

**‘Future of GEO’ Steering Committee Meeting Summary,
July 2, 2020**

Important Note: In order to make our calls more efficient and effective, Steering Committee members are encouraged to keep their verbal interventions to a maximum of 3 minutes each. Members are encouraged to mute their telephone lines when they are not speaking, to minimize background noise.

The Steering Committee on the Future of GEO met at its eleventh virtual call to discuss progress and plan next steps for the advancement of the process. Agenda items included:

1. Presentation of initial reactions on the draft options paper circulated for review by the steering committee to determine if that draft version of the options paper was good enough for the broader consultation process
2. Deliberation on the possible next steps and identification of the set of options to be included in the draft of the options paper that will be used in the broad consultation
3. Discussion on process and timeline, including how the broad consultation will happen
4. Any Other Business

On these agenda items the Steering Committee decided:

- The draft options paper as reviewed by the Steering Committee is not suitable for consultation at the moment. In the effort to reduce the length of the draft, some valuable information has been lost or annexed. A considerable amount of work is needed to redirect the draft. The Secretariat will need to ensure accuracy of process and content in the current report. This document will work in parallel with the preparation of the options. A shorter, very succinct document with a focus on options alone should be made available for consultations and UNEA.
- The Co-chairs summary shared for Steering Committee’s information is a good starting point to the options paper needed for UNEA. The draft should be redrafted to include other aspects needed for the options paper and be the main document for the consultation process. The options paper by the consultant will be converted to a background paper containing all relevant valuable information and analysis. The Secretariat should work with both the bureau of the Steering Committee and the consultancy team to develop the co-chairs summary and the background document respectively. This two-track approach will ensure the two documents are in sync and ready by the end of the month in preparation for the consultation process.
- The consultation process should be adjusted from a review approach to a co-design approach. The proposed integrated options therefore, should be presented as tentative/illustrative options and not conclusive. The focus of the consultation should be on the elements to ensure that as much as possible, inputs on their importance and relevance is received. This will enable the Steering Committee to effectively come up with the appropriate integrated options for UNEA. This consolidation phase of the process will commence after the consultation phase and will entail analyses on the feedback received.

- One more month is allowed to the team of consultants and Secretariat working with co-chairs to produce the two drafts for Steering Committee review before signoff for start of consultations.

Rapporteur	Signature
Mr. Rafael Monge Vargas	

Summary of the meeting

The meeting was chaired by the co-chairs of the Steering Committee.

Initial reactions on the draft options paper circulated for review by the Steering Committee

The meeting started with a brief from the Secretariat on the review of the draft options paper. A link to a website with the draft and accompanying annexes together with a template for comments had been sent out by the Secretariat at the start of the review period. The consultancy team had produced a longer document earlier which had the options integrated into the text. In the version recently reviewed by the Steering Committee, the draft included short paragraphs of analysis on the issue but did not include the options at the bottom rather, these were moved to annex five. This meant that if someone wanted to comment on the entire work, there was need to also comment on annex five. The Secretariat has reviewed the entire draft with accompanying annexes and compiled comments together with those from the Steering Committee members for the Consultancy team to address. To ensure all comments are considered by the consultancy team, the Secretariat has organized a call to discuss the comments and train the team on how to fill in the review-editing grid for transparency.

Co-chairs then opened the discussions with a call for each present member of the Committee to share their thoughts and suggestions on the reviewed draft. This was done to assess members thoughts on whether that version of the options paper was good enough for the broader consultation process.

Most Steering Committee's members noted that they weren't able to review the draft as shared by the Secretariat without using a substantial amount of time. Some of the Steering Committee members had provided a number of inputs, but these were not reflected in the final version of the document. The document was detailed but non-coherent leading to so many ways to combine different building blocks into integrated options. Additionally, some members doubted if the document had the right building blocks in the first place. Steering Committee members found it potentially challenging to get a consensus around a small set of proposed options in readiness for the consultation at this stage. They further noted that the process of finalizing the document and making some of the choices should be informed by clarity around what the content of the consultation could be. The Steering Committee further noted that the draft they had reviewed was a document between a longer analytical document they had hoped for and a short crisp document suitable for the consultation process. Further, the Committee agreed with the Secretariat's observation that in the effort by the consultancy team to reduce the original document, some important aspects of the options paper had been lost either entirely or converted to annexes. This was seen as a major weakness of the draft.

On the consultation process, Committee members noted that this process is twofold; the consultation and consolidation phase. At the moment the Steering Committee should ensure inputs are harnessed and verified for accuracy. In the consolidation phase, which starts after the consultation period, an analysis will be made on the input and outcomes merged for appropriate forms. The process should therefore be open at this stage to invite inputs and sharing guiding material to help the Steering Committee gather more information and input from the consultation. The Steering Committee has spent some time already in discussing the form aspects before determining the function of the GEO. Form should therefore be an important part of the content of the consultation. It was further observed that the proposed plan was going toward a review process type of arrangement. This will not be useful in the co-production model envisioned for this process. In such member states, stakeholders and assessments experts should input into core elements of the paper. It was highlighted that having a shorter document only with elements and maybe proposed integrated options will help achieve this outcome from the consultations. A detailed background document can help the consultations by providing accurate and valuable information on what should be known in making choices and decisions. Eventually, in-depth analysis of for example costing can be done afterwards after a sense of where the Steering Committee's wants to proceed with a more limited set of options to put forward to the further process. In this case the multicriteria analysis that was included in the report would not be valuable at the current stage.

The consultation is meant to gather input on the draft options document and the proposed set of options. At the moment there are several different ways to combine various elements in the document into potential options that the Steering Committee can consider. On this issue it was decided that rather than presenting the current integrated options as proposed set of options in the consultation, key considerations and analysis should be presented with these integrated options only as illustrative or potential options. This will ensure valuable input on the elements during the consultation process and enable the Steering Committee to merge desirable elements to most suitable integrated options in their second workshop. The consultation process should therefore invite input not only on the options, but also on key aspects of the assessment like the functionality, governance, approach, financing options etc. For each of the aspects, a corresponding criterion or more than one criterion can be developed for evaluation and eventual decision by the Steering Committee. This will help strengthen the coherence across the process through the consultation input to come up with a smaller set of options and then evaluate them effectively.

On shaping a future GEO, it was highlighted that its implementation structure can be based on collaborating centers, which would greatly streamline the process of selecting authors, allow for more continuity and institutional memory. It was further noted that the Co-chairs summary that had been circulated for Steering Committee's input did not mention that GEO should include policy analysis, especially analysis of policy effectiveness. On the future roles of GEO, Committee members emphasized the need for GEO integrating global environment aspects as well as sustainable communities. In the light of the current global health pandemic, it was noted that a future GEO could focus on Emerging Issues. GEO should be useful for a sustainable future. Working with countries to achieve this will be valuable. Aspects like data and scenarios are important for countries to make progress in the sustainable agendas a role that a future GEO can take on.

On the process it was noted that the rapporteur of the Steering Committee has been valuable in the production of summaries from the Committee meetings and other engagements with the Consultancy team. A lot of progress has been made so far however, with the limited time left, it is important to ensure consensus is reached on the way forward and work toward the finalization of the process. Steering Committee members were assured of support to this regard with emphasis on transparency through documentation of the outcome from meetings and webinars in the process.

On this agenda therefore, it was decided that a considerable amount of work is needed to convert the draft options paper to a background document that would support a co-chairs summary during the consultation process. The process has to go back one step to the building blocks. A first step would be to go back to the paper which was sent out with building blocks and amend that with the new building blocks that appear in the consultant's options paper, the co-chairs paper and other building blocks that would be presented by other Steering Committee members to have a good set of building blocks. The Steering Committee can then consider the different building blocks and assess them as to whether they are in line with the UNEP's mandate and UNEA resolution. It was further emphasized that a set of adjusted building blocks can then be used as a basis for the consultations and only when the Steering Committee has feedback on these building blocks, can they be ranked and considered for integration and eventual presentation at UNEA. The secretariat agreed that consulting on these set of either criteria or building blocks would be probably more productive than trying to consult on the already formulated integrated options. A two-track approach will be implemented in an upwelling approach with the analytical foundation and then a top down approach reflecting if the current GEO is an intergovernmental science policy interface, what would be its core building blocks.

Deliberation on the possible next steps and identification of the set of options to be included in the draft of the options paper that will be used in the broad consultation

Co-chairs presented the co-chairs summary in detail. Their presentation intended to help the Steering Committee determine if the options in the current paper are the right ones. This will then help inform if the Committee should consider adding or substituting some of them with the proposals from the co-chairs.

The co-chairs summary was an attempt to summarize the discussions that the Steering Committee has had so far in the process. This was drafted in consideration to UNEP's mandate in the subject. Three key mandates given to UNEP in 1972 are to keep the global environment under regular review, bring emerging issues to the attention of the governments, and promotion of contribution from the National scientific and professional community. A lot has changed since 1972 on how these processes have been applied. Intergovernmental assessments are key and GEO is among a club of relatively few advanced intergovernmental science policy interfaces. This is one of the things that the Steering Committee have to keep in mind when analyzing the options.

The co-chairs highlighted their intention is to turn such a summary into an analytical description that would help the Steering Committee make their decision around appropriate elements for the integrated options. Such an analysis would draw from the core UNEP mandates and lessons learned from previous processes. For instance, it's very interesting

that in GEO-4, findings moved into the decisions of the Governing Council and from there the findings verbatim moved into the resolutions of the UN General Assembly. GEO-5 in its case, analyzed risks and at that time the idea of sustainable development goals was referred quite extensively in the outcome document of Rio plus 20. The SDGs became a reality after that. The recent GEO-6 looked at human health and the health of the planet and a few months after we're in the midst of a world pandemic. These lessons from GEO can inform the most suitable elements for consideration in the future. It was also highlighted that these processes where there is a co-design and there is a co-production between government representatives and scientists or where one guards the scientific and credibility and scientific independence of a process and at the same time ensures its legitimacy and its relevance for policymaking are really the substantial of the GEO processes that the world needs in order to move towards a transformations to sustainability.

Steering Committee members raised a concern on the risk of this process potentially overlooking the detailed analysis already provided in the options paper. It was then clarified that the co-chairs summary will seek to include all building blocks that have already been researched by the consultancy team and ensure their inclusion into the draft. The co-chairs will work with the consultancy team and the secretariat closely to ensure that synergies are realized and information presented is factual.

The Steering Committee sort further clarification from the Secretariat on whether based on the raised inaccuracies in the options paper, the draft produced by the consultancy team was not going to be used as the main input into the co-chairs summary and that it was up to the Steering Committee to figure out the way forward and make sure that the options produced are appropriate for UNEA. On this the Secretariat responded that it will be working very closely with the consultants to address all of the comments that have come in. The Secretariat wants the consultants to be very transparent on how they address each comment. However, the overarching comment from the call is; taking a step back and maybe removing section six of the report which provides the integrated options and changing that to a set of questions around the function, the form of GEO and other guiding questions so that there can be useful feedback on the framing of the options rather than the options themselves, because it's premature right now to seek opinions on options. The Secretariat further reiterated that it's more useful for the Steering Committee to receive feedback from a broad group of experts, Member States and stakeholders on the criteria or the building blocks around the options, rather than the options themselves. This is a major comment and change of direction from the Steering Committee that the Secretariat has to take back to the Consultancy team. The Secretariats emphasized that the Steering Committee itself needs to get its ideas more clearly on how they're going to evaluate future options and the kind of future options that might be most realistic to be considered. Therefore, this two-track approach where the consultant produces the review draft to be able to get input on the criteria in the building blocks would be brought together with the thinking of the Steering Committee at the second facilitated workshop.

On this agenda item the Steering Committee felt that it was a valuable document and should be the starting point of a co-chairs summary that will be the main document for consultations. It will however need reorganization to ensure that form follows function and where scope and products are presented upfront. It was noted that it would be useful to have a column which sets out the landscape in which they operate, how that option fits with other

options and the synergies with other options. Further, the document should present strengths and weaknesses or the differences for the combinations to help inform the desired decision. That comparative information can include costings and global requirements to reflect UNEPs mandate. It was decided that the co-chairs summary will be further developed with additional aspects needed for eventual consideration in the consolidation phase. This paper will be further enriched during the consultation process to ensure that it contains all the relevant building blocks accurately. A two-track approach will be used to ensure that the draft is developed in parallel to the consultancy background document and the two documents sync.

Discussion on process and timeline, including how the broad consultation will happen

Co-chairs presented an amended plan for the advancement of the process. The Secretariat had shared a plan for the consultation period. A six-weeks period had been identified as suitable for the consultations with Member states, Stakeholders and Global assessments experts as identified in the resolution. In that plan, six webinars had been planned to ensure maximum participation in addition to a written feedback modality aimed for receiving feedback on the options paper documents.

Based on the advice from the Steering Committee, the production of the Future of GEO options paper has been split into a two-track process, with the production of a background document which reviews and analyses the assessment landscape, combined with a summary of the issues to be consulted upon, prepared by the co-chairs of the Steering Committee (the co-chairs summary). The consultation process on the co-chair's summary, supported by the background paper, will be conducted over a month's time and will support the deliberations of the Steering Committee at its second facilitated workshop.

On this issue;

- The Steering Committee decided to allow one more month for the consultancy team to work with the Secretariat to develop a background document that reviews the global environmental assessment landscape and GEO's role and position in it. Also, over this time the Co-chairs will draft a summary document that will review the issues and decision-making criteria that are important in determining the future of GEO. The two documents, (new background document and the Co-chairs summary) will be submitted to the Steering Committee on July 31th for their review. The Steering Committee will review the two documents over a two-week period, up to the 14th of August. Review comments will be submitted to the consultancy team and the co-chairs during this time so that these two documents can be updated in preparation for the broader consultation period.
- The next planning call of the Steering Committee to be held on 17th August. This call will focus on ensuring the background document and the co-chairs summary are ready for the broader consultation.
- The broad consultations will run for one month (instead of six weeks) between August 18th -September 18th

- New drafts of the background paper and the co-chairs summary will be developed following the consultations outcome and submitted for the Steering Committee's consideration by 2nd October
- The second facilitated workshop of the Steering Committee will happen in either the second or the third week of October. In parallel the co-chairs will present an interim report (tentative table of options) to the UNEP Annual Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives in the week of 12th October. This will be a virtual presentation. This presentation will be mainly to provide information to the CPR rather than to seek input on the options.
- Between the Second workshop and mid-November the Steering Committee and Secretariat will work to produce the relevant documents to be submitted to UNEA. These documents will enable a decision on the Future of GEO, as per the request in the resolution.
- The appropriate documents will be submitted by the Steering Committee to UNEA on 20 November.

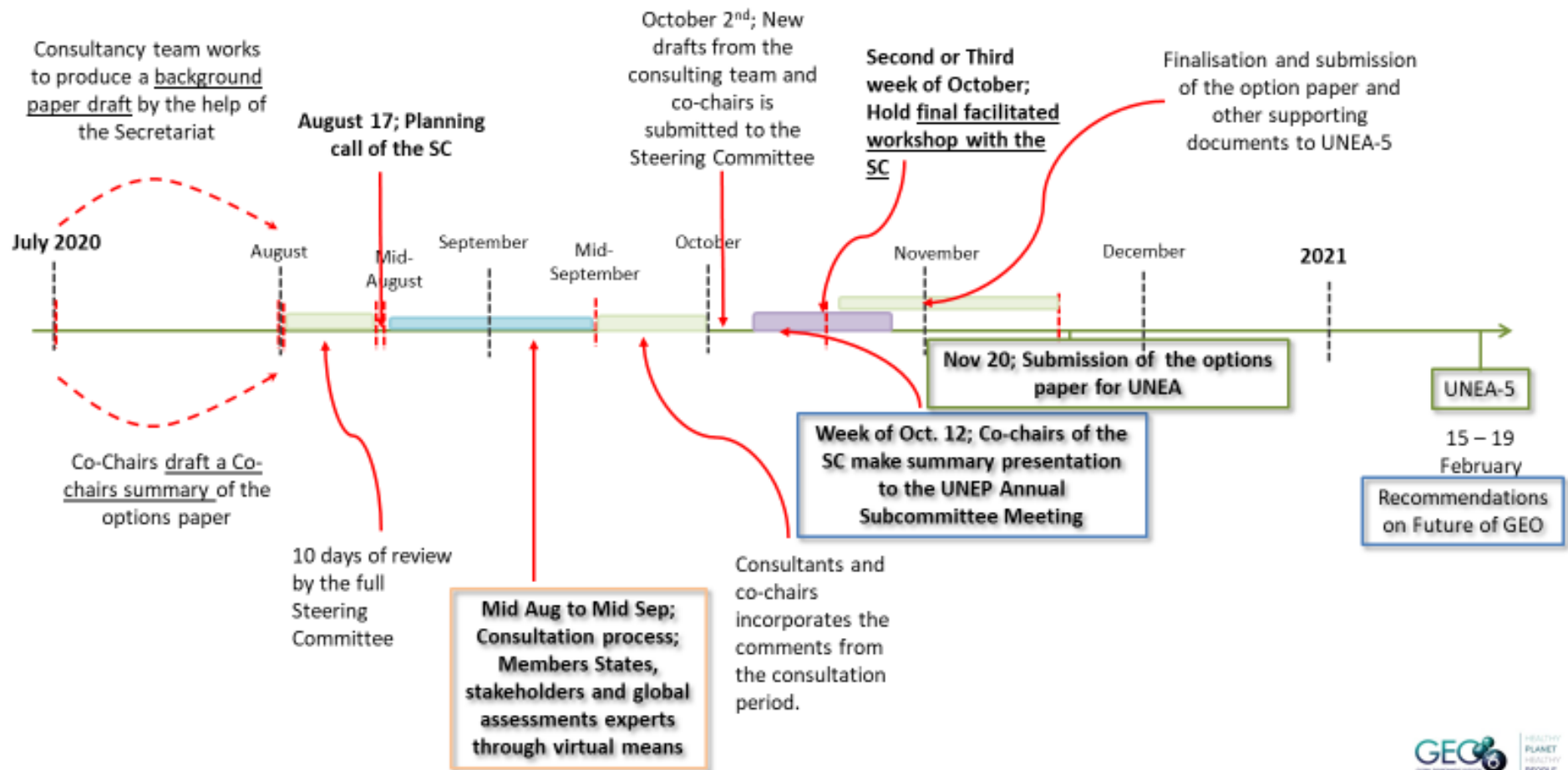
Schedule of Activities

Key Dates	Task	Number of Days
July 2 nd -July 30 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultancy team works to produce a background paper draft with the help of the Secretariat • Co-chairs to draft a summary of questions and criteria on which to consult with assessment experts, stakeholders and Member States. 	One Month
July 31 st - August 14 th	Review and feedback from the Steering Committee on the draft background document and co-chairs summary paper will be sent in writing to the Secretariat for transmission to the consultant and the co-chairs.	10 days of review by the full Steering Committee
August 17 th	Planning call of the Steering Committee. The call will approve the background document and co-chairs summary for release for the consultation period.	
August 18th -September 18th	Consultation period with assessment experts, stakeholders and Member States. 6 consultation webinars will be conducted with the different groups during this period.	One-month consultation period
September 21 st – September 29 th	Depending on the complexity and scope of the comments - Consultants and co-chairs incorporate the comments and deliver second drafts of the background paper and co-chairs summary to the Secretariat and the Future of GEO Bureau	
October 2 nd	New drafts from the consulting team and co-chairs are submitted to the Steering Committee	
Second or Third week of October	Hold final facilitated workshop with the SC	This may be <u>more than the two days planned</u> in the earlier timeline
Week of Oct. 12	Co-chairs of the SC make summary presentation to the UNEP Annual Subcommittee Meeting of the CPR	
Between the Second workshop and Submission of the paper to UNEA	Hold a series of calls to refine the options and prepare other material for recommendations to UNEA-5	

November 20 th	Submit the decision documents to UNEA	
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The two documents, (background document draft and the co-chairs summary) will be the consulted after which the process will enter a consolidation phase inputs from the consultations and the discussions of the Steering Committee will be discussed and agreed upon at the second workshop. This will ensure the Steering Committee comes up with a list of options by November 20. The purpose of submitting it so far in advance of UNEA is for governments to be able to read through the rationale that has been produced by the Steering Committee and come up with their negotiating positions on the resolution. In addition to this decision, the Steering Committee was urged to be clear on their use of the term 'consultation' in order to identify what level of consultations and the parties involved.

Illustrative Work Programme of the Steering Committee



Any other business

Having no other issues for discussion the meeting was adjourned at 17h32min (Nairobi time)

Action items

- The Secretariat will prepare a written summary of the meeting and share the link to the recording of the call.
- The Secretariat will tabulate the amended timeline and share with the Steering Committee.
- Co-chairs will start advancing their summary in parallel with the Consultancy background document for the Steering Committee's review by the end of July.
- The Secretariat will continue working with the Consultancy team to convert the current options paper draft into a background document as agreed by the Steering Committee and prepare for the consultation process that will focus on the building block and other analysis rather than the proposed integrated options presently in the options paper.

List of Participants

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Sebastian	Jan Konig	Swiss Federal Office for the Environment,	Switzerland
Marek	Haliniak	Ministry of the Environment, Poland	Poland
Cathy (alternate)	Maguire	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union
Kazuhiko	Takeuchi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Ambinintso a Lucie	Noasilalaonomenjanahary	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Madagascar
Marcos	Serrano	Ministry of Environment Chile	Chile
Mona	Westergaard	Ministry of Environment and Food	Denmark
Andrew	Stott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Keisuke (alternate)	Takahashi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Suzan	Alajjawi	Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain	Bahrain
Toral	Patel-Weynand	US Forest Service	USA
Salla	Rantala	Finnish Environment Institute	Finland
Mira	Zovko	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Croatia
Nino	Gokhelashvili	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia	Georgia
Marcel	Kok	Environment Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Ivar Andreas	Baste	Norwegian Environment Agency	Norway
Chatchai	Intatha	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand	Thailand
Rafael	Monge Vargas	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China
Ivana	Stojanovic	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Montenegro

Apologies

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Garry	Kass	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa
Mery	Harutyunyan	Ministry of Environment	Armenia
Apsara	Mendis	Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment	Sri Lanka
Keri (alternate)	Holland	US Department of State	USA
Ryan	Assiu	Environmental Management Authority	Trinidad and Tobago
Ouedraogo	Desire	Ministry of Environment, green economy and climate change	Burkina Faso
Nadia	Chenouf	Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Energy	Algeria
Christine Okae	Asare	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Ghana
James	Mathew	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Aliya	Shalabekova	Ministry of Energy	Kazakhstan
Jock	Martin	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union
Paul (alternate)	Lucas	Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Celso	Moretti	Agricultural Research Corporation	Brazil
Carlos (Alternate)	Cordero Vega	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Isaac	Dladla	Eswatini Environment Authority	Swaziland
Najib	Saab	Arab Forum for Environment & Development (AFED)	Lebanon
Claudia	Kabel	German Environment Agency	Germany
Charles	Lange	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Kenya
Teshia	Jn Baptiste	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Shanna (alternate)	Emmanuel	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia

Narges	Saffar	International Affairs & Conventions Center, Department of Environment	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
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