

STATEMENT BY THE AFRICAN GROUP DURING THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING.

Thursday, 1st October 2020 (Online meeting)

Agenda item 2: Consultation on timing and format of UNEA-5 in the aftermath of covid-19 pandemic.

Chairperson,

Excellences, Ambassadors, High Commissioners, and Dear Colleagues,

It is my honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group. The African Group takes this matter on the timing and format of the 5th session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) with great importance. As host to the only UN Headquarters in the global south, Africa is keen to support the complete and effective performance of UNEP. In this regard, Africa has carefully considered and deliberated on the options presented by UNEP Secretariat for timing and format of UNEA-5. We thank the Secretariat very much for providing a comprehensive document outlining the various possible options and scenarios for holding UNEA-5 under the prevailing circumstances of covid-19 pandemic;

Chairperson,

At the onset, the African Group underscores the need to incorporate **core principles**, hereby put forward by the Group, underpinning a successful UNEA-5 and which should be put into consideration in deciding the format and timing of UNEA-5. These principles include:

- Provision of equal opportunity for participation of all Member States, including Developing and Least developing Countries, and taking into consideration different time zones and challenges related to online participation, as well as, interpretation in the six official languages;
- Effective and inclusive participation by all Member States must be ensured in any option that is passed through and adopted by consensus;
- Virtual negotiations are not encouraged as they may hamper negotiations and outcomes of UNEA-5 due to technical challenges as experienced in other meetings;

- A list of items to be discussed, agreed in a participatory, consultative and transparent manner, which are time sensitive and ensure business continuity for UNEP;

Chairperson,

In view of the above, and putting into consideration the numerous opportunities and challenges brought forward by the respective formats as proposed, the African Group proposes the option of holding a **sequenced hybrid format** as viable. In this scenario, a shortened UNEA-5 will be held during the original dates, in February 2021, to adopt Decisions that cannot be delayed. Under this scenario, Africa would propose that only procedural decisions that do not require substantive negotiations be adopted, such as the Medium-Term Strategy and the Programme of Work & Budget, and therefore allow the work of UNEP to move forward. All other Decisions/Resolutions requiring substantive negotiations by Member States will be postponed to 2022 to allow for a physical meeting. Multilateral Diplomacy is a complex process, and its success depends on. Among others, interpersonal relationships and preparedness, those are forged in numerous formal and informal meetings, including Conferences, and Gatherings. The absence of such interactions can lead to a weak negotiating position.

Nonetheless, Mister Chairperson, the list of decisions to be adopted during the proposed short UNEA-5, in February 2021, need to be clear and finalized as soon as possible.

In addition, Chairperson,

Postponing UNEA-5 to 2022 will also allow for other processes to be followed and we will have the benefit of the outcomes of the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP-15) and of the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP-26), among others, to feed into the substantive discussions and negotiations during the preparation of the resumed session of the postponed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly.

With these few remarks, **Chairperson**, the African Group remains open for further discussions on this matter.

I thank you!