

**Meeting of the Subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the UNEP
(Nairobi, 1 October 2020)**

The input by the European Union and its Member States to

The Consultation on the timing and format of UNEA-5 in view of COVID-19

- We are facing challenging times with COVID-19 continuing to spread and resurge in all regions, while the lives of billions of people are being directly or indirectly impacted by the pandemic. Considering the uncertainty of the pandemic's trajectory over the coming months, it is clear that we will not be able to organise UNEA-5 as would usually have been the case.
- At the same time it is important that we recognise that the environmental crisis we are faced with – such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and ecosystem-degradation, as well as increasing levels of pollution – continue to affect millions of people, simultaneously to, and in many cases exacerbating, the impacts of the pandemic.
- It is paramount to ensure that UNEA-5, as the highest universal body on the environment, sends the right political messages and agrees measures that effectively address these challenges, in line with its mandate.
- In this context the EU and its MS thank the Secretariat for outlining potential options for the format and timing of UNEA-5 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. They are a good basis for discussion and galvanise thinking among the membership.
- The EU and its MS are cognizant of the fact that all of the options presented come with a long list of caveats and challenges. While the EU and its MS are open to discuss all options, it is our current view that deciding to exclusively apply one of the proposed options might be suboptimal. Rather, depending on key principles and outcomes the membership might wish to achieve with UNEA, it would be preferable to pursue a combination of specific elements contained in the options outlined by the Secretariat, building on the approach proposed by the UNEA-PRES.
- Therefore, the preference of the EU and its MS in terms of format and timing of UNEA-5 would be the following approach:
 - o A virtual high-level meeting as the main political event with ministerial dialogues and stakeholder involvement, should be planned for February 2021, which would serve the purpose of ensuring **political messaging at the start of the “super year for nature”**, the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration and the Decade for Action and Delivery of the SDGs, and create political momentum. Such a virtual high-level meeting could adopt a ministerial declaration and the most essential decisions and resolutions necessary for ensuring effective operation of UNEP, in particular the MTS 2022-2025, PoWB 2022-2023 and key items such as listed in the UNEP note on preparations of UNEA-5 that should be adopted as early as possible. All outcomes to be adopted at this high-level virtual meeting would need to be negotiated by virtual means and written procedure in advance.
 - o Substantive negotiations and adoption of other resolutions and processes where intensive debates would be needed and that are not ready or mature enough for adoption in February, could take place in a second part of UNEA-5, in a physical

meeting, as early as the COVID-19 crisis will allow, preferably still in 2021. A decision on the feasibility of a high-level segment also in the resumed physical meeting should be taken at a later stage, carefully examining other important high-level conferences.

- Such an approach would, in the eyes of the EU and its MS, strike a balance between keeping UNEA politically relevant by using February 2021 as an opportunity for concise political messaging on a range of important issues as well as taking necessary decisions on the one hand, and on the other hand safeguarding that political consensus on important substantive issues is crafted in a transparent, inclusive, equitable and effective manner through physical negotiations among capital delegations at a later stage, thereby ensuring ambitious outcomes.
- The EU and its MS would appreciate more information regarding precedents on how voting would be carried out in a virtual setting.
