

The U.S. delegation understands the appeal and value of a purely virtual UNEA-5, which could help signal that UNEP and its Member States remain seized with global environmental issues even in the face of a worldwide pandemic.

A great strength of past UNEAs has been its consensus-based decision making, which is built on a spirit of compromise over long hours of face to face negotiations.

However, because we can't meet and negotiate in person as normal, the agenda for a February 2021 UNEA would have to be very streamlined with a constrained set of outcomes.

Any negotiations beyond those absolutely necessary for the continuity of UNEP's operations would make it exponentially harder for Member States to reach consensus and set UNEA-5 up for failure. For example, even a Ministerial Declaration would involve intensive negotiations that would be extremely difficult to accomplish in a virtual format.

Furthermore, during our own informal consultations with Member States, we have heard many valid concerns about how the digital divide could preclude effective participation.

As well, we all know from the September 14 CPR meeting that effective 6-language interpretation is still very much a work in progress.

Regarding the **proposed hybrid format**, in addition to the very obvious health implications, Member State delegations not physically present in Nairobi would be severely disadvantaged in their ability to interact with counterparts.

The United States opposes the so-called “two part” UNEA that involves an abridged February meeting followed by a resumed session later in 2021 or early 2022. Such a model would invariably lead to lengthy open-ended processes that would entail months of open negotiations. Furthermore, the environmental calendar is demanding enough later in 2021.

Therefore, Chair, in order to maximize the chances for a successful and meaningful UNEA-5, the U.S. delegation supports a delay of UNEA-5 until 2022, which could include a commemoration of UNEP@50 and be early enough in the year to avoid conflation with Stockholm +50.

In a case of postponement, UNEA-5 preparations could resume at the 2021 Annual Subcommittee.

Thank you.