

Summary of the 2017 Environment Assembly Preparatory Retreat

Joint meeting of the bureaux of the UN Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives 27 – 28 October, 2016, Nairobi, Kenya

On 27 and 28 October 2016, members of the bureaux of the UN Environment Assembly and of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the UN Environment Programme came together in Nairobi, Kenya for a joint retreat, with the participation of Regional and Political Groups in observer capacity.

This document summarizes the main joint decisions, discussions and agreed action points of the meeting, which was a milestone in the evolution of the UN Environment Programme, for being the first formal joint meeting of both bureaux.

Main Joint Decisions:

- The Assembly Bureau and the Committee Bureau will continue working together in preparation for the 2017 Environment Assembly and will hold a joint meeting (via video-conference) in early spring 2017, and a Second Preparatory Retreat in June 2017, which will be organized subject to availability of resources,.
- There will be only one theme for the 2017 Assembly.
- A consultation process on the theme will be launched with the Member states through the Committee of Permanent Representatives with the support of regional offices, and through UNEA Bureau members, as appropriate, in order to build consensus on the theme for the 2017 Environment Assembly, taking into account the suggestions and selection criteria received from the Secretariat.
- The Secretariat will compile submissions, and record views to inform the UN Environment Assembly Bureau decision. The UNEA Bureau will decide on the theme for the 2017 Environment Assembly, at its next meeting scheduled on December 5th, 2016.
- The Committee will set preliminary deadlines for indicating intention to submit draft resolutions.
- The Secretariat will prepare a joint “Road Map” towards the 2017 Assembly including milestones and deadlines. Such a “Road Map” will be adjusted as required by the bureaux of the Assembly and the Committee.

The Preparatory Retreat allowed participants to address five broad topics critical to the success of the 2017 Environment Assembly:

1. The theme of the Third Session of the Assembly and structure of the High-level Segment;
2. Partnerships with stakeholders (Civil Society and the Private Sector);
3. Outcome of the ministerial segment of the Third Session of the UN Environment Assembly;
4. Preparations for the Third Session of the Assembly;
5. The contribution of the Sixth Global Environmental Outlook to the 2017 Environment Assembly.

The Summary of these discussions, including recommendations and agreed action points, are herewith:

Session 1: Theme of the Third Session of the Assembly and structure of the High-level Segment

(a) Possible theme of the 2017 Environment Assembly

Recommendation/Action:

- The Secretariat will prepare by 7 November 2016¹, a revised proposal for the 2017 UN Environment Assembly themes, including revised criteria and detailed information on possible actionable outcomes.

(b) Reimagining the organization of the high-level segment of the Environment Assembly

Recommendation/Action:

- There was an agreement to use innovative ways to improve the interactive dialogue at the 2017 Environment Assembly, looking at best practices at other fora, such as Davos meetings and the 21st Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change,
- Member States should be allowed to deliver and record national statements, where feasible, in advance.
- The Secretariat should prepare and present to both bureaux, by January 2017 a concept paper that proposes a truly interactive modus operandi of the high-level segment at the 2017 UN Environment Assembly. Such a paper should include proposals for better time management of interventions.
- UN Environment should consider regional preparations (e.g. discussions of the theme/outcome in regional ministerial gatherings, or consultations organized by Regional Offices of UN Environment) and presentation of the outcomes of such meetings to the Assembly.

Session 2: Partnerships with stakeholders (Civil Society and the Private Sector)

(a) Way forward on Stakeholders Engagement Policy

Recommendation/Action:

- Under the leadership of the President of the UN Environment Assembly, informal discussions among Member States on a new Stakeholder Engagement Policy should continue on the basis of the draft presented on the matter by his predecessor.
- A new draft of the Stakeholder Engagement Policy would most likely be tabled at the 2019 UN Environment Assembly.
- The Secretariat was requested to encourage maximum Major Groups and Stakeholder engagement - within existing rules and practices for Stakeholder Engagement and consistent with the intergovernmental nature of the Assembly.
- Civil Society side events at the 2017 Assembly should preferably focus and contribute to the main theme of the Assembly and could feed into the Proceedings (report) of the Assembly.

(b) Executive Director's strategy to engage civil society, especially the private sector; partnerships for implementing environmental projects/programs and UN Assembly resolutions

Recommendation/Action:

- UN Environment efforts to strengthen relations with the private sector should continue.
- Private Sector engagement in preparation for the 2017 Environment Assembly should be planned with the involvement of the Private Sector and their networks and organizations.
- UN Environment was invited to further explore the initiative of some businesses to create a business coalition for UN Environment. Representatives of the Business and Industry Major Groups should be requested to further explain the proposal, ensuring that their approach is inclusive.

Session 3: Outcome of the ministerial segment of the Third Session of the UN Environment Assembly

¹ Document was sent on 4 November, 2016.

(a) Type of process that can be supported, which leads to the adoption of a ministerial declaration of the 2017 Environment Assembly

Recommendation/Action:

- The 2017 Environment Assembly should strive for a negotiated ministerial outcome document linked to the theme of the high-level segment. The negotiated ministerial outcome document should be succinct, actionable, appealing and drafted in language that is easy to understand.
- In addition to a ministerial outcome document, discussions at the High Level Segment of the Assembly should be captured in a chair's summary.
- Target groups for the outcome document are the political leadership, the UN system, the High-level Political Forum, the private sector, civil society and citizens at large.
- Under the leadership of the President and the Bureau of the Assembly, the text of the outcome document should be negotiated among member states prior to the Assembly, including during regional ministerial fora and meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. These pre-negotiations should in particular focus on building consensus on possibly contentious issues. Final negotiations and approval would take place during the Assembly, with the participation of the Ministers.
- In order to ensure inclusiveness of the process, the President of the Assembly should keep the Committee of Permanent Representatives informed on a continuous base.
- UN Environment should propose prior to the Assembly, a communication strategy that will ensure wide distribution and impact of the outcome document.

Session 4: Preparations for the Third Session of the Assembly

(a) Process and timelines for preparation and submission of draft resolutions and compliance with the rules of procedure of the Assembly

Recommendation/Action:

- Member States should submit draft resolutions in good time before the Assembly. The President of the Assembly will send a letter to all Ministers of the Environment encouraging them to respect the deadline that will be set by the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
- The Committee of Permanent Representatives will set preliminary deadlines for indicating intentions to submit resolutions. Given the short time available, the number of resolutions for the consideration of the Assembly should be limited.
- Resolutions should be related to the theme of the Assembly, global in focus and actionable.
- The Assembly will be open to consider critical emerging issues.
- Meeting documents should be translated and distributed well in advance, including in line with the six-week rule of the Assembly.
- The Committee of Permanent Representatives will engage in discussions on different positions on resolutions and in pre-negotiation. It will endeavor to finalize negotiations during the Open Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives.
- The Secretariat is requested to translate and distribute draft resolutions upon official submission by Member States and to activate a password-protected platform, based on the Committee Portal, to allow Member States track updates made to draft resolutions.

(b) Follow up of the implementation of Environment Assembly's resolutions by the Committee of Permanent Representatives:

Recommendation/Action:

- The role of the Committee of Permanent Representatives in providing political oversight of implementation of Assembly resolutions should be enhanced. This should be connected to overseeing the implementation of the Programme of Work and budget.
- In reporting back to Member States on the implementation of the Programme of Work, UN Environment should make links to resolutions.
- The Secretariat should report to the Committee of Permanent Representatives on the implementation of resolutions (status, impact, feedback, challenges) so that the Committee can decide on possible actions. The report should include information on time-sensitive and necessary resolutions to be considered at the third session of the Assembly.
- The Portal of the Committee of Permanent Representatives should be used to communicate on Assembly resolutions, including their links with Sustainable Development Goals, progress achieved and commitments.

(c) Proactive involvement of Member States which do not have resident missions in Nairobi during the inter-sessional process, through electronic means, such as video-conferencing and a new electronic portal for resolutions

Recommendation/Action:

- The Secretariat should continue and expand opportunities for e-participation (via video/tele conference) of member states, which do not have resident missions in Nairobi.
- The Secretariat should further strengthen the online platform of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, ensuring that it is always up-to-date, and is responsive to Member States' needs.
- Non-resident member states should be informed in a timely manner about upcoming meetings including the distribution of related documentation.

(d) Support of UN Environment Secretariat in the preparatory process and during the meetings

Recommendation/Action:

- The Secretariat should finalize handbook for negotiators by March 2017, which should, among other aspects, clarify the rules applying to voting and quorums.
- The Secretariat should ensure that input received from member states, including non-resident missions, to draft resolutions, is acknowledged and made accessible to other member states in a timely fashion, by using the online platform and email notifications
- The Secretariat should ensure that draft resolutions submitted by Member States are translated in a timely manner. The final drafts should also be made available to all member of the Assembly in the official UN languages before their adoption.

(e) Early selection and appointment of chairs of the Committee of the Whole, sessional working groups and their early involvement in the preparatory work in the inter-sessional period by the bureau of the Assembly and the Committee in order to promote greater transparency and inclusiveness in the selection and appointment

Recommendation/Action:

- The structure and chair of the Committee of the Whole should be decided upon at an early stage by the Bureau of the Assembly.
- Early selection and appointment of the Chair (or Co-Chairs) of the Committee of the Whole, and other sessional working groups of the Assembly and their involvement in the preparatory work undertaken by the Committee of Permanent Representatives is necessary.
- Appointments by the Assembly of the Chair (or Co-Chairs) of the Committee of the Whole, and other sessional working groups, in line with rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, should be

done upon recommendation by the Bureau of the Assembly and take into account positions and distribution amongst regional and political groups in transparent and inclusive manner.

- The Committee of the Whole and Drafting groups could be co-chaired by Committee of Permanent Representatives members who have prior engagement in resolution negotiations.
- Prior experience in chairing and ability to move process forward should be a key qualification for candidates.
- Vice Presidents of the Assembly should be considered as candidates.

(f) Better response by the Secretariat to challenges in preparations of the Assembly including in the timely translation of documentation and resolutions that the Committee will present to the Assembly

Recommendation/Action:

- The Secretariat must ensure that working documents are translated into all official UN languages and distributed in a timely manner, in line with the rules of procedure and practices in the UN and the six-week rule.
- The Secretariat should ensure that draft resolutions submitted by Member States are translated in a timely manner upon their submission. The final draft should also continue to be made available to all member of the Assembly in the official UN languages before its adoption.

(g) Support/role of regional ministerial fora and other regional meetings in preparing for the Assembly

Recommendation/Action:

- There is a need to strengthen the role of regional fora, as appropriate, in the preparatory process for the Assembly.
- Member States are invited to consider if a resolution could help make the linkages between the fora and the Assembly, building on resolution 27/2.
- Assembly Bureau members should reach out to and participate in regional fora to share the Environment Assembly message.

(h) Road map and action plan to prepare for the third Session of the Assembly: roles of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, UN Environment and the Bureau of the Assembly

Recommendation/Action:

- A UN Environment Assembly road map should be prepared by the Secretariat, as soon as possible. It should include recommendations of the Bureaux on matters such as relevant deadlines, dates and roles of the Bureaux, the Committee of Permanent Representatives as well as Regional fora. It should be viewed as a living document that includes both hard and soft deadlines and the best available knowledge for use as a tool to inform member states and civil society about preparations for the 2017 Environment Assembly.
- The main recommendations of the retreat should be shared with the Committee of Permanent Representatives by November 9 2016.
- The President of the Environment Assembly is invited to send a letter to all Member States, informing them about the theme, the intention to limit the number of resolutions as well as deadlines. The President should also invite chairs of regional fora and chairs of relevant multilateral environmental agreements to discuss the theme.
- UN Environment is expected undertake and/or support regional multi-stakeholder consultations during the first half of 2017.
- The Bureaux of the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the one of the Environment Assembly are expected to hold a joint meeting (via video-conference) in early spring 2017, and a Second Preparatory Retreat in June 2017 subject to the availability of resources.

- The Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives should send a letter before the end of year to non-accredited Member States inviting them to accredit representatives to the Committee.
- (i) *Ways/modalities of the Assembly to work better with the High-Level Political Forum and other process relevant to the sustainable development agenda and to raise visibility of the Assembly*

Recommendation/Action:

- The President of the Assembly will invite the members of the Bureau of the Committee to provide advice on his response to the letter of the President of the Economic and Social Council requesting for the inputs of the Assembly to the 2018 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum.

Update on Global Environmental Outlook-6

- The Secretariat should prepare background documentation based on the Geo-6 process to underpin the discussions of the main theme during the high-level segment. It should also provide questions that may be used in the Ministerial discussions.
- The GEO-6 High Level Group (HLG) is also considering scheduling a Ministerial discussion to provide views on how GEO 6 can help them, either tackle challenges associated with the theme or those associated with the SDGs more generally. This would inform the final GEO 6 report especially regarding the policy review and outlooks.
- A resolution providing for final release of GEO 6 in 2019 at the 2019 UN Environment Assembly will be prepared.