



Key Messages from the North American Civil Society Consultation for the 3rd Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

Background

UN Environment’s North America Office, in partnership with the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, convened a full-day consultation on Thursday, 26 October 2017 at the Lieutenant Governor’s Suite in Queen’s Park, Toronto, Ontario. The consultation provided stakeholders with an opportunity to make inputs into the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-3) taking place in Nairobi, Kenya from 4 – 6 December 2017, on the theme *Towards a Pollution-Free Planet*. The consultation attracted over 50 participants representing different Major Groups from Canadian- and United States-based accredited and non-accredited organizations, as well as government officials. It featured expert panels which discussed the economic cost of pollution, the role of cities in addressing it, and steps that the Canadian and US governments are taking to engage with UNEA-3.

Knowledge Keeper James Bird opened the consultation with an invocation noting that the land where the meeting took place is sacred and home to many indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, welcomed participants and spoke about the linkages between environmental stewardship, economic prosperity, and social cohesion, and their relationship to the pursuit of sustainable development. Barbara Hendrie, Regional Director of UN Environment’s North America Office, emphasized that there does not need to be a trade-off between environmental protection and economic prosperity, and provided context about UNEA-3 and the aims of the consultation.

Key Points from Panel Discussions

The first panel focused on the economics of pollution and opportunities for change. Moderated by North American Regional Representative Christian Ledwell of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, this panel included:

- Karti Sandilya, Senior Advisor, Pure Earth and Global Alliance on Health and Pollution
- Tom Rand, Managing Partner, ArcTern Ventures
- Laura Zizzo, CEO of Zizzo Strategy, and Board Member of the Clean Air Partnership
- Dr. Leonardo Trasande, Director, Section of Environmental Pediatrics, NYU School of Medicine

Panelists noted the high costs and impacts on human health and well-being, with the recent report of the [Lancet Commission on Health and Pollution](#) finding that pollution leads to over 9 million deaths per year globally—more than all deaths from malaria, tuberculosis and HIV

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combined. Panelists noted that while the overall number of deaths is an important metric, pollution reduction interventions are needed to prevent other impacts as well, including morbidity (disease) and disability. The costs of pollution in Canada [were highlighted](#), and it was noted that Canada will be chairing the G7 next year and thus is well-positioned to use this role to encourage the G7 to take a strong stance on curbing pollution. The need for governments to create clear market signals for the private sector to address pollution with metrics and targets for reduction was emphasized. Panelists noted that it can be challenging to introduce regulation unless a clear technological solution already exists, emphasizing the need for innovation.

The second panel focused on the role of cities and other sub-national governments in reducing pollution. Moderated by North American Regional Representative Michelle Wyman, who is the Executive Director of the National Council for Science and the Environment, this panel included:

- Ewa Jackson, Managing Director, ICLEI Canada
- Rob Kerr, Community Energy Planner, Quality Urban Energy Systems of Tomorrow
- Ronald Macfarlane, Manager, Healthy Public Policy, Toronto Public Health
- Dr. Miriam Diamond, Professor, University of Toronto

This panel addressed cities' strong potential to act on reducing pollution and curbing greenhouse gas emissions in situations where they are empowered to do so and when they are provided with adequate resources and access to needed technologies. While urban pollution is inevitable, cities offer opportunities for reducing resource use and pollution per capita and for more efficient waste management. Cities can lead in these effort by using an integrated approach to implement sustainable solutions by engaging with local actors, setting-up monitoring and measuring plans early on, and addressing financial barriers. There was a call to build a strong case for curbing pollution through economic cost analysis, case studies and pilot projects, and through bottom-up citizen empowerment. Speakers highlighted that investing in environmental protection is economically viable with numerous benefits and should be regarded and communicated as a positive change.

In the afternoon, government representatives from Canada and the United States presented key inputs that their governments are preparing for UNEA-3 in a session chaired by Barbara Hendrie. Jennifer Kerr, Acting Director of Air Emissions Priorities, Environment & Climate Change Canada, spoke on a range of air pollution reduction initiatives being undertaken by the Government of Canada, including submitting a resolution on air pollution for consideration by UNEA-3. Walker Smith, Director of Global Affairs & Policy from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), highlighted the U.S. government's proposal for a standalone resolution on lead paint given the absence of adequate lead paint regulation in many global jurisdictions.

Participants engaged in a lively plenary discussion through Q&A sessions with all three panels, as well as in a final session in which the North American Regional Representatives reported back the key messages they had noted from discussions and welcomed further feedback.

Key Messages

The following key messages emerged from the dialogue on opportunities and challenges in pollution reduction.

Call for Governments

- There was a call for a global resolution to combat air pollution, the world's single largest environmental health risk.
- Countries should closely measure the burden of disease and economic cost of disability related to the exposure of pollution, while further understanding the burden of disease from emerging contaminants.
- Countries should enforce existing bilateral and multilateral environmental agreements to address pollution. Government ministries should not work in silos but across vertical and horizontal sectors to implement these agreements.
- Countries should ensure that UNEA resolutions are accompanied with mechanisms for cooperation and finance, considering knowledge and capacity gaps, to be implemented effectively.
- Lead, which has serious consequences for the health of children, is under-regulated globally; action needs to be taken to ban lead in paint.
- Unintended consequences of consumption need to be realized; the more we consume, the more waste is generated. We need to navigate towards reduced consumption while maintaining equity.
- We need a better understanding of the impact of endocrine disruptors and persistent organic pollutants on human health and the environment, while also looking at the consequences of increased plastic marine litter into the ocean and the food chain.

Citizen Engagement

- Acting on pollution requires the active engagement of a wide coalition of stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, labour movements, rural communities, faith based organizations, youth, and the poor.
- Call for laws for the private sector to disclose and label toxic substance. Citizens should have the 'right to know' about the use of chemicals and toxic substances in products. This information needs to be accessible and understandable to all.
- There was a call for a rights-based approach to a clean environment.
- More investment in high quality education is essential to keep the public scientifically literate and engaged with an understanding of how everyday activities are linked with pollution.

Innovation and the Private Sector

- More investment is needed to innovate and scale-up the deployment of clean technologies that reduce pollution.
- Regulations should be accompanied with policies that incentivize innovation and entrepreneurial efforts in solutions, especially for high priority areas such as plastic and chemicals.

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- The private sector needs clear market signals with metrics and targets for reduction to play a larger role in addressing pollution. Companies are starting to see a long-term economic advantage in securing a sustainable supply chain.
- Cost of pollution should not be externalized. Regulations that use a ‘polluter pays’ or ‘producer pays’ principles (such as extended producer liability policies) should be implemented.
- Large industries as well as small-to-medium sized enterprises contributing to pollution should be regulated.
- Costs of recycling are too high; regulations should require companies to consider the total life-cycle impact of their products to divert waste streams and move producers to create a virtuous cycle towards a circular economy. It was noted that some of the ways countries are recycling is by shipping hazardous waste to other countries.
- The impact of high-tech industries focused on smart technologies, which take up a lot of resources, rare earth minerals, and generate waste, on the environment should be further examined.

The Role of Cities

- Governments should empower and enable local governments to lead on reducing pollution, especially greenhouse gas emissions.
- Urbanization can provide health and environmental benefits when cities are built to create healthy livable communities, with low carbon footprints, access to clean safe drinking water, sound waste management systems, affordable and mixed housing, green spaces, efficient transit, more walkways and bike lanes, energy efficient heating and cooling, and sensitivity to noise.
- Cities can use an integrated approach to implementation, by starting with simple solutions: win-win actions, with multiple benefits; engaging institution and stakeholders; setting out monitoring and measurement plans early; mainstreaming financial aspects of planning and integrating it into existing framework and operations, while tailoring message to different actors.
- Cities can use tax incentives to encourage buy-in services and show leadership by conducting sustainable public procurement practices to support the circular economy in creating a low carbon future.

Overall, participants expressed the importance of depoliticizing pollution and framing it in a broader context, emphasizing that it impacts everyone, especially citizens of low- and middle-income countries. The importance of engaging the public and marginalized communities in global environmental decision-making was noted. The significance of UNEA-3 in making a global case for action to address pollution and to inspire a greater political will to achieve a low carbon future was reaffirmed. Regional Representatives, Christian Ledwell and Michelle Wyman, are looking forward to sharing the perspectives and lessons learned from North America with stakeholders at the UNEA-3.

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