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**United Nations
Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment
Programme**

**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the
United Nations Environment Programme
152nd meeting**
Nairobi, 23 November 2020

**Draft minutes of the 151st meeting of the Committee of
Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment
Programme held on 14 September 2020**

Agenda item 1

Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting, which was held online, was opened at 1.20 p.m. on Monday, 14 September 2020, by Mr. Fernando Coimbra, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP.
2. The meeting was attended by participants representing 81 Member States, 1 observer mission, and 11 organizations from Major Groups and Stakeholders.
3. The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Committee: Mr. Tenzin R. Wangchuk (Bhutan); Mr. Ole Thonke (Denmark); Mr. Enkhbold Vorshilov (Mongolia); Mr. Maarten Brouwer (Netherlands); Ms. Caroline Vicini (Sweden); Mr. Valentin Zellweger (Switzerland); Mr. Khalid Khalifa al-Mualla (United Arab Emirates); Mr. Asif Choudhury (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); Mr. John Stephen Simbachawene (United Republic of Tanzania); and Mr. Nestor A. Rosa (Uruguay).
4. He then bade farewell to the following departing members, thanking them for their contribution to the work of the Committee: Ms. Marta Eugenia Juárez Ruiz (Costa Rica); Ms. Mette Knudsen (Denmark); Mr. László Eduárd Máthé (Hungary); Mr. Rahul Chabbra (India); Mr. Soehardjono Sastromihardjo (Indonesia); Mr. Sukhbold Sukhee (Mongolia); Mr. Franciscus Albrecht Makken (Netherlands); Ms. Anna Jardfelt (Sweden); Mr. Ralf Heckner (Switzerland); Ms. Pornprom Petklai Nihon (Thailand); Mr. John Hamilton (United Kingdom); and Ms. Pindi Hazara Chana (United Republic of Tanzania).
5. The Chair invited the representative of Norway to speak on behalf of the President of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme.
6. The representative of Norway welcomed the ongoing high level of Member State engagement in the drafting of a ministerial declaration, noting that global environmental challenges continued to require urgent attention notwithstanding the need to address the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. With regard to the format, conduct and timing of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, many representatives had agreed that it would be disadvantageous to postpone the event in its entirety and stressed the need to provide technical conditions that would ensure the full and active participation of all Member States and relevant stakeholders. In considering the option to postpone the Assembly, it had been noted that the uncertainty related to the pandemic

would most likely prevail for some time and that many global environment-related events had already been scheduled for the second half of 2021. He therefore urged representatives to consider which of the Environment Assembly components should not be postponed. In particular, it was important to enable UNEP to continue its work, guided by a medium-term strategy and programme of work and budget adopted in a timely manner.

7. The President invited representatives to consider the high-level dialogues, ministerial round tables and ministerial declaration as opportunities to build strong, relevant political messages and to show that UNEP was open for business and stood ready to work for a stronger, more resilient post-pandemic world.

8. The road map for the preparation of the ministerial declaration included two online open-ended informal consultation meetings convened and led by the President of the Environment Assembly with the support of the Secretariat to ensure the active participation of the Committee and capitals in preparing the draft ministerial declaration. The inclusive, transparent online format would enable all Member States and stakeholders to be aware of each other's position. She expressed gratitude to the Chair of the Committee for convening the open-ended meetings to keep representatives informed. She noted that the current road map was based on the understanding that at least the high-level component of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly would take place as scheduled in February 2021.

9. The Chair invited the Executive Director, Ms. Inger Andersen, to provide an update on the joint meeting of the bureaux of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee.

10. The Executive Director said that in the light of the current extraordinary times, UNEP had presented an options paper on the modalities for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, whether held online, in person or using a blended format. It had been agreed that representatives required more deliberations with their capitals in that regard. Every effort was being made to find a solution that would meet the needs of everyone concerned, with no loss of momentum in the conduct of UNEP and without silencing the strong voice of the environmental community as conveyed to the Environment Assembly by environment ministers. She looked forward to the guidance to be provided at the present meeting.

11. The Chair said that the bureaux had agreed that the matter of how to conduct the fifth session of the Environment Assembly should be considered in a more inclusive setting, preferably in a dedicated meeting of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives at the end of September 2020. He would report back in that regard to the Bureau of the Environment Assembly at its next meeting, in the first week of October, with a view to deciding on the date and format. In that regard, he invited Bureau members to engage in consultations within their regional groups and noted that he had briefed the bureaux on the preparations for the seventh annual meeting of the subcommittee, to be held online from 12 to 16 October 2020.

Agenda item 2

Adoption of the agenda

12. The agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/151/1).

Agenda item 3

Adoption of the draft minutes of the 150th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

13. The Committee adopted the minutes of its 150th meeting, held on 30 April 2020 by videoconference, on the basis of the draft minutes of the meeting (UNEP/CPR/151/2).

Agenda item 4

Report of the Executive Director

14. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a document entitled "Quarterly report to the 151st meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Advance unedited). April–June 2020".

15. In her oral briefing, the Executive Director said that a grim milestone had been reached with global COVID-19 infection rates hitting 25 million. Extending her solidarity with and sympathies to Member States, she noted that environmental catastrophes in many regions of the world were adding

to the humanitarian burden of the global pandemic, and that the World Meteorological Organization, based on reliable science, had predicted continued extreme weather throughout 2020.

16. Stronger science for informed policy formed the backbone of the UNEP strategy to respond to the pandemic. In July, UNEP, in collaboration with the International Livestock Research Institute and other partners, had released a report on zoonotic diseases and their prevention. The report, whose findings had been published in 430 media outlets across 42 countries and in 10 languages, unambiguously called for a “One Health” approach that integrated human, animal and environmental health. The “One Health” approach was not new, but related institutional support and implementation had been limited, a fact that needed to be remedied. Fortunately, doing so would cost only a fraction of the stimulus packages announced to reboot the global economy.

17. The drawing of linkages between human activity, human health and planetary health was the foundation of the UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025. She recalled that, at the subcommittee meeting held in July, there had been broad agreement among Member States that UNEP actions to deliver deeper and broader impact were key to effectively addressing the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and proliferating pollution and waste. The feedback provided at that meeting had been incorporated into the medium-term strategy, including the need for greater emphasis on the issues at the nexus between the strategic pillars of internal UNEP reform and the broader reform of the United Nations development system.

18. A coherent and focused medium-term strategy should be the entry point for the alignment of UNEP systems, operations and procedures, and even the organization’s culture, to ensure greater impact beginning in 2022. Collaborative work would be required to ensure that, by the end of 2021, UNEP was ready to respond to the promise of the ambitious strategy. Accountability played a significant role; UNEP was strengthening its “lines of defence” approach for effective risk management and control within the back-to-basics model of its road map for strengthening management controls and principles.

19. Key to that strengthening were setting the right tone at the top and continuing with independent audits and the implementation of their recommendations. The audits already performed had identified a need to strengthen grant management and the work involving implementing partners. It had further been concluded that there was a need within UNEP, as a non-resident agency, to prioritize the system-wide reform and its attendant efficiencies, and, to that end, three United Nations entities had been identified for the performance of a benchmarking exercise.

20. Despite the challenges of the global pandemic, good progress had been made in the UNEP programme of work. Progress in securing the health of people and planet fell within the purview of the implementation plan “Towards a pollution-free planet” (UNEP/EA.3/HLS.1), described in Environment Assembly resolution 4/21, which aimed to build synergies across UNEP to strengthen coordination, information sharing and reporting.

21. The first global standard on tailings management had been launched in August by the Global Tailings Review, convened by UNEP, Principles for Responsible Investment and the International Council on Mining and Metals. Working directly with industry and investors, UNEP had used its convening power to achieve an important milestone on the path to its ambition of zero harm to people and the environment from tailings facilities. Building on that success, UNEP would explore whether comparable standards could be developed to address other environmental challenges and catastrophes such as those now afflicting many regions.

22. Together with Colombia, the host country of World Environment Day 2020, UNEP had successfully organized the celebration of World Environment Day online, including through a multilingual digital campaign #ForNature that had reached more than 100 million people. She expressed appreciation to the Governments of Colombia and Germany for their support in that regard and said that UNEP looked forward to continuing to foster the global conversation on nature at the United Nations Biodiversity Summit, at the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, and during discussions on the post-2020 biodiversity framework.

23. Expressing her gratitude to Member States, she said that contributions to the Environment Fund in 2020, at over \$71 million, had exceeded contributions in 2019. However, the liquidity crisis affecting the regular budget of the United Nations and the expenditure control measures that had been introduced were beginning to affect UNEP. While regular budget funding constituted only five per cent of the UNEP budget, critical positions, including that of the UNEP chief scientist, were drawn from it; a prolonged inability to fill the growing number of regular budget-funded vacancies would hamper the delivery of vital parts of the programme of work. The dialogue with Member States on funding and resource mobilization would continue at the annual subcommittee meeting in October.

24. The world was at a historic juncture. The use of resources during the post-pandemic economic recovery would determine whether human, economic and environmental health would be secured for generations to come or the world would continue on the current path, which had brought about the suffering now being experienced. Only a green recovery made economic, environmental and societal sense. Spending on renewable energy would generate 2.5 times more jobs than spending on fossil fuels and would reduce the burden of disease from air pollution, which was costing countries seven per cent of their annual GDP. One dollar spent protecting ecosystems generated nine dollars in return and protected livelihoods. Inclusive, effective and renewed multilateralism could rise to the challenges of the present turbulent times. She called on representatives to help put nature and environmental stewardship at the heart of the recovery from the pandemic.

25. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the Executive Director for her report and the Secretariat for preparing the options paper on the modalities for holding the fifth session of the Environment Assembly during the pandemic, and many welcomed the new Committee members. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, urged the Bureau to clarify as soon as possible how negotiations would be limited by each format, whether online or hybrid, as those limitations might negatively influence the relevance and quality of outcomes. A successful fifth session of the Environment Assembly would be key to enabling a green post-pandemic recovery, halting biodiversity loss and stemming waste and pollution.

26. Several representatives stressed that, irrespective of the option chosen, effective, inclusive and transparent participation and respect for due process would be crucial. One representative noted that the full participation of many representatives, in particular those located in developing countries, might be hindered by network connectivity issues in an online or hybrid Environment Assembly session. She urged the Secretariat to provide a “level playing field” to ensure that all Member States would be able to participate fully in substantive negotiations.

27. Concerning gender mainstreaming and regional representation in staffing, several representatives expressed satisfaction with the gains achieved in gender equity, while noting that work remained to be done to achieve equitable geographical representation. Several representatives noted that many staff members at the P-5 level and above came from the same group of countries. One representative said that more could be done in that regard; one called for a detailed report on geographical representation, with a breakdown by levels and organizations and a concrete proposal for change; and a third recalled an earlier request for the information to be presented by country rather than by group of countries.

28. Many representatives stressed the need for Member States to take advantage of the COVID-19 economic recovery initiatives to “build back better”, including by strengthening the science-policy interface and adopting strong biodiversity and chemicals and waste frameworks. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, cautioned against losing sight of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and multilateral environmental agreements in the context of the economic recovery and noted the importance of aligning the medium-term strategy with existing frameworks to leverage their initiatives and activities. One representative, expressing his concern at the decline in funding available for environmental work, noted that protecting the environment was an issue whose long-term significance would eclipse that of COVID-19. Another representative noted that UNEP was well-positioned to promote cooperation and coherence across the United Nations development system.

29. One representative, welcoming the alignment of UNEP management reform with the broader reform of the United Nations system, also emphasized that, if the expectations raised by the new medium-term strategy were to be met, UNEP needed sufficient core and other funding to fulfil its mandate. At the same time, UNEP should underpin the medium-term strategy with a realistic and conservative budget. Some representatives called on all Member States to pay their fair share to the Environment Fund. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, requested a written update on the implementation of the “five lines of defence” in the UNEP management reform process and on the implementation of the recommendations from the recent report of the board of auditors.

30. Turning to climate change, one representative noted that legislative solutions should not necessarily be prioritized, as substantive programmes, policies and actions on the ground were often the real drivers of progress, and insufficient institutional capacity rather than a lack of legislation was often the missing link. She cautioned against an excessive focus on climate change mitigation in the light of the need for countries and communities to adapt and create resilience, also noting that actions taken in response to climate change should not detract from a focus on the need to address desertification, land degradation, and the poverty-environment nexus.

31. Several representatives highlighted the particular economic vulnerability to the pandemic of developing and least developed countries and the clear need for additional means of implementation for existing commitments under multilateral environmental agreements and to enable those countries to “build back better”. One representative, noting that “business as usual” would continue to degrade the environment, urged the fostering of new development paradigms that would merge the remediation of environmental degradation with green stimulus packages while promoting traditional sustainable practices, all of which would drive poverty reduction. Mutual aid must be the watchword in combating climate change and countries should help each other, sharing technology and providing funding to stimulate innovative climate action in line with common but differentiated responsibilities. Several representatives emphasized that any aid provided in the guise of pandemic economic recovery initiatives should take into account the special needs and circumstances of Africa and provide specific support.
32. Several representatives expressed concern at the policy on promoting greater protection of environmental defenders and its potential to take on a political dimension or affect national sovereignty.
33. Thanking representatives for their comments and support, the Executive Director said that staff could not be made redundant because of their gender or nationality. UNEP would welcome support from Member States in building capacity in under-represented countries and constituencies to continue to address the gender and geographical imbalances in its staffing. Regarding the policy on promoting greater protection for environmental defenders, it was administrative rather than political, and predated her tenure. She would discuss with the Chair how best to prepare an explanatory note on the topic to be included on the agenda of the next subcommittee meeting. Lastly, she had taken note of the comments on the poverty-environment nexus, and UNEP would continue to support related activities, including through the reform of the United Nations and resident coordinator systems, and comprehensive and updated country analyses and frameworks.

Agenda item 5

Consultation on the medium-term strategy 2021–2025 and the programme of work and budget 2022–2023

34. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the draft medium-term strategy for the period 2021–2025 and the programme of work and budget for the period 2022–2023, inviting the Executive Director to introduce them.
35. The Executive Director said that many stakeholders had contributed to the draft medium-term strategy for the period 2021–2025 and the programme of work and budget for the period 2022–2023. Thanking Member States and other contributors, she stressed that the documents were solidly anchored in the 2030 Agenda and sought to uphold paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), “The future we want”.
36. The medium-term strategy was based on three thematic subprogrammes, namely, action on climate, action on nature and action on chemicals and pollution. It was further structured into two foundational subprogrammes, science-policy and environmental governance; and two enabling subprogrammes, finance and economic transformations and digital transformations. The strategy was practical, focused, results-oriented and monitored, with a particular focus on mainstreaming gender and on the response to the environmental dimensions of conflict and crisis.
37. Mr. Tim Kasten, Acting Director, Policy and Programme Division, UNEP, provided an overview of the medium-term strategy with the aid of an audiovisual and slide presentation. Noting that a wealth of information had emerged from the subcommittee meeting held on 14 July, Mr. Kasten said that UNEP welcomed the close collaboration with representatives and looked forward to receiving their continued input in the preparation of the final document.
38. In response to the input already received, the medium-term strategy and programme of work had been adjusted to create synergy across the three thematic subprogramme areas of climate, nature and waste, each now with its own theory of change. The text was more concise, clear and approachable, and the linkages between it and the 2030 Agenda and the multilateral environment agreements had been drawn to show how they served as its foundation. At the same time, duplicative text between the strategy and programme of work, which now formed an annex to the strategy, had been eliminated.

39. Both texts now featured the priorities that had been underscored during the consultations undertaken, such as a focus on strengthening collaboration with other United Nations entities and with the financial and private sectors; further engagement from UNEP to strengthen visibility, transparency and accountability in the commitments and actions of non-State actors; and an accessible text that was significant for all stakeholders and not only those in the environmental community. Linkages had also been drawn between the two texts and the management reform of UNEP and the broader reform of the United Nations development system.

40. Turning to the budget, he said that, after receiving feedback that, in the current context, a balance between ambition and realism was needed, the three options presented during consultations in July had been winnowed down to one, which would be presented at the annual subcommittee meeting in October. The input of representatives would be incorporated into the indicator framework to be revealed in the streamlined programme of work under development, to achieve the closest possible alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. UNEP looked forward to working closely with representatives on the final phases of its preparation.

41. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the Executive Director and the Secretariat for organizing the consultations on and preparing the medium-term strategy for the period 2021–2025 and the programme of work and budget for the period 2022–2023. Several representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that their delegations appreciated the efforts made to improve the programme of work since the consultations held in July, in particular in the light of the constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the long-term global vision reaching forward to 2050 and the contextualization of the medium-term strategy and its three strategic pillars of action within that vision.

42. Several representatives, including two speaking on behalf of groups of countries, said that the work of UNEP on climate change, the degradation of the natural world and pollution and waste should complement and be aligned with the work of other United Nations entities and multilateral environmental agreements to avoid duplication of effort. Several representatives noted that peace and security were the purview of the Security Council and that UNEP should restrict its activities in that regard.

43. Two representatives, one of whom spoke on behalf of a group of countries, emphasized the importance of highlighting the cross-cutting issues of sustainable consumption and production, circular economy and resource efficiency in the operational parts of the strategy. One representative said that that could be achieved by defining more concrete objectives under each of the three thematic subprogrammes. One representative suggested drawing from the work done in the context of the new strategy for the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP), noting that the 10YFP was scheduled to conclude in 2022 and that a call should therefore be included in the strategy for its continuation. He also highlighted the role of UNEP as the custodian of Sustainable Development Goal 6 (Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all). He cautioned against reducing the water-related content in the strategy to the issue of wastewater in the context of pollution.

44. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noted the absence of emphasis in the text on the importance of the environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals. He suggested the introduction of an explicit reference on the need to improve the health of the environment as an enabling factor for the achievement of all the goals, noting that such a reference would also provide a clear reflection of the mandate and ambitions of UNEP. Another representative stressed that poverty eradication was the greatest global challenge and was crucial to sustainable development.

45. Two representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, underscored the need for the medium-term strategy to strengthen the ability of UNEP to support countries, in particular developing countries, in the implementation of their national environmental policies and internationally agreed commitments in line with their national priorities and needs. Another representative, also speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that his region strongly supported the inclusion of emerging environmental issues in the medium-term strategy, including the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental degradation and the health-environment nexus. He also stressed the need for the strategy to be based on reliable data.

46. There was broad consensus among representatives that consultations on the programme of work should pay particular attention to the needs of developing countries. One representative, noting with concern the widening gap in funding for development, said that developing countries needed help from UNEP in the light of the particular vulnerabilities that hampered their ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Such assistance should take the form of immediate short-term

interventions to mitigate job losses through the creation of green jobs; programmes with a 2-year to 5-year scope in the context of the green recovery; and investments in line with countries' long-term visions of sustainable development. Particular support should be given to sectors with greater potential for green recovery.

47. One representative said that Africa deserved targeted intervention as the region was home to many of the world's least developed and twenty of its fastest-warming countries. The continent was already suffering humanitarian crises enhanced by poverty and by the consequences of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, including plagues of locusts and extreme flooding. He urged UNEP to consider the implementation of targeted regional programmes in Africa, which could be based on other successful regional interventions.

48. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, suggested the inclusion in the medium-term strategy of a clear description of the comparative advantage of UNEP, which could be achieved by highlighting UNEP strengths under each of the three subprogrammes and detailing how it could provide support to other organizations. UNEP could then build synergies related to its subprogrammes with other multilateral bodies.

49. Turning to finance, one representative said that, while he appreciated the prudent approach taken in the budget, UNEP should maintain a clear focus on areas where its core competencies provided a competitive advantage. He and another representative requested clarification on financing for the three multilateral funds mentioned in the strategy and on how the new structure would improve finance-related governance. One representative expressed support for the promotion of soft earmarking. Another representative requested further details on the resource mobilization strategy and how her delegation could provide support in that regard.

50. Several representatives, one of whom spoke on behalf of a group of countries, noted that the term "nature-based solutions" had yet to be defined. Welcoming any action taken in relation thereto, they requested the Secretariat to prepare a concept note on the topic to launch a much-needed discussion on defining the term in the lead-up to the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

51. Turning to the reform of the United Nations system, several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, agreed that it should serve to raise environmental ambition across the United Nations system. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noted that the link to and centrality of the reform and its capacity to foster the delivery of the UNEP mandate could be clarified in the medium-term strategy. Another representative sought clarification of how UNEP would use the reform to extend its reach and what challenges were anticipated in that regard. On the internal reform of UNEP, she also suggested that one overarching theory of change could be created in addition to or rather than the current three theories.

52. Several representatives expressed satisfaction with the focus placed on gender in the text, although one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed regret at the absence of gender parity as a proposed outcome of the seven subprogrammes.

53. Lastly, several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed their eagerness to receive in the next iteration of the medium-term strategy specific details of how the programme of work and budget would contribute to the implementation of the strategy, including through the results framework and UNEP flagship activities. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, urged the Secretariat to elaborate on how the impact and influence of UNEP interventions to support systemic change would be measured, noting that an analysis of the challenges in that regard would inform upcoming discussions. Another representative stressed the importance for representatives and their capitals of receiving the fully costed and developed medium-term strategy for the period 2021–2025 and programme of work and budget for the period 2022–2023 well in advance of the following Committee meeting.

54. Responding to comments, the Executive Director thanked representatives for their valuable, rich and varied input. Noting that UNEP had a firm understanding of its role and those of the multilateral environmental agreements, she said that countries expected science-based inputs and capacity-building from UNEP to enable the implementation of projects and the strengthening of policy. If the language used in the text had led to confusion in that regard, every attempt would be made to clarify the matter. UNEP would continue to focus on science and collaborate with countries that had requested its support.

55. She acknowledged the stated need for greater emphasis on poverty eradication and development, and more robust situational analysis on broader issues, including desertification, land degradation and sustainable pastoralism. With regard to strengthening the local presence of UNEP, she noted that UNEP staff were far fewer than the staff numbers at the United Nations Development

Programme or the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Although it was expected that UNEP would gain enhanced opportunities for operational intervention through the reform of the system, its current capacity in that regard was limited.

56. With regard to the three thematic trust funds, some of the funding currently provided to UNEP was tied to specific projects. It was to be hoped that, under the new structure proposed, funding could be tied to themes rather than projects, in a move away from hard earmarking. As earmarked funding often fell under the three rubrics presented for the three thematic funds, the new structure, through softer earmarking, should enable more resources to be dedicated to the capacity-building requested by so many countries.

57. Turning to the comments on sustainable consumption and production, she said that greater emphasis would be placed on the topic in the next iteration of the document, including the suggestion of building on the new strategy of the 10YFP. Regarding results, for the three levels of results proposed, every effort would be made to provide clarity on UNEP contributions. With regard to gender, the programme of work, when finalized, would reflect the comments made by representatives.

58. The resource mobilization strategy was currently undergoing review in the light of the difficult economic circumstances faced by many countries owing to the ongoing pandemic. However, the resource mobilization unit had been strengthened and new financing options were being explored, including opportunities related to the thematic funds.

59. Regarding peace and security, she emphasized that UNEP had a strong understanding of the limits of its mandate, while noting that, in some jurisdictions where the Programme was active and where conflict and insecurity prevailed, it was vital to have a better understanding of how to operate safely. The text would nevertheless be reviewed to ensure that no boundaries had been overstepped.

Agenda item 6

Progress update on the consultation process under General Assembly resolution 73/333

60. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the progress update on the consultation process under General Assembly resolution 73/333 (UNEP/CPR/151/4) and invited the co-facilitators of the first informal substantive consultation meeting to provide an update on its outcome.

61. Ms. Saqlain Syedah, Vice-Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, drawing attention to a statement by the co-facilitators, recalled that in its recommendations, endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 73/333 and set out in the annex to that resolution, the ad hoc open-ended working group established in accordance with General Assembly resolution 72/277 had recommended that the Environment Assembly, at its fifth session, prepare a political declaration for a United Nations high-level meeting in the context of the commemoration of the creation of UNEP by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in June 1972. To that end, a road map setting out an informal consultation process to prepare the draft political declaration had been developed by the Secretariat in February 2020 and approved by the Committee and the Bureau.

62. The first informal substantive consultation had been conducted online on 21 and 22 July, with robust participation by representatives of Member States, specialized agencies, convention secretariats, United Nations entities, an intergovernmental organization and accredited non-governmental organizations. Discussions had been grouped under the topics of governance, means of implementation and environmental rule of law.

63. There had been broad consensus that the political declaration should be a non-binding document that supported and reflected existing frameworks, conventions and agreements on international environmental law, in particular the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Participants had agreed on the need to fully implement paragraph 88 of the outcome document of Rio +20 and supported the inclusion in the declaration of processes under way in the Committee, such as the drafting of an action plan on the implementation of paragraph 88.

64. Many participants had highlighted the vital role in the efforts of Member States in implementing environmental legislation in line with the Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law. Some had supported the reaffirming of principles in the political declaration, including the principles set out in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, while others had opposed such inclusion. Many participants had supported the inclusion in the declaration of calls to strengthen cooperation and synergies among environmental bodies.

Others had cautioned against discussing actions that they felt had not been mandated under General Assembly resolution 73/333.

65. Many participants had called for the specific inclusion in the political declaration of provisions on support from developed to developing countries, including through additional financial resources, technology sharing and capacity-building, while others had expressed the view that no pledges or financial commitments should be included.

66. She invited representatives to view the co-facilitators' summary and the statements of participants in the consultation, which had been made available at www.unenvironment.org/events/cpr-meetings/first-informal-substantive-consultation-meeting-unga-resolution-73333.

67. Regarding the way forward, she said that the second informal consultation would take place either online or in a hybrid format from 3 to 5 November and that the Bureau had agreed that the final consultation should take place before the fifth meeting of the open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, currently scheduled for the second week of February 2021. A draft political declaration was being prepared and would be shared with members in early October, one month before the second substantive consultation.

68. Mr. Ado Lohmus, Vice-President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, concurred with the summary provided and said that he looked forward to the active participation of representatives in the creation of an ambitious and action-oriented political declaration.

69. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the secretariat for organizing the consultation and the co-facilitators for the summary.

70. A number of representatives expressed the view that, in the light of the constraints related to the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, there might not be enough time to properly prepare the full political declaration in time for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. One representative noted that the Committee was not mandated to decide when and where the declaration would be adopted, but only to draft it, while another representative said that until agreement was reached on the substantive content of the declaration it would be difficult to finalize the draft. In that context, another representative said that the inability to hold face-to-face meetings due to COVID-19 prevented the negotiation of new or substantive issues. Several representatives said that the political declaration should focus on matters for which there was already broad support, including the agreed recommendations of the ad hoc open-ended working group, given that the diversity of views reflected in the co-facilitators' summary could lead to the re-opening of topics that had already been carefully negotiated.

71. A number of representatives cautioned against allowing negotiations on the political declaration to exceed the scope defined in General Assembly resolution 73/333. One representative noted that much important business would have to be addressed at the fifth session of the Environment Assembly and that it would be important to ensure that the process of drafting and approving the political declaration did not overwhelm the Assembly. Several representatives supported the postponement of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, suggesting that the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of UNEP could reasonably be combined with the session, which could simplify the organization of the commemorative event.

72. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, reiterated the importance of the process to prepare a political declaration that was ambitious and truly fulfilled the mandate of strengthening the implementation of international environmental law and governance. He said that he looked forward to receiving the initial draft of the declaration and to a rich discussion at the next consultation in November. Another representative said that he continued to advocate for a lean and focused process in which the substantive discussions on the draft were finalized before the open-ended meeting of the Committee.

73. Several representatives reiterated the centrality of the need for means of implementation to be provided to developing countries, noting that raising environmental ambition through the political declaration without providing the requisite means of implementation would be futile. One representative said that the co-facilitators' summary did not adequately reflect the emphasis placed on the need for means of implementation during the consultation. Two representatives said that developing countries were already lagging behind in the achievement of their environmental ambitions. In that regard, finance, technology transfer and capacity-building were fundamental prerequisites for further progress. One representative noted that the predictability of means of implementation was as important as its availability, particularly in the context of efforts by developing countries to ensure that recovery from the effects of the pandemic was green, sustainable and just.

74. There was broad agreement among representatives that the political declaration should be ambitious and concise. One representative said that it should provide an opportunity to demonstrate political will, provide an urgently needed springboard for greater international collaboration, build on existing structures and agreements, promote long-lasting impact that could be monitored, and encourage increased implementation of existing international commitments.

Agenda item 7

Progress update on the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine plastic litter and microplastics

75. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the progress update on the work of the ad hoc open-ended working group on marine plastic litter and microplastics (UNEP/CPR/151/5) and invited Mr. Satoru Iino, Deputy Director, Ministry of the Environment, Japan, and acting Chair of the Bureau of the ad hoc open-ended expert group, and Ms. Susan Gardner, Director, Ecosystems Division, UNEP, to provide an overview of developments.

76. Mr. Iino recalled that the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine plastic litter and microplastics had been established pursuant to Environment Assembly resolution 3/7 and that its mandate had been extended by Environment Assembly resolution 4/6. Since the third meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group, held in Bangkok in November 2019, and in the light of the postponement of the remainder of the in-person meetings of the group in 2020, online meetings had been organized to enable progress to continue on its intersessional work. In that regard, progress had been made on four main points: the stocktaking exercise, the technical and financial inventory, input on potential response options to the plastic waste issue, and an effectiveness analysis of potential response options.

77. For the stocktaking exercise, an online survey had been conducted on existing activities and actions to combat marine plastic and microplastic waste by Member States and stakeholders, with answers received from more than 60 countries and a webinar held in May. An online survey had also been conducted for the technical and financial inventory, and a webinar held, also in May. Input on potential response options to the plastic waste issue had been received from 14 countries and regions, in the context of which a technical briefing had been held in July. The effectiveness analysis of potential response options was underway. The group had been working on improving the methodology of the effectiveness analysis and had carried out three pilot studies, on microplastics, regional action plans, and a new international framework. In that regard, a webinar had been held in May and a technical briefing in August.

78. In the light of the logistical difficulties of organizing further consultations amidst the ongoing pandemic restrictions, a decision had been made to conduct only one more round of regional consultations, which would take place online, instead of the two in-person meetings originally scheduled.

79. The Bureau had met several times in July to review the draft scenario note, which provided information on the outcomes of the group's work and charted a path to the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. The scenario note was included in the progress update on the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine plastic litter and microplastics (UNEP/CPR/151/5). It contemplated the inclusion of a summary of the group's work to be annexed to the report of the Executive Director to the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. Part one of the summary would present the findings of the group, with a focus on the stocktaking of initiatives by all stakeholders to combat plastic pollution and on the financial and technical mechanisms to address it. Part two would consist of future work, including possible and existing response options, voluntary and legally binding government strategies, the identification of environmental, social and economic costs and benefits, and feasibility and effectiveness analyses of existing and potential response options.

80. Two online meetings would be held in preparation for the fourth meeting of the ad hoc expert group. Member States were also encouraged to hold regional consultations. In that regard, regional consultations had already been held by the Asia-Pacific and African groups, in August and September, respectively. The group of Latin America and the Caribbean would conduct regional consultations in late September. He reiterated his appreciation for the active participation of Member States in the process and for the efforts made by the Secretariat to ensure that the work of the group continued, despite the difficult circumstances.

81. In the ensuing discussion, several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, thanked the outgoing Chair of the ad hoc open-ended expert group, Ms. Jillian Dempster, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of New Zealand in Geneva, for her valuable contributions to the group, and welcomed the acting Chair, Mr. Iino.

82. Several representatives thanked the Bureau for its work to prepare for the current meeting and expressed their support for the streamlined process set out in the revised scenario note. One representative noted that online meetings were a “new normal” to which everyone needed to adapt. She urged the Bureau to provide clear guidance to participants on the conduct of online meetings to ensure their success.

83. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, stressed the need to switch the focus of the work of the group away from studies and towards identifying the response options. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the option of “maintaining the status quo” could already be eliminated. A number of representatives noted the importance of a factual, neutral summary document containing the full range of response options, existing and potential, as the outcome of the fourth meeting of the expert group.

84. One representative said that it was crucial to fulfil the mandate of the ad hoc open-ended expert group before the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, noting that the already urgent need to address the problem of plastic waste had been heightened by the increase in plastic waste resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 94 countries had expressed their support for a new global agreement, and, to build on that momentum, she supported a decision with a clear mandate to negotiate a new international agreement on marine plastic litter and plastic waste as an outcome of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

85. One representative requested clarification on the two meetings to be held in preparation for the fourth meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group in November. Another representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the summary mentioned in the scenario note needed to be extensive enough to reflect the discussions, views and recommendations of the expert group, which might be difficult to achieve if it were too short. In addition, he expressed the view that discussions at the fourth meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group should focus on response options organized along the life cycle stages of plastic. In the context of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, he requested an update on the next steps with regard to the consideration of a draft decision on the Intergovernmental Review Meeting of the Global Programme of Action. Another representative expressed support for the discontinuation of the Intergovernmental Review Meetings, but suggested retaining the Global Programme of Action, which could contribute to the response options and serve as a mechanism to assist in their coordination.

86. Responding to the comments, Mr. Iino said that the group had a clear understanding of its mandate and would do its best to fulfil it, recalling that the group was intended to provide options and analyse their effectiveness in preparation for negotiations at the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. He urged all Member States to participate actively in the intersessional processes to ensure a fruitful outcome.

87. Ms. Gardner said that the two-hour September preparatory meeting would focus on providing a progress update. The provisional documents to be presented at the fourth meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group would be made available shortly with a view to preparing for the preparatory meeting in October, by which time, with the assistance of the Bureau, all the documents for the fourth meeting of the expert group should have been finalized and made ready for translation. The October meeting would provide an opportunity for Member States to discuss the response options and the content of the summary over several days. During the preparatory meetings, logistical and operational matters relating to the online format of the fourth meeting of the expert group would be settled. Every effort would be made to issue all the documents in a timely manner to allow for the submission by Member States of written responses on the summary outcome document well in advance of the fourth meeting in November. The Bureau understood the need for a neutral outcome document that provided a full range of expert views.

88. Turning to the Global Programme of Action, she said that informal consultations had taken place during the latter part of 2019 and that the subcommittee had been briefed on the draft decision at its meetings in February and March 2020. In April, a revised draft decision had been presented based on comments received, in the expectation that an ad hoc Intergovernmental Review Meeting might be held in October, in the margins of the annual subcommittee meeting, to adopt it. However, given that the annual subcommittee meeting would be held online and that there was no agreement on the draft decision, those timelines no longer appeared feasible. Member States would instead be invited to

consider resuming consultations and convening an informal discussion on the basis of a revised draft decision, to be proposed by the Secretariat based on comments received. Those consultations could take place in November after the fourth meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group, if the Committee agreed, with a view to a draft decision being prepared in time for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

89. The Committee agreed that the related consultations would be convened in late November.

Agenda item 8

Progress update on the implementation plan “Towards a pollution-free planet” (UNEP/EA.3/HLS.1) described in Environment Assembly resolution 4/21

90. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a progress update on the implementation of the pollution action plan, “Towards a pollution-free planet”, described in Environment Assembly resolution 4/21 (UNEP/CPR/151/6). He invited Ms. Ligia Noronha, Director, Economy Division, and Ms. Cristina Zucca, Economy Division, to provide an update.

91. Ms. Noronha said that a detailed brief on progress in the implementation plan had been made available to representatives. Ms. Zucca, would provide a brief update focused on responses to medical waste, information-sharing, reporting on pollution and enhancing the capacity to act on pollution.

92. Ms. Zucca said that, although more information was currently available than ever before on the effects of pollution, a global overview of the pollution situation was still required. Despite the many initiatives that were under way to combat pollution globally, the need to dramatically scale up investments remained. The implementation plan aimed to create cooperation and synergies to facilitate information-sharing, tracking and reporting on pollution with a view to increasing the capacity to take action.

93. The UNEP response was aligned with the implementation plan, “Towards a pollution-free planet”. It had included the development of resources such as fact sheets, reports and webinars on the links between pollution and COVID-19, air quality, sustainable mobility, waste and water.

94. With regard to information-sharing, a website had been created,¹ where layers of data would continue to be added and links would be made with existing platforms to avoid duplication. A feature focused on pollution was being incorporated into the World Environment Situation Room. With regard to reporting, a pollution summary report was being drafted. It would be finalized in 2021, focusing on the Sustainable Development Goal indicators and other indicators and building on existing reports. In terms of enhancing the capacity to act, five areas in which gaps in capacity had been noted were being addressed, namely, knowledge, implementation, infrastructure, awareness and leadership. With regard to knowledge, several reports were under preparation, including on how fiscal policy could affect pollution. Capacity development projects were under way in India, Africa and other regions, with support from other United Nations entities, including projects on greening health infrastructure and enhancing the capacity to monitor environmental quality. The inaugural celebration on 7 September of the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies was an example of UNEP awareness-raising work, and its collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation on the new plastics economy was one of its initiatives to foster leadership. She invited representatives to view the briefing note for details of many other initiatives being spearheaded by UNEP.

95. With regard to the way forward, progress had been made in putting together a foundation for coordinated pollution action, including through a coordination hub and channels that had been activated to develop the specific outputs requested in the implementation plan. The plan would be key to establishing baselines, setting up the system and delivering coordinated action. Importantly, the medium-term strategy would have a specific focus on combating pollution. The COVID-19 pandemic represented an important opportunity to strengthen awareness of the link between environmental and human health. There was a need to dramatically strengthen the prioritization of pollution action, which, in turn, would lead to stronger investment.

96. In the ensuing discussion, a number of representatives, one of whom spoke on behalf of a group of countries, thanked the secretariat for the update. One representative noted with concern the lack of attention given to chemicals and waste and encouraged UNEP to give greater weight to that cross-cutting aspect in the next iteration of the plan. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the wide range of activities being undertaken in the context of the

¹ Available at www.unenvironment.org/beatpollution/.

implementation plan and expressed particular appreciation for the valuable publications mentioned in the progress update. He nevertheless underscored the need to translate findings and recommendations into action, noting that publications should not be called tools unless they contained concrete guidelines, recommendations and methodologies for implementation. With regard to the knowledge platforms, their content remained broad and could be strengthened. It was also important to ensure transparent and effective linking across platforms to avoid presenting information in a fragmented manner. He concurred with the conclusions drawn on the way forward and encouraged UNEP to take further action to strengthen the implementation plan.

Agenda item 9

Report of the subcommittee

97. The Committee took note of a document entitled “Chair’s report of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives”.

Agenda item 10

Other matters

98. The Chair said that the dedicated subcommittee meeting to consider the format and dates for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly would be held on 1 October 2020.

Agenda item 11

Closing of the meeting

99. The meeting was declared closed at 7.10 p.m. on Monday, 14 September 2020.
