

**UNEA-5.2 Highlights:
Tuesday, 1 March 2022**

On Tuesday, 1 March 2022, the resumed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) met in contact groups for most of the day to try to reach consensus on pressing matters. Delegates convened in plenary to hear national statements. The Committee of the Whole (COW) approved 11 resolutions and one draft decision on the date and venue of UNEA-6, forwarding them to UNEA for adoption. Significantly, the COW endorsed a resolution setting up the process towards a Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution.

Delegates also met in a high-level segment. Under the overarching theme of “strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),” delegates met in a leadership dialogue, and in a multi-stakeholder dialogue.

High-level segment

Leadership Dialogue with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs): Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility (GEF), moderated the Leadership Dialogue with the MEAs. Welcoming participants, he stressed the urgent need to enhance coherence and collaboration across all levels. Rodriguez noted that more money is currently being directed towards harmful activities than towards protecting the life supporting systems of our planet. He stressed the need for aligning public and private funding, policy coherence, and political consistency.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UNEP, reflected on the 1972 environmentalism “awakening,” following the Stockholm Conference, the establishment of UNEP, and the blue marble photograph taken from space. She reminded participants that multilateralism works when “we make it work,” making a rallying call for stronger leadership towards fostering better responses through international coordination and collaboration.

Juliet Kabera, Director General, Rwanda Environment Management Facility, highlighted domestic efforts for strengthening national coordination between MEAs, as well as efforts directed towards enhancing engagement with stakeholders. In terms of challenges, she highlighted national reporting and information sharing between MEAs.

Elizabeth Mrema, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), underscored the significant role of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) in advancing collaboration between existing MEAs in order to foster better and more integrated responses to environmental crises.

Rolph Payet, Executive Secretary, Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions, emphasized the need for policy coherence in international environmental governance for effective

implementation. He highlighted efforts undertaken by the BRS Conventions to explore links between biodiversity, chemicals and waste, and climate change.

Martha Rojas-Urrego, Secretary-General, Ramsar Convention, emphasized the crucial role of the biodiversity-related conventions, highlighting the work of the Biodiversity Liaison Group. She noted that all the conventions have prioritized contribution to the GBF, describing the GBF as the unifying framework, which needs to build on the strength of different conventions.

Amy Fraenkel, Executive Secretary, Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), noted that although each MEA has its own mandate, they are all facing the same drivers of environmental harm, reminding participants that it is more costly to address the former than the latter. She urged delegates to do more in bringing environmental values into political decision-making.

Ivonne Higuero, Secretary-General, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), noted that the goal of seeking synergies and engaging in joint work has been woven into the frameworks of all MEAs, and reiterated the important role of the GBF in setting the scene for global conservation action.

During the ensuing interventions, ministries and other high-level representatives highlighted efforts to promote a pragmatic and ambitious GBF. Bridging the gap between policy, science, and action on the ground was prioritized. Many discussed the need to strengthen the mainstreaming of biodiversity, chemicals and waste, and climate change across the MEAs. Some also spoke of the importance of making reporting by parties easier in order to measure the impact of agreements and follow up on their implementation. Developed countries were called upon to fulfil their financial commitments and to translate political commitment into action. Several interventions condemned the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine, stressing that it poses a threat to the lives of civilians as well as the environment.

Multi-stakeholder Dialogue: Oliver Greenfield, Green Economy Coalition, moderated the dialogue aimed at providing an opportunity for member states representatives to engage in an open and interactive exchange with stakeholders about how to work together in building back greener in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gitika Goswami, Development Alternatives Group, India, highlighted findings and recommendations from a global study on building back greener. She noted that there is still time for countries to make far reaching policy choices for greener and more inclusive economic growth. She highlighted recommendations including: embedding sustainability in budget design and implementation; prioritizing debt-for-nature swaps; and providing financing to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for the achievement of sustainability goals.

Bruno Oberle, Executive Director, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), explained that during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, IUCN advocated for ensuring that new investments do not harm nature and that, at a minimum, 10% of all investments should be “nature positive”. He added that greening recovery will allow governments to learn how to better align public expenditure with sustainability. He further highlighted the development of a global standard for nature-based solutions (NbS) and a corresponding standardized certification scheme.

Stewart Harris, American Chemistry Council, highlighted the role of plastics in the COVID-19 response, as well as the threats posed by plastics and waste mismanagement. In recognizing that building back better requires rethinking product design and keeping waste out of the environment, he anticipated engaging in existing and future discussions, and moving forward on implementing the resolutions agreed at UNEA-5.2.

Alejandra Parra, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), stressed the need for a just transition, which requires strengthening support for local-level action, and reimagining our relations with the environment. This includes de-escalating the economy by shifting our focus away from international-scale investments, towards supporting local economies that benefit local peoples, livelihoods and environments, as well as the de-monetization of nature. She also stressed the importance of addressing and tackling the current power dynamics underpinning decision-making structures.

During the discussion that followed, ministers and other high-level representatives, highlighted the importance of NbS in addressing the mounting challenges brought on by the triple planetary crises, all the while helping to restore ecosystems and strengthening local livelihoods. Speakers also emphasized the importance of channelling public funds into “forward looking” sectors, and ensuring strong engagement with stakeholders. Some emphasized that a green recovery also means incorporating sustainability into budget design to safeguard human and economic welfare, which rely on healthy ecosystems. The importance of stimulus packages to support local level action and small enterprises was emphasized, as well as the importance of rethinking cultural relations with the environment and the important role of Indigenous Peoples in this regard.

UNEA Plenary

National Statements: Delegates convened in plenary to hear national statements throughout the day. *For more on these, please refer to <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea-5.2/statements>*

Committee of the Whole (COW)

International Environmental Policy and Governance: Delegates met in contact groups in the morning, afternoon, and evening, holding a stocktaking plenary in the afternoon. The COW then convened in an evening closing plenary to approve resolutions, led by COW Chair Andrea Meza Murillo (Costa Rica).

Contact Group I: The contact group was co-chaired by Sergio Salazar (Colombia), Dragan Zupanjevack (Serbia), and Marek Rorh-Garztecki (Poland). On the draft resolution on **biodiversity and health**, delegates discussed text welcoming the CBD Kunming Declaration, eventually deciding to welcome the “holding of the first part of COP15 to the CBD, in Kunming, China, from 11-15 October 2021, under the theme proposed by the host, “Ecological Civilization: Building a Shared Future for All Life on Earth.” They further agreed to preambular language looking forward to an ambitious, transformative, balanced, effective, and practical post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

The group continued discussing the draft resolution on **biodiversity and health**. Delegates agreed to language on reducing health risks associated with trade in live wildlife through regulation of their commerce, and ensuring the sustainable and safe consumption of wild meat, including adequate sanitary controls in food markets which are selling live wild animals. States considered new text proposal, *inter alia*, recognizing the importance of “easy, rapid, and unrestricted” access to genetic resources for scientific and technological advances in the health-related sectors, which several delegates argued were against provisions in the CBD, as well as conservation values more broadly. A member suggested simplifying the paragraph referring to “recognizing the importance of access to genetic resources and benefit sharing for scientific and technological advances in the health-related sectors.” Countries also discussed whether to refer to “animal,” “plant” and “ecosystem” health, or all three, in relation to the threats caused by the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme climate events. During the closing plenary, Co-Chair Zupanjevack, reported that the group had reached consensus. The COW forwarded the resolution on biodiversity and health (UNEP/EA5/L11) to UNEA for adoption.

On the draft resolution on **NbS** delegates deleted language on the potential of NbS to address drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. They agreed on language identifying options for supporting sustainable investments in NbS, and sharing information on multilateral and bilateral sources of finance for developing countries to develop and deploy NbS. Divergence on opinions remained on language around assessing existing and discussing possible new “criteria, standards, and guidelines for the implementation of NbS.” At the end of the contact group discussions, a regional group suggested that the definition of NbS, contained in the first operative paragraph of the draft resolution, be replaced with language denoting that there is no internationally agreed definition on NbS. Following an evening session in the contact group, all paragraphs were agreed, other than the first operational paragraph containing the definition. During the closing plenary, Co-Chair Zupanjevack, reported that the group had reached consensus. The COW forwarded the resolution on NbS for supporting sustainable solutions (UNEP/EA5/L9) to UNEA for adoption.

On the draft resolution on **sustainable lake management**, a lengthy discussion took place, provisionally reaching agreement on language: recognizing that transboundary lakes may be subject to relevant bilateral, international, and multilateral agreements, in which case sustainable lake management efforts should be pursued under their respective agreements; and recalling SDG target 6.5.2, to, by 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate. During the closing plenary, Co-Chair Zupanjevack, reported that the group had not reached consensus, and that Indonesia was consulting with UNEP’s legal counsel on the resolution. COW Chair Murillo called on delegations to make progress on this draft, and on this basis, the COW forwarded the resolution on sustainable lake management (UNEP/EA5/L8) to UNEA for further consideration.

Contact Group II: The group met to address pending issues under the guidance of Co-Chair Ana Elena Campos Jiménez (Costa Rica). Starting with the draft resolution on **sustainable and resilient infrastructure**, delegates proposed among others to compromise on references to NbS by giving it less prominence in operative text, but ensuring adherence to already agreed language.

Delegates also agreed to use the term “natural infrastructure,” instead of “green infrastructure.” Many said the phrase “potential ecosystem-wide environmental impacts of infrastructure” was dense and agreed to “all potential environmental impacts of infrastructure projects.”

On aligning infrastructure planning and investment with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, delegates considered including the key areas of concern namely, climate, biodiversity, pollution, and desertification, and agreed to avoid lengthy discussions by not singling out MEAs for inclusion. The group completed review of the resolution and forwarded it to the COW for further action.

On **green recovery**, the issue on negative impacts from COVID-19 on human health, safety, and wellbeing occupied a major part of the discussions, with some noting the need to include reference to the poorest and most vulnerable as the hardest hit by the pandemic.

Delegates agreed to refer to “sustainable recovery” and not “green recovery” in the text, and to provide its definition in the context of the resolution, as referring to “recovery that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.” Some suggested referencing the UNGA resolution 75/1 entitled “Declaration on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the UN” that noted the “historic opportunity to build back better and greener.” Delegates proposed deleting potentially contentious paragraphs in the spirit of moving forward and proceeded to delete rather than reopen such paragraphs, and consultations on this resolution continued late into the night.

In plenary, Co-Chair Jiménez reported success in the group on completing draft resolutions on sustainable and resilience infrastructure (UNEP/EA5/L15) and on enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production (UNEP/EA5/L17). Co-Chair Jiménez also reported consensus on the resolution on the environmental dimension of a sustainable resilient and inclusive post-COVID-19 recovery (UNEP/EA5/L16), formerly titled green recovery. The COW endorsed the resolutions, forwarding them to UNEA for adoption.

Contact Group III: During their discussion, the contact group was guided by Co-Chair Gudi Alkemada (the Netherlands). Having completed consideration of the draft resolution on the **environmental aspects of minerals and metals management** on Monday evening, delegates continued their consideration of the draft resolution related to a proposed **Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution**.

They addressed the scope of the proposed science-policy panel, a core issue of contention. The group considered suggesting that the science-policy panel be established to support action on the pollution and sound management of chemicals and waste. One delegation noted that there is agreed language on the sound management of chemicals and waste, also noting that the definitions for chemicals, waste, and pollution are distinct. Another preferred that the panel only support action on issues related to pollution. Others preferred that the panel consider those issue covered under the chemicals and pollution sub-programme under UNEP. In a bid to reach consensus, one delegation proposed that the panel supports actions on “pollution, on the sound management of chemicals, and on waste management and other related issues.” The proponent explained that addressing chemicals and waste separately expands the scope, and that waste management also includes plastic pollution. Some delegations required clarification on what other related issues could be addressed. One underlined that chemicals are the source of all pollution that the panel would tackle. Another delegation favored the panel considering chemicals, waste management, pollution, and other interrelated issues. Many others preferred the agreed language related to the sound management of chemicals and waste.

Co-Chair Gudi Alkemada suggested that there might not be any agreement on the panel’s scope and proposed allowing the *ad hoc* open-ended working group to address this issue. In response to this, one delegation suggested that the panel support action on chemicals, waste, and pollution. Another delegation preferred,

and delegates eventually agreed, that this particular paragraph reference the principle functions of the *ad hoc* open-ended working group, which include discussing the panel’s scope.

Reporting back to plenary, Co-Chair Alkemada announced that the group had finalized their work on the resolutions on the Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution (UNEP/EA5/L14) and on the environmental aspects of minerals and metals management (UNEP/EA5/L18). She drew attention to the delicate balance represented in the group’s negotiation of the science-policy panel’s title. The COW endorsed these resolutions and forwarded them to UNEA for adoption.

The EU, endorsing the resolution on the science-policy panel, requested that they be included in the list of resolution co-sponsors.

Date and Venue of UNEA-6: Regarding a draft decision on the date and venue of UNEA-6, delegates continued to consider the options for future meetings of UNEA-6 and UNEA-7, taking place either in: 2024 and 2025; 2024 and 2026; or 2025 and 2027. Along with carrying consequences for the timings of presidency cycles, technical difficulties also arose with regards to the programme of work and budget, as well as aligning the next UNEA with the schedule for completing, or providing an update report, of the seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO-7). In the closing plenary, the Secretariat for Co-Chair Rorh-Garztecki, reported that the group had reached consensus on the draft decision and that the resolution on the GEO would require an amendment related to scheduling.

The COW endorsed the decision on the date and venue of UNEA-6 (UNEP/EA5/L21).

Closure of the meeting: Delegates adopted the report of the COW (UNEP/EA.5/CW/L.1). COW Chair Murillo thanked delegates and closed the meeting at 11:59 pm.

In the Breezeways

At long last, on Tuesday, negotiators finally agreed on a science-policy panel to tackle the pressing, urgent problems presented by chemicals, waste and pollution. As well as the legally binding instrument for plastic pollution, this panel was one of the most anticipated resolutions of UNEA-5.2. The absence of a chemicals, waste and pollution panel breaks the stride on a unified response to addressing the three planetary crises (climate change, biodiversity, and pollution). Science-based assessments are the cornerstone of informed decision-making. This is true of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). “Now we are on the way to having one of our own,” gushed one delegate, “how truly groundbreaking.” Seminal indeed, given the genesis of the IPCC, birthed in 1988 by UNEP and World Meteorological Organization. “The world’s leading environment agency, on the eve of its fiftieth anniversary, has given life to something truly remarkable, what a commemoration,” remarked a jovial delegate on receiving the news.

UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2025) is focused on tackling climate change, loss of nature, and pollution. The confluence of all these challenges compromises the attainment of the SDGs and erodes COVID-19 recovery. The IPCC and IPBES have been successful in improving the scientific support to policy making: their reports act as a periodic, global rallying call. The chemicals, waste and pollution panel, now agreed, squares the circle. Both the IPCC and IPBES provide inspiration for what is possible. However, the panel on chemicals and wastes will have to be fit for purpose to meet the specific needs and challenges of the relevant sectors and communities. Baby steps for now, but monumental nevertheless.