



SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERVENTION DURING THE SUBCOMITTEE MEETING ON CONSULTATION ON THE TIMING AND FORMAT OF UNEA-5 IN VIEW OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mr Chair,

My delegation wishes to thank the secretariat for their update on this agenda item. We wish to align our intervention with the statement delivered by the African Group.

My delegation wishes to align with the sentiments expressed stating the importance of the sessions of the UN Environment Assembly and wish to underscore that the principles of equal opportunity, effective and inclusive participation be upheld when determining the kind of UNEA5 we would like to have.

Chairperson, at the outset allow me to indicate that my delegation would not support a fully virtual meeting of UNEA as this would undermine the very principles outlined earlier and would open possibilities for weakened outcomes. This is also due to the fact that a number of delegations will not be able to connect online and participate meaningfully owing to the digital gap that currently exists.

While my delegation initially would have preferred the postponement of UNEA 5 until 2022; we understand and have taken into consideration views that some of the work of UNEP cannot be delayed and that the programme needs to fulfil its mandate. We have also understood and agreed that the work of environment cannot be put on hold.

In this regard, my delegation would support a shortened UNEA5 in February 2021 as currently scheduled, and allow for the agenda for UNEA-5 as adopted in UNEA Decision 4/2 to be altered to include administrative and budgetary matters as these do not require substantive negotiations. We wish to underline that the accepted list of decisions to be adopted during the shortened UNEA should be clear to everyone and possibly agreed upon urgently. This proposed sequenced hybrid would then create a prospect for UNEA to meet in 2022 to deliberate on substantive negotiations through a physical meeting. An opportunity to then link UNEA in 2022 with the commemoration of the creation of UNEP exists and should be seized. The commemoration of UNEP @50 should be aligned with the month of the environment.

Mr Chair, my delegation takes note of the virtual-hybrid option that was presented and views shared regarding reconvening in 2021 as a second part of UNEA5, however we believe that these offer the following challenges:

- representation in Nairobi by Member States is limited
- access to the compound is not very clear at this stage
- it will not allow for effective and inclusive participation
- it is open to the idea of virtual negotiations which cannot be supported by my delegation
- The guidelines of hosting of international conferences announced in March 2020 by the host Government still apply as expressed by the distinguished Ambassador of Kenya

In conclusion Mr Chair, my delegation is ready to continue with discussions on this agenda item and is committed in ensuring that no Member State is left behind in effectively and actively shaping the agenda of the environment.