

26TH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL/GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM (GC/GMEF) OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP): 21–24 FEBRUARY 2011

The 26th session of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) opens today at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, and will continue until 24 February 2011. The ministerial consultations at this session will focus on emerging policy issues under the overall theme of UNEP's contribution to the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (also known as "Rio 2012"), to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012. The GC/GMEF will also consider reports submitted by the Executive Director on various issues as requested by decisions of the Council adopted at previous sessions, as well as other issues that may be raised by its members.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNEP GC/GMEF

As a result of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the UN General Assembly (UNGA), in its resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 1972, 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 it, and the provision of policy guidance for the direction and coordination of environmental programmes in the UN system. The GC reports to the UNGA, 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 GA 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.

GCSS-6/GMEF: The sixth Special Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum 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: This meeting took place from 5-9 February 2001, in Nairobi, Kenya. 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 the UNEP Executive Director to examine the need for a strategic approach to international chemicals management (SAICM).

GCSS-7/GMEF: This meeting 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: The 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: This meeting took place from 3-7 February 2003, in Nairobi, Kenya. 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: This meeting 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: small island developing states; water; waste management; regional annexes; and the implementation of decision SS.VII/1 on IEG.

GC-23/GMEF: This meeting took place from 21-25 February 2005, in Nairobi, Kenya. 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.

GCSS-9/GMEF: This meeting was held from 7-9 February 2006, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. 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.

GC-24/GMEF: This meeting convened from 5-9 February 2007, in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates adopted 15 decisions on issues relating, *inter alia*, to: chemicals, including a provision to establish the *Ad Hoc* Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) to Review and Assess Measures to Address the Global Issue of Mercury; the world environmental situation; IEG; South-South cooperation; waste management; 2010-2020 UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification; UNEP's updated water policy and strategy; and support to Africa in environmental management and protection.

GCSS-10/GMEF: This meeting convened from 20-22 February 2008, in the Principality of Monaco. Ministerial consultations addressed the emerging policy issues of mobilizing finance to meet the climate challenge, and IEG and UN reform. The GC/GMEF adopted five decisions on: the UNEP Medium-term Strategy 2010-2013; chemicals management, including mercury and waste management; the GEO; sustainable development of the Arctic region; and the International Decade for Combating Climate Change.

GC-25/GMEF: GC-25/GMEF convened from 16-20 February 2009 in Nairobi, Kenya. The GC/GMEF adopted 17 decisions on issues relating to, *inter alia*: chemicals management, including mercury; the world environment situation; environmental law; the intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES); and the environmental situation in Gaza. Decision 25/4 on IEG established a regionally representative, consultative group of ministers or high-level representatives. The decision requested the group to present a set of options for improving IEG to GCSS-11/GMEF with a view to providing input to the UNGA.

GCSS-11/GMEF: The simultaneous extraordinary Conferences of the Parties (ExCOPs) to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions convened from 22-24 February 2010 in Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia, followed by GCSS-11/GMEF, which convened from 24-26 February 2010. The GCSS-11/GMEF concluded its work by adopting eight decisions on: IEG; enhanced coordination across the UN, including the Environmental Management Group (EMG); a follow-up report on the environmental situation in the Gaza Strip; IPBES; strengthening the environmental response in Haiti; oceans; a consultative process on financing options for chemicals and wastes; and environmental law.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

IPBES: Following two meetings (November 2008, Putrajaya, Malaysia; and October 2009, Nairobi, Kenya), the third *ad hoc* intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an IPBES (June 2010, Busan, Republic of Korea) concluded that such a

platform should be established and reached agreement on its main elements, recommending that it would collaborate with existing initiatives on biodiversity and ecosystem services and be scientifically independent. The meeting also recommended that the UN General Assembly be invited to consider its conclusions and take appropriate action for the establishment of the platform.

At the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (October 2010, Nagoya, Japan), the COP welcomed the outcome of the third stakeholder dialogue on an IPBES and encouraged the 65th session of the UN General Assembly to consider IPBES establishment at the earliest opportunity.

On 20 December 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 65/162, which, *inter alia*, called on the UNEP GC to take the necessary steps to set up the IPBES, including convening a plenary meeting to determine modalities and institutional arrangements for the planned body.

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON IEG: The first meeting of the Consultative Group of Ministers or High-level Representatives on International Environmental Governance (IEG) convened in Nairobi, Kenya, from 7-9 July 2010 to discuss broad IEG reforms. The group exchanged views on the proposals put forward by UNEP for consideration, and identified nine options of the original 24 proposed by UNEP that warrant further consideration. The Group requested the Executive Director to prepare an analysis on the options to be discussed at the Group's second meeting and agreed to a roadmap for its work through the 2011 GC.

The second meeting convened from 21-23 November in Espoo, Finland. The Consultative Group identified the following system-wide responses to the challenges in the current IEG system: strengthening the science-policy interface; developing a system-wide strategy for environment in the UN system; encouraging synergies between compatible MEAs; creating a stronger link between global environmental policy making and financing; developing a system-wide capacity-building framework for environment; strengthening strategic engagement at the regional level to strengthen UNEP Regional Offices; and, for the GC, considering the contribution of UNEP to identifying the implementation and follow up of these approaches. The Group recommended that the GC consider how to "secure political momentum" and "efficient follow-up of the IEG process."

UNCSD: The first session of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) convened from 17-19 May 2010, at UN Headquarters in New York. Delegates assessed progress to date and the remaining gaps in implementing outcomes of major summits on sustainable development. They also discussed new and emerging challenges, a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

The first Intersessional Meeting for the UNCSD convened from 10-11 January 2011, at UN Headquarters in New York. During the meeting, delegates listened to: a summary of the findings of the Synthesis Report on securing renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development and addressing new and emerging challenges; and panels on green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development.