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

**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United  
Nations Environment Programme**  
**137th meeting**  
Nairobi, 19 January 2017

**Draft minutes of the 136th meeting of the Committee of  
Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment  
Programme, held on 29 September 2016**

**Agenda item 1**

**Opening of the meeting**

1. The meeting was opened at 9.40 a.m. on Thursday, 29 September 2016, by Ms. Julia Pataki, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP.

The meeting was attended by 94 participants representing 60 members, and 4 participants representing 2 observers, 1 participant from other entities and 9 non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations. The representatives of Peru, Samoa and Singapore participated via videolink.

2. The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Committee: Mr. Salah Francis Elhamdi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Algeria; Mr. Martín Gómez Bustillo, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Argentina; Mr. Andrew Mariott, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia; Mr. Elman Abdullayev, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan; Ms. Sarah Hradecky, High Commissioner and Permanent Representative of Canada; Mr. Jamie Pennell, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada; Ms. Elizabeth Inés Taylor Jay, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Colombia; Ms. Marta E. Juárez Ruiz, Ambassador on Special Mission of Costa Rica; Ms. Miriam Beatrice Ott, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany; Mr. Yahel Vilan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Israel; Mr. Michael Baruch Baror, Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel; Mr. Jean-Marc Hoscheit, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Luxembourg; Mr. Uriel Norman R. Garibay, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Philippines; Mr. Abdullah Masoud M. AlQahtani, Second Secretary, Chargé d'Affaires and Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia; Mr. Bandar Mahdi S. Al Nadhi, Second Secretary, Head of Consular Affairs and Alternate Deputy Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia; Mr. Florian Gubler, Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland; and Mr. John Hamilton, Second Secretary and Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3. She bade farewell to the following departing members: Mr. Simon Anderson, First Secretary and Deputy Permanent Representative of Australia; Mr. David Angell, High Commissioner and Permanent Representative of Canada; Mr. Jamie Christoff, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada; Ms. Maria Eugenia Correa, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Colombia; Ms. Corinna Enders, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany; Mr. Nadav Peldman, Deputy Head of Mission and Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel; Mr. Abdelilah Benryane, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Morocco; Mr. Bayani V. Mangibin, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Philippines; Ms. Kataryna Jaworowska, Chargé d'Affaires and

Permanent Representative of Poland; Mr. Ali A. Al Othman, Counsellor and Acting Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia; Mr. Mirko Giuliatti, Deputy Permanent Representative of Switzerland; Mr. Stephen Burns, Second Secretary and Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; Mr. John Michael Haule, High Commissioner and Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania; and Mr. Tobias Glucksman, Permanent Representative of the United States of America.

### **Election to replace a departing member of the Bureau**

4. Following the departure of Ms. Corinna Enders, the members of the group of Western European and other States nominated Mr. Toni Sandell, Deputy Permanent Representative of Finland, for the office of Rapporteur of the Bureau.

5. Mr. Sandell was elected as Rapporteur of the Bureau by acclamation.

### **Agenda item 2**

#### **Adoption of the agenda**

6. The agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/136/2).

### **Agenda item 3**

#### **Adoption of the draft minutes of the previous meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives**

7. The Committee adopted the minutes of its 134th meeting, held on 3 May 2016, and the minutes of its 135th meeting, held on 14 June 2016, on the basis of the draft minutes (UNEP/CPR/135/2) and (UNEP/CPR/136/3), respectively.

### **Agenda item 4**

#### **Report of the Executive Director**

8. In his oral briefing, the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Erik Solheim, drew attention to a number of activities undertaken by UNEP, as well as developments of significance to the Programme, since the previous meeting of the Committee. He subsequently drew attention to his written report, entitled “Executive Director’s update to the Committee of Permanent Representatives”, noting that it would be made available on the dedicated portal of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

9. With regard to recent developments, the most important event had been the release of a joint declaration by the Presidents of China and the United States of America, during the Group of Twenty Summit held on 4 and 5 September 2016 in Hangzhou, China, announcing that both countries would ratify the Paris Agreement on climate change. With this announcement by the leaders of the world’s two largest greenhouse gas emitters and the acceleration of the ratification process in a large number of countries, it was expected that the Paris Agreement would enter into force in 2016.

10. Another significant event had been the adoption by the Group of Twenty at the Hangzhou Summit of the “G20 Leaders’ Communiqué: Huangzhou Summit” in which it had recognized that there was a need to scale up green financing and welcomed the “G20 green finance synthesis report”, which had been submitted by the UNEP-supported G20 Green Finance Study Group. Encouraging Committee members to read the report, he said that green finance had been a central theme of the Hangzhou Summit in part thanks to the work of UNEP, which, through its Finance Initiative and its Inquiry into the Design of a Sustainable Financial System, had engaged with the Chinese Presidency of the Group of Twenty and with key stakeholders in the financial sector in the lead-up to the Summit.

Side events on green finance had been held during the seventy-first session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. UNEP work on green finance had been hugely successful, with the issue being discussed by major international financial institutions, and UNEP would continue to increase its work in the field in order to reach a wider audience and achieve its objective of transforming the global economic structure to make global capitalism green, inclusive and responsible.

11. Lastly, the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Mr. John Kerry, had hosted a major conference on oceans, entitled “Our Ocean Conference”, in Washington, D.C., on 15 and 16 September 2016, during which he and Mr. Barack Obama, President of the United States, had drawn attention to the importance of conserving the oceans and many countries had pledged to create new marine protected areas. A series of conferences on oceans were planned for 2017, including in Malta and New York. A major task for Ms. Lisa Svensson (Sweden) UNEP’s new Coordinator of the

Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Branch was discuss with Member States the role that UNEP could play in terms of oceans.

12. With regard to its own activities, UNEP had signed an agreement with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to fight environmental crime, and had also signed agreements with Belgium, the Netherlands and the United States Environmental Protection Agency. The Government of Canada had agreed to host World Environment Day in Canada in 2017. Members were encouraged to propose a theme for the event.

13. At the seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, which was taking place in Johannesburg, South Africa, UNEP was providing a platform to enable African countries to discuss and develop a common approach to elephant conservation. While all the countries implicated wanted to achieve the goal of elephant conservation, views differed with regard to which method should be used to that end, with some countries favouring a protection approach and others a sustainable use approach to conservation.

14. As for other species, progress had been made in some areas, for instance with regard to the panda, which had been moved from “endangered” to “vulnerable” on the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, but news was not so encouraging for great apes or other large mammals. He urged stakeholders to remain alert and develop a common approach to deal with both the supply and demand of wildlife products. The Chinese Government had ramped up its efforts to combat the illegal trade in wildlife and had made available to UNEP a very large commercial space at the Beijing Capital International Airport for an exhibition aimed at raising awareness about the issue. This was a much-appreciated in-kind contribution.

15. Stressing that the location of UNEP headquarters in Africa was one of its strengths given that Africa was the fastest growing continent, he said that two of his first missions as Executive Director had been to Ethiopia and Côte d’Ivoire. The Prime Ministers of both countries had expressed concern about air pollution in their countries. The Prime Minister of Ethiopia had asked UNEP to support his Government’s efforts to develop regulations to deal with the huge challenge of chemicals and waste, while the Prime Minister of Côte d’Ivoire had highlighted concerns about significant land loss in his country due to sea-level rise and pollution in Abidjan’s Ebriée Lagoon. In Côte d’Ivoire, the Executive Director and the Prime Minister visited Banco Forest, which is one of the largest urban parks in the world and launched the Banco Forest Project.

16. In October 2016, he planned to visit Argentina and Colombia. The President of Colombia had asked UNEP to explore how it could support the reconstruction of the country following the adoption of the Peace Accord between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, which would be the subject of a referendum on 2 October 2016.

17. In addition to attending several international conferences, he and the Deputy Executive Director, Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, had held meetings with all the regional groups to gather their opinions on a range of issues, including two key matters. The first was his plan to intensify UNEP engagement with the business sector, including by signing agreements with companies that were at the forefront of sustainability in Asia, Africa and Latin America; in line with this approach, UNEP had recently signed an agreement with China’s Ant Financial, the world’s largest financial technology company, and was working on potential agreements with Ethiopian Airlines and Kenya Airways. The second issue was his plan to simplify the language used by UNEP, including by avoiding the use of acronyms, by referring to UNEP as “UN Environment”, and by renaming its divisions to use simple names, such as the “Law”, “Economics” and “Ecosystems” divisions. Stressing that such changes were not intended to change the legal structure of UNEP, he said that they were needed because the Sustainable Development Goals could not be achieved without the active participation of all citizens. UNEP should therefore use a language that the general population, and especially those who did not work in the field of the environment, could understand.

18. In closing, he drew attention to the upcoming Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, to be held in Kigali from 10 to 15 October 2016, during which the parties would have the opportunity to adopt an historic agreement to address hydrofluorocarbons, potent greenhouse gases, under the Protocol. Stressing that the Montreal Protocol had been hugely successful not only by contributing to the recovery of the ozone layer but also by preventing two million cases of skin cancer annually and significantly mitigating climate change, he urged Member States to reach a significant deal in Kigali.

19. In the ensuing discussion, representatives expressed appreciation to the Executive Director for his oral briefing and extended him a warm welcome as the new head of UNEP. Several representatives

requested that he continue with the practice of submitting written reports on UNEP activities to the Committee at its quarterly meetings in addition to providing oral reports on such activities.

20. Regarding the meetings held with the regional and political groupings, one representative speaking on behalf of a group of countries said that he had been encouraged to learn about plans to improve the visibility of UNEP and the impact of the Environment Assembly and to reach out to a wider community of stakeholders. One representative said that her country would support UNEP efforts to engage with the private sector, as it shared the Executive Director's conviction that meaningful cooperation with that sector was key to comprehensively and effectively addressing global environmental challenges. Joined by several others, she further expressed support for plans to simplify the language used by UNEP in order to improve communication with the public thereby prompting behavioural change. One representative requested that the Secretariat draft a document setting out the proposed new names of the UNEP divisions, saying that he was reassured by the Executive Director's comment that the proposed changes were not intended to change the legal structure of UNEP, which, he said, would require approval by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

21. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed eagerness to further strengthen the group's relationship with UNEP, but suggested that UNEP could not effectively fulfill its mandate until paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), "The future we want", had been fully implemented. He said that much work remained to be done on strengthening the regional presence of UNEP and consolidating its headquarter functions in Nairobi.

22. With regard to green finance, one representative said it was thanks to UNEP leadership and expertise that issues such as the green economy and sustainable finance had reached circles far beyond the environmental community, such as the Group of Twenty. It was crucial to build on this success, she suggested, and ensure that the Environment Assembly became a forum that was closely watched by business and financial analysts and that set the pace for the implementation by Member States and the public of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

23. Several representatives made remarks concerning the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the session must be impactful and ensure that the resolutions adopted at the second session of the Assembly, which had linked the work of UNEP to the main international instruments adopted in 2015, were implemented and contributed to the operationalization of the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Another representative said that it was important that the session be thematically and strategically linked, and substantively contribute, to the Sustainable Development Goals review process of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. She further said that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offered a significant opportunity to push for long-term socioeconomic development within planetary boundaries, stressing that her country had witnessed how national reporting under the 2030 Agenda could trigger political changes at the national level, including the adoption of environmental policies that could be a powerful tool for the transformation of key economic sectors such as agriculture and transport.

24. With regard to the Environment Assembly, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that he attached great importance to the effective participation of all Member States, including those that were small and those that did not have permanent missions in Nairobi, in the preparatory work for sessions of the Assembly, in the sessions themselves, and in overseeing the implementation of the decisions and resolutions adopted by the Assembly. Such participation was critical to ensuring that the Assembly was indeed universal and that the results of its sessions were balanced and impactful. He said that he would continue to insist on the importance of improving and accelerating the translation of all the pre-session and post-session documents of the Environment Assembly in the six official languages of the United Nations, in accordance with rules 30, 64 and 65 of the Assembly's rules of procedure, which applied both to the Assembly and to its subsidiary organs. He requested the secretariat to be more actively involved in the translation of documents to ensure the accuracy of translations, stressing that errors compromised the Assembly's universality. Accurate interpretation during formal meetings of the Assembly was also essential to ensure equal participation by all representatives. In closing, he expressed support for the secretariat's plans to develop a new portal through which all Assembly documents, including resolutions and information on their implementation, would be made available in a single location, and to enable representatives who were not resident in Nairobi to participate by virtual means in the Committee's work.

25. One representative, speaking on behalf of another group of countries, requested the secretariat to provide regular reports to the Committee on progress in the implementation of the UNEP programme of work and the Environment Assembly resolutions. It was important that the Committee,

and not only the subcommittee, receive such reports in order to fulfil its mandate of reviewing, monitoring and assessing such matters. Another representative, also speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the Environment Assembly at its second session had given the Committee an increased role in monitoring the implementation of resolutions.

26. One representative of China commended the Executive Director's efforts to promote greater cooperation between UNEP and China, saying that his Government was committed to supporting South-South cooperation in the field of the environment and would contribute \$6 million to UNEP to support environmental protection in developing countries, in line with its Belt and Road Initiative, in addition to the \$6 million contribution it had announced during Rio+20. He expressed the conviction that under Mr. Solheim's leadership, China would have new opportunities to engage in the work of UNEP and this would serve the interest of all Member States and contribute significantly to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

27. The representative of Canada noted that her Government had gladly accepted to host the Environment Day celebrations in 2017, which she said would coincide with Canada's 150th birthday celebrations and present an opportunity to raise awareness and generate positive action for the environment and to increase the visibility and profile of UNEP as the global environmental authority.

28. Several representatives thanked Mr. Solheim for his past or planned visits to their countries. The representative of the United States expressed the hope that the resolutions relating to oceans adopted by the Environment Assembly at its second session and the oceans-related events scheduled for 2017 would help to advance the oceans agenda, and that representatives would urge their capitals to strive to reach agreement on hydrofluorocarbons under the Montreal Protocol.

29. The representative of Colombia thanked the Executive Director for his commitment to advancing environmental and post-conflict projects in her country and invited Member States to support UNEP efforts in the country at this critical juncture.

30. The representative of India said that her country would ratify the Paris Agreement on the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi – a great environmentalist – on 2 October 2016.

31. The Executive Director thanked the representatives for their comments. He encouraged members to write to him and set up meetings to raise issues of importance to their countries, saying that UNEP would respond to their queries and that he was open to discussing environmental and sustainable development matters with Government officials.

## **Agenda item 5**

### **Lessons learned from the United Nations Environment Assembly at its second session and way forward to the third session of the Environment Assembly**

32. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a document entitled "Lessons learned from UNEA-2 and way forward to UNEA-3", noting that she had prepared the document compiling in a concise manner the comments submitted by both resident and non-resident members of the Committee on lessons learned from the second session of the Environment Assembly and suggestions on how future Assembly sessions could be improved. Issues covered in the document included ways to improve the preparatory process in the lead-up to the third session of the Assembly; to strengthen the procedures and management of the third session; to improve transparency, ownership, inclusiveness and consensus-building in Assembly sessions; and to promote a dialogue between ministers during the session's high-level segment.

33. She said that the document would be further reviewed in the light of comments made by members in the Committee and the subcommittee. A revised version of the document could form the basis of recommendations to be produced by the bureaux of the Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives during a joint retreat to be held at the end of October 2016.

34. In the ensuing discussion, representatives expressed appreciation to the Chair for producing the document, which many said provided a good basis for discussion of how future sessions of the Environment Assembly could be improved.

35. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that he could not endorse the document in its current form, stressing that although it contained a large number of suggestions it did not reflect all the recommendations submitted by Member State and regional groups. He suggested that an open-ended working group tasked with analysing the lessons learned from the second session of the Assembly could be established to further discuss the document and the recommendations contained therein. He stressed the need to ensure a maximum of transparency and universality, including by dealing with translation-related issues, during the third session of the Assembly in order

to achieve balanced results during the session and maximize its impacts. Another representative suggested that the secretariat assess the various challenges identified in the document and determine which of them could be addressed in the lead-up to the third session of the Assembly, noting that a number of the challenges had budgetary implications.

36. Several representatives expressed their support for establishing a working group. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, endorsed the document as an input to the preparatory process.

37. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that there was a need to strengthen the procedures and governance of the Assembly, including through the provision of adequate legal advice and a review of the Assembly rules of procedure; improve communication between and convergence in the work of the bureaux of the Committee and the Assembly; guarantee transparency and consultations with regional and political groups in the selection of the chairs of the Committee of the Whole and working groups created during Assembly sessions; enhance the interactive nature and effectiveness of the high-level segment and ministerial dialogue; and facilitate the translation and early distribution of Assembly documents to all Member States. In order for member States to embark on their common journey towards sustainable development, the principles of universality and inclusiveness must be upheld and the work of UNEP must be aligned with the 2030 Agenda, he said.

38. Regarding the rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly, one representative said that there was no need to review the rules, suggesting that the secretariat develop a practical handbook of the rules to assist those who were new to the Assembly. Another representative said that while renegotiating the rules might not be productive, a legal review of the rules might be beneficial and should preferably be conducted by an external body to ensure its objectivity. A third expressed support for both a legal review and a handbook, as well as the conduct of orientation sessions on the rules for Nairobi-based representatives.

39. One representative said that there was a need to revise the voting rules of the Assembly in order to prevent a reoccurrence of the issue that had arisen during the closing plenary of the second session with regard to a draft resolution relating to the Gaza Strip. Practical and efficient measures were needed to help the State of Palestine to deal with the environmental challenges it faced in the occupied territories and he suggested that Committee members propose a way forward in that regard.

40. The representative of the State of Palestine requested that the document prepared by the Chair explicitly record the misinterpretation of the rules of procedure observed during the second session of the Assembly which had arisen in relation to a draft resolution on the Gaza Strip. The draft resolution had, he said, been supported by more than 120 Member States but its adoption had been sabotaged through an illegal vote and illegal action. He noted that, since the Assembly had not voted on the content of the said draft resolution, he expected it to be considered during the third session of the Assembly. He called on the Executive Director to help find a solution to deal with environmental damage in the Gaza Strip and in Palestine as a whole, noting that if UNEP provided assistance, consideration of the said resolution might no longer be required at the third session of the Assembly.

41. Several representatives, including two speaking on behalf of groups of countries, said that major achievements of the second session of the Environment Assembly included unprecedented levels of attendance by high-level participants and the adoption of twenty-five resolutions on major environmental issues of global concern, some of which covered new ground.

42. With regard to lessons learned, two representatives expressed regret that the session had not resulted in the adoption of a political declaration, with one expressing the hope that a spirit of compromise would enable the adoption of such a declaration at the third session and that the preparatory work would result in solutions and consensus-building on key logistical and substantive issues well before the start of the session. One representative expressed the hope that a high-level outcome document, which he suggested was the best way to set the environmental agenda, would be adopted by the Assembly at its third session. In the absence of such a document, however, a chair's summary should be produced. He expressed regret that no record of the high-level segment discussions at the second session had been produced.

43. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that there was a need to increase the visibility of the Environment Assembly and the impact of its work within the United Nations system and globally, and that the adoption of an outcome document at Assembly sessions would help to achieve that aim.

44. One representative said that two lessons learned from the second session were the need to follow a similar working structure for negotiating resolutions to that followed during the intersessional

period and to ensure the timely distribution of the final agreed version of all resolutions. Another representative said that there was a need to avoid repeating the situation that had occurred during the closing plenary of the second session, which, he claimed, had compromised the neutrality of the secretariat. Greater clarity and transparency was required with regard to the Environment Assembly's rules of procedure.

45. In respect of the preparatory process for the third session of the Assembly, one representative said that the bureaux of the Assembly and the Committee should work together to secure ownership of the process by Member States, including those that did not have representatives in Nairobi. Two representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that there was a need to increase transparency and clarify the roles of Committee members and their respective capitals in the preparation and negotiation of draft resolutions. One representative said that there was a need to better define the roles of the Committee and Environment Assembly bureau in the preparatory process.

46. One representative said that his Government would strongly support any efforts made by the President of the Assembly to reach an agreement on the stakeholder engagement policy at the third session of the Assembly.

47. Another representative suggested that, in preparation for the third session, consideration be given to the six challenges identified in the *UNEP Frontiers 2016 Report: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern*.

48. Several representatives expressed support for a more interactive high-level segment in which all countries were encouraged to participate, with two saying participation should not depend on rank. Another representative said that the session should not be a forum for political speeches but for discussions between top policymakers, experts and civil society leaders from around the world.

49. As for the theme of the third session, several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that it should be focused and relevant to the global community, further suggesting that the resolutions to be considered by the Assembly at a given session should be relevant to the theme of the session. Two representatives expressed support for developing criteria to guide the selection of session themes, which, said one, should not only be focused and globally relevant but also actionable, achievable and science-driven. Two representatives said that the third session should contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals review process and the meeting of the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development to be held from 10 to 19 July 2017.

50. With regard to the draft resolutions to be considered by the Assembly at its third session, several representatives suggested that they should be limited in number and concurred that they should be relevant to the theme of the session. One representative said that they should not follow up on the resolutions adopted at the second session given that a relatively short period of time would separate the second and third sessions. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, requested the secretariat to provide regular updates to the Committee on the implementation of Assembly resolutions and the UNEP programme of work, which he said was crucial in the context of preparing new Assembly resolutions.

51. Several representatives expressed support for the adoption of stricter deadlines for the submission of draft resolutions to enable adequate prior consultation among Member States on each draft resolution. One representative suggested that the current deadline be amended to between 8 and 12 weeks prior to the start of each session, in line with the rules of the governing bodies of other United Nations entities.

52. With regard to financial matters, one representative requested the Secretariat to provide to the subcommittee at its next meeting an update on current levels of funding and the status of fundraising efforts, as well as the expected impact, if any, of the third session on the UNEP programme of work and contingency fund.

53. One representative said that several participants from least developed countries whose participation in the second session had been financed by the secretariat had not been able to stay until the end of the session and this might have contributed to the lack of a quorum in the closing plenary. He suggested that, to the extent possible, the secretariat should ensure that flights were booked in such a way as to enable all delegates to participate fully in discussions prior to the closure of a session.

54. The Executive Director thanked members for their comments, saying that the secretariat had taken note of their remarks. Noting that he would send suggestions for possible themes for the third session to members in the near future, he encouraged them to consult with their capitals on proposed themes and themes that were of interest to them. A real interest from capitals was critical to the successful selection of an appropriate theme. The Bureau of the Environment Assembly was

responsible for selecting the theme, and he would encourage the Bureau to complete that task in 2016 in order to enable the secretariat to prepare and distribute pre-session documents early.

55. Regarding comments on the need to increase the visibility of the Assembly and its resolutions, the secretariat would increase its communication efforts to achieve that aim but might require additional resources to do so. With regard to translation, he said that UNEP took the issue very seriously and would do its best to communicate in all the official languages of the United Nations. He was planning a reduction in the number of publications produced by UNEP, partly in order to further improve their quality and also to ensure they could be made available in a greater variety of languages so as to reach a wider audience and have a greater impact around the world. Such efforts would also require additional resources, however, and he encouraged Member States to make and consider increasing their contributions to UNEP.

56. With regard to the high-level segment of Environment Assembly sessions, he said that the secretariat would make proposals and seek the advice of Member States on a format for the segment that would enable more interactive discussion to move the environmental agenda forward while also enabling ministers and other high-level officials, if they so wished, to deliver statements and make their positions known globally.

57. He rejected suggestions that the secretariat had not been impartial during the closing plenary of the second session of the Environment Assembly, stressing that the secretariat had done its best to interpret the rules of procedure and would seek proper legal advice, including from United Nations Headquarters, in order to improve the functioning of future sessions of the Assembly. He said that he had met with the representatives of Israel and Palestine and made it clear that UNEP stood ready to provide technical expertise and assistance to both in addressing environmental challenges, including in Gaza and the West Bank. In closing, he said that while many conflicts had important environmental components and UNEP was willing to provide environmental knowledge and expertise in the context of conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts, neither UNEP nor the Environment Assembly should be used as a platform for addressing peace, security and political issues, which should be referred to the General Assembly of the United Nations, the United Nations Security Council and other appropriate forums.

58. The Committee agreed to establish an informal working group to begin discussing the recommendations contained in the Chair's document and identify recommendations that could feasibly be implemented over the following year. A revised version of the document would be presented to the bureaux of the Environment Assembly and the Committee at their joint retreat.

## **Agenda item 6**

### **Other matters**

59. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic drew attention to a report on makeshift refineries with major health and environment implications in his country entitled "Scorched earth and charred lives".

60. The representative of the Holy See welcomed the Executive Director to Nairobi and his plans to speak more directly to global citizens in support of the environment.

## **Agenda item 7**

### **Closure of the meeting**

61. The meeting was declared closed at 12.25 p.m. on Thursday, 29 September 2016.

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