



**150<sup>th</sup> meeting  
of the Committee of Permanent Representatives of UNEP  
30 April 2020**

**Interventions on behalf of the European Union  
and its Member States**

*Agenda Item 4: Report by the Executive Director*

- Chair, Madam Executive Director, distinguished colleagues; it is my privilege to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.
- In these extraordinary circumstances of the global pandemic, let me start by thanking all those who do not spare efforts to ensure the continuity of our business, in particular the CPR Chair with the Bureau, and the UNEP Secretariat. It is of utmost importance that our work as the Committee and that of UNEP continue uninterrupted. We also would like to thank UNEP and UNON for exploring options to restore the interpretation of our deliberations into all official UN languages and hope that will be possible soon.
- Just days before the COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, we were privileged to welcome the Executive Director of UNEP at the EU headquarters for our annual High Level Meeting. We agreed that there was a great alignment between UNEP and the EU's flagship policy, the European Green Deal<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

Accordingly, we concluded on a number of areas for collaboration to support a global transition to a climate neutral and resource efficient economy.

- I am pleased to report that on the EU side, since the beginning of this year, we have rolled out a number of Green Deal initiatives of significant international relevance, including a proposal for the European climate law<sup>2</sup> to ensure a climate neutral Europe by 2050; the Circular Economy Action Plan<sup>3</sup> and its global outreach<sup>4</sup>; and the Comprehensive Strategy with Africa<sup>5</sup>. In the pipeline are a ‘Farm to fork strategy’ for sustainable food systems, and the EU biodiversity strategy. We are ready to share more details on those and other initiatives and look forward to collaborating with interested parties.
- As we prepare for UNEA-5, our expectations from that meeting may need to adapt to the recent developments. Less than three months ago, speaking to this Committee we believed that UNEA would follow a series of global events scheduled for 2020. Instead, due to the pandemic related reschedules, UNEA-5 will hopefully open a sequence of even more meetings of key relevance for shaping the environmental and sustainable development agenda, including the Climate, Biodiversity, Chemicals and Waste COPs, the Food Systems Summit, and lead eventually to year 2022, marking five decades since UNEP’s creation and the Stockholm Conference. UNEA-5 has therefore an unprecedented opportunity to set the tone for that important sequence of events, fully standing up to its role as the global environmental authority. Not least, UNEA should address the (hopefully) post-COVID recovery to rebuild our economy and society respectful of climate and environmental imperatives, in harmony with nature.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/commission-proposal-regulation-european-climate-law-march-2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/commission-proposal-regulation-european-climate-law-march-2020_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/new\\_circular\\_economy\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/new_circular_economy_action_plan.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/leading\\_way\\_global\\_circular\\_economy.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/leading_way_global_circular_economy.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf)

- With less than ten months in front of us, we count on a collective effort of this Committee to prepare for a successful UNEA-5, that would be able to conclude on several on-going processes, leading to adoption of an ambitious Medium Term Strategy for 2022-2025, deciding on a more impactful future of the Global Environment Outlook, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of UNEP's governance, launching a courageous action against marine litter and plastic pollution, and preparing a political declaration for a UN High Level Meeting to strengthen the implementation of international environmental law and international environmental governance.
- Lastly, at the point where we stand now, in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, let me thank the Executive Director for her tireless campaign for the right understanding of the environmental aspects of this pandemic, the relationship between health of ecosystems and that of humans, and for the need to 'build back better' to recover to a sustainable and resilient economy and society.

I thank you.

*Agenda Item 5: Implementation of paragraph 8 of UNEA decision 4/2  
(UNEP@50/Stockholm+50)*

Key messages:

- The EU and its Member States welcome the opportunities as presented in the UNEP's document on preparations for UNEA-5, including the section on the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNEP<sup>6</sup>.
- The launch of UNEP@50 at UNEA5 in 2021 and charting a course towards Stockholm+50 in 2022 presents a unique opportunity for accelerating action on the environment.
- The EU and its Member States believe these opportunities must be grasped for the sake of the environment in a supportive and complementary fashion. We therefore encourage and welcome the contacts between UNEP, the UNEA President, Kenya and Sweden in the preparations for the launch of UNEP@50 at UNEA5 together with the Stockholm+50, so that the different meetings proceed with a mutually reinforcing approach and we look forward to hearing from our respective colleagues in this regard.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/32130/Agenda%20item5-6%20-%20Preparations%20for%20the%20fifth%20session%20of%20the%20Environment%20Assembly.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

## *Agenda Item 6: Preparations for UNEA-5*

### Key messages:

- The EU and its Member States thank UNEP for the note on the preparations for UNEA-5<sup>7</sup>, which provides an excellent basis for discussion, addresses pertinent questions and makes a number of meaningful proposals that can inform our deliberations. Despite short time available, we have had an in-depth consideration of the document and will share our detailed comments in writing (in annex to this statement).
- **The theme of UNEA-5** remains valid but we welcome the UNEP's proposal to establish a strong link with the current developments, presenting the green agenda as an opportunity to deliver as part of the “building back better” after the COVID-19 crisis. In this context, placing the nature at the centre of solutions with the need to leverage innovation and sustainable consumption and production patterns will be key to ensuring a successful sustainable green recovery. Moreover, UNEA-5 should seek synergies and broadly support other global environment related processes in 2021, notably the Climate, Biodiversity, Chemicals & Waste COPs and the Food Systems Summit and launch preparations for UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50.
- The adoption of the **Medium Term Strategy** will be a key part of UNEA-5. We expect the new MTS to meaningfully bridge the operationalisation and implementation of resolutions adopted at UNEA5 and the past UNEAs, accommodate new and emerging trends, and mainstreams gender issues across all programmes. The work on the MTS has to move forward as soon as

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<sup>7</sup> <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/32130/Agenda%20item5-6%20-%20Preparations%20for%20the%20fifth%20session%20of%20the%20Environment%20Assembly.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

possible in a transparent and inclusive manner. We look forward to the interactive sessions scheduled to start next week.

- The EU and its Member States support the four **transformative action areas** as balanced and helpful proposal for achieving a substantive and focused discussion. We also welcome linking the areas to relevant SDGs, which help cluster the work streams and will support monitoring. We have detailed comments and recommendations of the content of the four areas, which provide in writing (see annex). We also find the areas strongly interlinked.
- Concerning the **organisation of resolutions** into four omnibus documents, the EU and its Member States will consider UNEP's proposal and reserve the right to come back with additional comments on it, following our further internal deliberations. We, however, note that the suggested provision of draft action points for resolutions for consideration by the Member States well in advance of the October Annual Subcommittee meeting could be helpful.
- The EU and its Member States welcome a strong emphasis on transparent, understandable and compelling **communication** efforts. In relation to COVID-19 and green recovery it will be essential to highlight synergies of protecting nature and ensuring human well-being, including in relation to avoiding future epidemics caused by zoonotic diseases. Re-evaluating our relationship with nature is a very timely message, which in our opinion, can be well utilised in the communication strategy.

**(See detailed comments in the Annex)**

## *Agenda Item 7: Contribution of UNEA to HLPF*

### Key messages:

- The EU and its Member States regret that this item had to be introduced to the agenda of today's meeting. It has been our understanding that the CPR subcommittee in its session on 2 April generally supported the draft UNEA contribution to HLPF, subject to amendments agreed in that meeting and authorising the Secretariat to incorporate references to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the briefing of the Executive Director.
- Furthermore, we were surprised that further language was added for the silence procedure, that was launched subsequently, which led to confusing the process and resulted in multiple iterations. Against that backdrop, we find it necessary that the text the CPR should agree on, is as close as possible to the text supported by the subcommittee on 2 April, including references to COVID-19.
- Accordingly, the EU and its Member States can go along with the compromise text backed by the CPR Chair and the Bureau, which was presented to the silence procedure on 24 April and is in front of us today.
- We appeal to the Member States who made additional comments to show flexibility and allow to conclude the process today, by going along with the consensus expressed on 2 April. We consider that the document should be sent by the UNEA President to the ECOSOC Chair without further delay.
- For the preparation of UNEA inputs to HLPF in next years, we would like to reiterate our earlier suggestion to agree on a format and clear guidance for this document. Furthermore, in line with the UNEA resolution 3/3, the preparation of the document should not lead to negotiations but benefit from consultations

with and guidance from the CPR. This should provide for a much smoother process and ensure much more impactful contribution of UNEA to the HLPF.



## **ANNEX - Detailed comments**

### **Preparations for UNEA-5 (agenda item 6)**

#### ***General considerations:***

- The COVID-19 outbreak is changing the world in unexpected ways. In a world with a “new normal”, business as usual will not do. This crisis has also injected a high degree of uncertainty regarding the continued planning of multilateral processes, many of which have been delayed, postponed and/or are taking place in virtual formats and focused on absolute essentials. This is also true in the context of sustainable development policies and the preparation of future environment summits, including UNEA5. We therefore need to consider how this might affect the narrative of 2020 as the “super year for nature”, which was the essential focus of communication and outreach so far.
- With CBD-COP 15 and UNFCCC-COP 26 both postponed to 2021 and the UNSG Food Systems Summit also taking place in 2021, it is likely that UNEA will be the first high-level UN conference on sustainable development in 2021, which constitutes an excellent opportunity to set a positive tone and provide guidance for ambitious green recovery.
- UNEA5 will certainly be influenced heavily by the (hopefully) ongoing recovery process. UNEA should provide a strong statement for a sustainable and green recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, and provide a comprehensive narrative on the relevance of implementation of the environmental aspect of the 2030 Agenda. The way we deal with nature, including the need to recover and maintain natural habitats and addressing wildlife trade in order to avoid new outbreaks of zoonotic diseases, can play a major role in this regard. Also of key importance will be the way we adapt our economic growth models to the new circumstances, in particular the patterns of our consumption and production.
- We need to use this occasion to come together as the environmental community, communicate appropriately on the new priorities and make a strong case for a green and sustainable recovery that leaves no one behind.
- Furthermore, the upcoming discussions and preparations for UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50 commemoration can beneficially contribute to inject further dynamics into this process and must therefore be borne in mind in this context.

#### ***“Continued relevance of the theme”:***

- The current pandemic and its subsequent social and economic impact is unprecedented in our modern times in terms of its rapid pace, its global scale and the challenge it constitutes for our collective recovery. Also unprecedented, are the actions, which have been taken in response by governments and stakeholders worldwide thus far.
- While we currently struggle with the immediate effects of the pandemic and the emergency response in the short term, international cooperation and solidarity remain

indispensable and absolutely necessary if we wish to make a more successful recovery from this global crisis. Despite the quick initial governmental and market reactions, it is now of the utmost importance to keep a cool head and begin with careful, deliberate and meaningful planning of a medium- and long-term policy response.

- In the words of the UN Secretary-General: “We all know what we need to do. It is laid out in the global roadmap for the future – the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change”, as well as other multilateral frameworks, in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Against this backdrop, the EU and its Member States welcome that the note establishes a strong link to the current developments and identifies opportunities for a balanced UNEA5 narrative. The focus and the desired outcomes to be aspired to under the UNEA5 theme must therefore flexibly adapt to the new policy context and embrace the new reality presenting the green agenda as an opportunity to deliver as part of the “building back better” after the crisis.
- In this context, placing natural capital at the centre of solutions with the need to leverage innovation and sustainable consumption and production patterns will be key to ensuring a successful sustainable green recovery. UNEP and UNEA play a vital role in many areas that are relevant to the success of sustainable and green recovery, including addressing the root causes of zoonotic diseases, such as destruction and fragmentation of natural habitats. It will be crucial to position UNEA5 within the broader global climate, environment and biodiversity agendas. UNEA5 should seek synergies and broadly support other global environment related processes taking place in 2021, notably the Climate, Biodiversity, Chemicals & Waste COPs and the Food Systems Summit.

***“Shifting the needle from ‘business as usual’ – designing an impact-driven MTS”:***

- The EU and its Member States agree that the new Medium Term Strategy is a critically important element for ensuring that UNEP adequately and effectively contributes to the global transformation towards sustainable development, systematically taking into account current global developments. In doing so, the MTS will also have to meaningfully bridge the operationalisation and implementation of political decisions taken at UNEA5, including past UNEAs, on the one hand and accommodate new and emerging trends on the other. The adoption of the MTS will be a key part of UNEA5.
- UNEP’s active involvement and environmental leadership in the UN System and the ongoing Reforms continue to be crucial for implementing the MTS and for ensuring mainstreaming of environment and implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda. We also look forward to a MTS that mainstreams gender issues across all programmes.
- This is why the process of drafting the MTS is a key priority for the EU and its Member States and has to move forward as soon as possible in a transparent and inclusive manner, despite the difficult challenge that COVID-19 constitutes for us all in terms of working methods.

- In this context, the EU and its Member States would also like to thank UNEP for the opportunity to engage in a first exchange on the MTS in the context of the “interactive discovery tours” envisaged by the Secretariat for 5, 11 and 13 May. We are looking forward to participating in those occasions.

***“Transformative action areas for nature to achieve the SDGs”:***

- The EU and its Member States thank UNEP for proposing the four transformative action areas, which we find well balanced and helpful for achieving a substantive focusing of discussions.
- We also welcome the explicit linkage of the chosen transformative areas to the implementation of relevant SDGs, in particular SDG 8, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15, which are likely to be the principal points of the Assembly. As the world is not on track to achieve the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and internationally agreed environmental goals by 2050, we can use this ready available framework to cluster the various work streams under UNEA5 and, more importantly, to monitor progress towards meeting the targets.
- In this context, it will be crucial to emphasize the important interlinkages and synergies existing between the different action areas as well.

Specific comments on the Action areas:

- **Action area 1**, Nature for Jobs and Economic Prosperity is very timely with regard to the challenges following the COVID- 19 crisis. UNEA5 should be an opportunity to highlight green recovery.
- **Action area 2**, Nature for Health, includes very important actions related to limiting the future emergence of zoonotic diseases. Unless we manage to address habitat encroachment and destruction as well as wildlife trade, the likelihood of epidemics occurring in the future cannot be avoided. We would welcome if even more attention was to be given to this issue along with the necessary measures needed for supporting developing countries in managing and controlling habitat destruction, sustainable management of forests and wildlife as well as wildlife trade. The link to air pollution and AMR should be highlighted further. Regarding marine litter, the ambition for UNEA5 should be to set this global collective structural response, rather than develop it as it now stands in box 2. Furthermore, microplastics should also be included in this context (Setting a global collective structural response for marine litter and microplastics).
- Furthermore, **Action area 1**, Nature for Jobs and Economic Prosperity and **Action area 3**, Nature for Climate:
  - These two Action areas are closely interlinked through the sustainable consumption and production nexus. The SCP angle should therefore be reinforced and a link to

UNEA4 and SDG 12 be made more explicit (in the same way as action area 2 is linked to UNEA3 'pollution free planet').

- We also suggest broadening Action Area 3 to include the biodiversity-resource angle, as per IRP findings, which basically link material resource extraction and processing with biodiversity and climate change impacts. The role circular economy and resource efficiency can play in this regard needs to be highlighted, possibly with a reference to salient examples having a higher impact on the economy (e.g. current and future initiatives on plastics, textiles, construction material).
- Furthermore, green finance and investment is the best approach to creating growth and jobs and improving the resilience of our economies. Therefore, key action areas must include shifting to a more sustainable financial system, including fiscal reforms, and to circular economy models that enable a decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation.
- In addition, strengthening environmental governance can also contribute to the achievement of SDG16, including through UNEP's work. UNEA could consider UNEP's crucial role on the climate/environment security nexus, in particular on guiding global environmental and climate data management. Aggregating data will improve our overall understanding and thereby aid and assist countries in finding the right tools to tackle the challenges they face. Strengthening this role could help address the need to strengthen foresight capacity by working towards accessible and interoperable international data on climate-related security risks.
- Linkage to Nature Based solutions should also be established in these two Action Areas.
- **Action area 4**, Nature for Sustainable Food Systems is closely related to destruction of habitat as well as wildlife trade. Avoiding future epidemics also requires ensuring food security while protecting nature. In order to strengthen monitoring and accounting of global wildlife trade, we need to improve access to information. All these areas require close collaboration with MEAs such as CITES and CBD as well as other UN organizations such as FAO. In this area, we would also like to highlight hazardous pesticides and AMR.

***“Enhancing the authority, impact and relevance of the Assembly through a limited set of ambitious resolutions and decisions”:***

- The EU and its Member States thank UNEP for proposing an innovative way to structure resolutions at UNEA while keeping the workload for participating delegations in mind.
- The EU and its Member States will consider this proposal and reserve the right to come back with additional comments on it following our further internal deliberations.
- UNEP's suggestion to provide draft action points for resolutions for consideration by the MS could help guide further discussions on this approach. Hereby, receiving these action

points (well in advance) of the ASC in October will ensure substantive discussions and serve the intended purpose.

***“Communicating the messages of the Assembly to citizens”:***

- The EU and its Member States welcome a strong emphasis on transparent, understandable and compelling communication efforts in the run-up, during and after UNEA5 that will serve to convey the narrative and key messages of the substantive discussions during the Assembly.
- In our view, it will be important to endeavour to strike a positive note in communication efforts that put the potential of nature front and centre. We think it is essential to strike a delicate balance in communications around COVID-19 and green recovery, so as to avoid any interpretation of economic considerations being weighted against environmental concerns. The synergies of protecting nature and ensuring human well-being should permeate our messaging, including on action to be taken to avoid future epidemics caused by zoonotic diseases.
- If there is such a thing as a positive recognition stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, it is that “if we want to, we can do it”. The unprecedented scale of immediate and medium-term actions taken by governments and stakeholders alike serves as an example of what determination and solidarity can achieve.
- Re-evaluating our relationship with nature is a very timely message, which in our opinion, can be well utilized in the communication strategy.

***“Commemorating UNEP@50”:***

See agenda item 5