 May 2000, in Malmö, Sweden. Ministers adopted the Malmö Ministerial Declaration, which agreed that the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) should review the requirements for a greatly strengthened institutional structure for international environmental governance (IEG).

GC-21/GMEF: GC-21/GMEF took place from 5-9 February 2001, in Nairobi. Delegates established the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives (IGM) to undertake a comprehensive policy-oriented assessment of existing institutional weaknesses, as well as future needs and options for strengthening IEG. They also adopted decision 21/7, which requests UNEP Executive Director to examine the need for a strategic approach to international chemicals management (SAICM).

GCSS-7/GMEF: GCSS-7/GMEF was held from 13-15 February 2002, in Cartagena, Colombia. In its decision SS.VII/1, the GC/GMEF adopted the IGM report, which contains recommendations aimed at strengthening IEG, including through: improved coherence in international environmental policy-making; strengthening the role and financial situation of UNEP; improved coordination among and effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs); and capacity building, technology transfer and country-level coordination. Delegates also adopted decisions related to, *inter alia*, SAICM at the global level.

WSSD: WSSD was held from 26 August-4 September 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) sets out a framework for action to implement the commitments originally agreed at the 1992 Rio

Earth Summit. The JPOI, among other things, emphasized that the international community should fully implement the outcomes of decision SS.VII/1 on IEG.

GC-22/GMEF: GC-22/GMEF took place from 3-7 February 2003, in Nairobi. Delegates adopted more than 40 decisions on issues relating to IEG, post-conflict environmental assessment, UNEP's water policy and strategy, SAICM, a mercury programme, support to Africa, production and consumption patterns, and the environment and cultural diversity.

GCSS-8/GMEF: GCSS-8/GMEF took place from 29-31 March 2004, in Jeju, Republic of Korea. At the conclusion of the ministerial consultations, delegates adopted the "Jeju Initiative," containing the Chair's summary of the discussions and decisions on: SIDS; waste management; regional annexes; and the implementation of decision SS.VII/1 on IEG.

GC-23/GMEF: The GC-23/GMEF took place from 21-25 February 2005, in Nairobi. Ministers considered the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, and adopted decisions on, among other things: the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building; IEG; chemicals management; UNEP's water policy and strategy; gender equality and the environment; poverty and the environment; and strengthening environmental emergency response and developing disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and early warning systems.

2005 WORLD SUMMIT: The 2005 World Summit was held at UN headquarters in New York from 14-16 September. Delegates recognized the need for more efficient environmental activities in the UN system, through, *inter alia*, enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance, and strengthened scientific knowledge. They further agreed to explore the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework, including a more integrated structure, building on existing institutions and internationally agreed instruments, as well as treaty bodies and UN specialized agencies.

ICCM: The International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) was held from 4-6 February 2006, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, immediately prior to GCSS-9/GMEF. At the ICCM, delegates completed negotiations and adopted the SAICM, including a high-level declaration, overarching policy strategy and global plan of action.

GCSS-9/GMEF: GCSS-9/GMEF was held from 7-9 February 2006, in Dubai. Ministerial consultations addressed, *inter alia*, policy issues relating to energy and environment, chemicals management, and tourism and the environment. The plenary discussion on environmental governance, outcome of the 2005 World Summit, and GC universal membership did not produce an agreed outcome and delegates decided that the report of the meeting should reflect the divergence of views expressed.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON SYSTEM-WIDE

COHERENCE: As a follow-up to the 2005 World Summit, the UN Secretary-General established, in February 2006, a High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment. The report of the Panel, issued on 9 November 2006, calls for UNEP to be upgraded so that it can more authoritatively play the role of the "environment policy pillar" of the UN system. The Panel's recommendations also include better coordination at normative levels, such as policy-setting, increased efficiencies and coordination among MEAs, greater funding for UNEP, and more effective use of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) by its implementing agencies.

INFORMAL CONSULTATIVE PROCESS: The UN General Assembly at its 60th session established the Informal Consultative Process on the Institutional Framework for the UN Environmental Activities. Two rounds of consultations were held in June 2006 and January 2007, during which member

states identified a number of key areas where improvements can be made. Consultations further highlighted: fragmentation and uncoordinated approaches in environmental policy development and implementation; constraints faced by developing countries in effectively participating in and complying with MEAs; and the key role of capacity building, technology transfer and increased financial support.

THIRD GEF ASSEMBLY AND SPECIAL GEF COUNCIL MEETING: These meetings, held in Cape Town, South Africa from 28-30 August 2006, agreed to a fourth replenishment of the GEF of US\$3.13 billion to finance environmental projects over the next four years, while acknowledging the need for additional funding to effectively address growing environmental challenges. Policy recommendations adopted require the GEF to enhance synergies among MEAs.

61ST SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY: In its resolution 61/205, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed the role of UNEP as the principal body within the UN system in the field of environment. It also recognized, among other things, the need to: enhance efficiency of environmental activities in the UN system; accelerate implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan; and strengthen the scientific base of UNEP.

IFCS-V: The fifth session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS-V) was held in Budapest, Hungary, from 25-29 September 2006, and agreed on establishing a working group to draft a decision on the Future of IFCS to be presented at IFCS-VI, adopted the Budapest Statement on Mercury, Lead and Cadmium, and identified a series of potential next steps to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition with tools and approaches for applying precaution in domestic decision-making processes.

INTERNATIONAL MERCURY CONFERENCE: This Conference was convened by the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium, from 26-27 October 2006. Delegates discussed actions needed at the local, national, regional and global levels to reduce health and environmental risks related to the use of mercury, with a view to providing input to GC-24/GMEF and relevant chemicals MEAs. Options discussed included: development of a legally-binding international agreement on mercury; inclusion of mercury in existing binding agreements; and voluntary and other measures.

PARIS CONFERENCE FOR GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL GOVERNANCE: Convened on the initiative of French President Jacques Chirac, this Conference was held in Paris, France, from 2-3 February 2007. The Conference sought to, *inter alia*, mobilize international action in support of a United Nations Environment Organization (UNEO) with a view to strengthening environmental governance. The Conference concluded with the "Paris Call for Action," which advocates transformation of UNEP into a fully-fledged international organization modeled on the World Health Organization, and welcomes Morocco's proposal to host the first meeting of the pioneering group of "friends of the UNEO." The Conference also calls for the adoption of a Universal Declaration of Environmental Rights and Duties.

GCSF-8: The eighth Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF-8) met from 3-4 February 2007 in Nairobi. The meeting addressed: the draft decisions of UNEP GC-24/GMEF; the programme of work of the GCSF Global Steering Committee; civil society participation in GC-24/GMEF; and the way forward to engage major groups in the work of UNEP. GCSF-8 also discussed policy issues related to four themes: water and the environment; gender and the environment; chemicals management; and globalization, ecosystem services and human well-being. Participants engaged in active discussion with UNEP Executive Director, as well as with the GC/GMEF Bureau. GCSF-8 will forward a Global Civil Society Statement to GC-24/GMEF, addressing these four themes as well as overarching aims.