



UNITED NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY:
A GUIDANCE DOCUMENT FOR
ANIMAL PROTECTION
ORGANIZATIONS

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Introduction

World Animal Net (WAN) received accreditation as an observer to the Governing Body of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in August 2017. Then, in December 2017, we attended the United National Environment Assembly (UNEA) for the first time, after having played an active role in civil society engagement leading up to the event. WAN was one of just three animal protection organizations to do so, with Compassion in World Farming joining our delegation, and the Africa Network for Animal Welfare (ANAW) also attending part of UNEA.

At the time of writing, there are only three other Animal Protection Organizations (APOs) with UNEP accreditation in addition to WAN, these are: ANAW; International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW); and World Animal Protection. However, it is much easier to obtain UNEP accreditation than consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and there is also an opportunity for non-accredited organizations to engage in certain UNEA preparations and side events, which are organized by various stakeholders and typically consist of a panel of speakers covering a specific topic with time for questions from the audience.

UNEA is the world's leading environmental authority for the global environmental agenda, and there are frequent discussions of issues impacting animal protection interests. While UNEA is a relatively new process, it is an important one strategically. Its influence will also continue to develop, as it is given greater voice and influence as the environmental pillar of sustainable development, and evolves its strategic overview for a number of environmental conventions.

Thus, we feel that it would be worthwhile for more animal protection organizations to engage with UNEA in order to influence any matters affecting animals and their interests. However, this is a complex process, so we decided to prepare a guidance document on engagement and advocacy in this forum, as we have already done for the UN's High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

We hope that the document will be useful for you and your organization as you embark on UNEA advocacy, and look forward to working with you to be a voice for animals at the UNEP.

Basics

What is the United Nations Environment Programme?

The [United Nations Environment Programme](#) (UNEP or UN Environment) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.

UNEP's mission is to “provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations” and is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya.

What is the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)?

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) is a result of the call made by world leaders at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Brazil in June 2012, to strengthen and upgrade UNEP.

UNEA is the governing body of UNEP. UNEA sets the global environmental agenda and is mandated to take strategic decisions on environmental sustainability issues, particularly in terms of addressing emerging environmental challenges; providing political guidance in the work of UNEP; and promoting a strong science-policy interface. It is convened once every two years.

The first UNEA (UNEA 1) was held in 23-27 June 2014 in Nairobi Kenya, and was attended by over 1,065 participants, including 163 Member States and 113 Ministers. During the assembly, calls for international action on major environmental issues were made, including combating illegal wildlife trade, plastic debris in the oceans, chemicals, waste and air pollution. UNEA 1 resolutions and decisions can be found [here](#).

The second UNEA (UNEA2) took place from 23-27 May 2016 in Nairobi, Kenya. The meeting brought together over 2500 delegates ranging from current and former heads of states, Environment Ministers from 174 countries, heads of UN organizations, representatives of the private sector and participants from Major Groups and Stakeholders. The theme was “Healthy Environment, Healthy People,” supported by a Global Thematic Report, and there were several roundtables and a first time ever multi-stakeholder dialogue with civil society leaders on ‘Restoring and Sustaining Healthy Ecosystems for People and Planet: Partnerships to jointly Deliver on the Environmental Dimension of Agenda 2030.’ There were 25 resolutions approved covering a wide range of environmental issues, including one on the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products and one on mainstreaming of biodiversity for well-being. Relevant documents can be found [here](#).

The third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-3) took place from 4-6 December 2017 at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, Kenya, under the overall theme “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet.” Over 4,300 delegates participated in UNEA-3 and its related events, including 1,197 delegates from more than 170 Member States, 711 representatives of Major Groups and other stakeholders, and 94 intergovernmental organizations. Three decisions, 11 resolutions and a Ministerial Declaration were agreed at UNEA 3.

Relevant documents can be found [here](#).

UNEA also has a subsidiary inter-sessional body, the [Committee of Permanent Representatives](#) (CPR), which discusses UNEP's latest activities and organizes Open-Ended Meetings (OECPR) – which function as preparatory meetings for UNEA, subcommittee meetings, and others including briefings and

thematic debates. These meetings generally permit the participation of accredited organizations, and the submission of written and oral inputs unless the CPR determines otherwise. There is an overview of the different types of meetings [here](#).

Components of UNEA

Several associated events took place in the week ahead of UNEA 3. The major events were:

27-28 November: The civil society-hosted [Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum](#), which facilitates the participation of civil society in the Environment Assembly.

29 November - 1 December: The third open-ended meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Member States representatives based in Nairobi), to prepare for UNEA and progress relevant documents.

2 - 3 December: [The UN Global Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment](#), under the banner “Science for Green Solutions.”

3-6 December: A [Sustainable Innovation Expo](#) in the margins of the Assembly.

3 December: The [Environment Management Group Nexus Dialogue on pollution, cities and health](#) co-hosted by the United Nations Environment Management Group, UN Environment, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

UNEA 3 also launched interactive Leadership Dialogues, to provide participants with an opportunity for high-level engagement and discussion on how to achieve a pollution-free planet. Plus, there were many interesting side events staged in the civil society “Green Tent,” including presentations from the Lancet Commission on Pollution and Health, the Global Pact for the Environment, and informative training/information sessions from the Stakeholder Forum.

These components can evolve each year, but they are an indicator of the type and range of events which take place at and around UNEA.

There is a full schedule of events for UNEA 3 [here](#).

Links to Wider UN System

UNEA has formal links to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and also has an interface with the wider institutional framework for sustainable development, including interlinkages with the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and UNGA through the Second Committee. The outcomes of UNEA are compiled into a report presenting proceedings, submitted to ECOSOC, and UNEA President reports on the outcome of UNEA to sessions of the HLPF. UNEA can recommend draft resolutions for adoption at the UN General Assembly for UN system-wide implementation, and contributes substantively to intergovernmental processes and negotiations of the United Nations, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 development agenda.

How Can Civil Society and Animal Protection Organizations (APOs) Engage with UNEA?

UNEP Accreditation

In order for stakeholders to participate fully in the work and governance of UNEP, they must be accredited to UNEP. Non-governmental organizations must successfully meet the requirements of the accreditation process before being granted with observer status to UNEA and its subsidiary organs.

Organizations that are accredited to other UN Bodies, such as ECOSOC, will still need UNEP accreditation.

As was pointed out above, there are currently few APOs with accreditation at UNEP. Yet applying for accreditation with UNEP is a far simpler process than applying for status with ECOSOC, and can be completed on a rolling basis (with no annual deadline). Applicants must be international non-governmental organizations having an interest in the field of the environment,

Accreditation will grant your organization consultative status at UNEP, within the [rules of procedure](#) of the [UN Environment Assembly](#). This will give you the following rights.

In the run-up to UNEA:

- Receive unedited working documents of UNEA first-hand and at the same time as the CPR.
- Submit to the UNEP Secretariat written contributions to these unedited working documents which will then be distributed to Governments.

During UNEA sessions:

- To attend the plenary, the Committee of the Whole and the Ministerial Consultations as observers.
- To circulate written statements to Governments through the UNEP secretariat.
- To make oral statements during the discussions of UNEA at the invitation of the chairperson.

There is more about modalities (procedures) of accreditation [here](#).

And a link to the Accreditation Application [here](#).

WAN would be pleased to advise any APOs wishing to seek accreditation.

Working with UNEP

UNEP works with civil society in three different forms of partnerships:

- [Participating and engaging in international environmental policy](#)
- [Providing scientific and technical expertise](#)
- [Implementing and executing projects and programs](#)

Principles of Engagement

UNEP is guided by the following principles in terms of stakeholder engagement:

- Acknowledgement of the intergovernmental nature of UNEP processes: decision-making within UNEP remains the prerogative of Member States;
- Participation in decision-making processes: In line with the Rules of Procedures, UNEP will grant participation and access privileges to all accredited stakeholders;
- Access to information: acknowledging the critical importance of disseminating and making accessible information concerning UNEP's work or information generated through its program as widely as possible;
- Transparency and accountability for mutual benefit: engagement with Major Groups and Stakeholders is based on the premise of mutual trust and benefit, transparency, responsibility and accountability;
- Respect for diversity of views and self-organization: UNEP acknowledges the diversity of views among its stakeholders and, in striving for greater openness and with a view to embracing the full spectrum of civil society actors, including the UNEP national committees, will ensure that those differing voices are heard, including those outside the nine Major Groups;

- Improvements to current engagement practices: UNEP will promote continuous improvement of its current practices.

Stakeholder Engagement Handbook

There is a full Stakeholder Engagement Handbook [here](#). This is due to be revised at the time of writing.

The Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGS) System

UNEP uses the term “Major Groups and Stakeholders” (MGS) to address broader civil society. There is more about their relationship with MGS [here](#).

This is based on a similar system to that used at the UN’S Higher Level Political Forum (HLPF). However, it is important to note that although the same nine major groups are active within both the HLPF and UNEP nominally, the organizational structure and leadership may not be the same. For example, there is not currently any formal connection between the NGO Major Group active at UNEP with the NGO Major Group active at the HLPF. On the other hand, the Women’s Major Group active at UNEP is indeed the same as that which is active at HLPF. The Major Group system was developed at the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development in [Agenda 21](#), and was reaffirmed at the Rio +20 conference in 2012. The Major Groups and Stakeholders system is comprised of nine original major groups:

- Women
- Children and Youth
- Indigenous Peoples
- Non-Governmental Organizations
- Local Authorities
- Workers and Trade Unions
- Business and Industry
- Scientific and Technological Community
- Farmers

However, some additional stakeholder groups have been added because their interests were not adequately represented in the nine Major Groups. These new groups are identified as “Stakeholders” rather than “Major Groups.” New stakeholder groups include a stakeholder group for the aging, the disabled, volunteers and others.

WAN is a member of two of the UN Major Groups – the NGO Major Group and the Women’s Major Group. When Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) joined WAN at UNEA, they took part in the Farmers Major Group. Each of these Major Groups has proved to be sympathetic to APO concerns and willing to accommodate these where possible.

In 1999, UNEP created a Major Group & NGOs Unit in its Policy Branch to provide [Major Groups](#) with the opportunity for broad participation in environmental decision-making. By creating the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch in 2004, UNEP continued to support participation of Major Groups and other Stakeholders in its work. According to its mandate, the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch engages with organized constituents such as not-for-profit organizations, networks and associations in contrast to single businesses or individuals. The unit can be contacted [here](#).

Meetings Leading up to UNEA

There are various types of meetings/forums that feed into UNEA ahead of the actual meeting. These change for each UNEA, but an early indication of key meetings in the lead up to UNEA 4 is given in this [roadmap](#).

The theme of UNEA 4 is due to be decided by end March 2018. This will determine which of these meetings will be most influential to UNEA 4.

[Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives \(CPR\)](#)

As explained above, the CPR organizes Open-Ended Committee meetings (OECPR) which prepare the agenda and documents for UNEA. There is an overview of their work [here](#).

Accredited organizations are usually allowed to attend their meetings and submit written and oral inputs.

It may also be possible for APOs to influence the position of their national member of the CPR through advocacy with their government.

[Major Groups and Stakeholders](#)

The Global Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum ([GMGSF](#)) takes place every two years prior to UNEA and is the main entry point for civil society participation at the highest level of UNEP and serves as a MGS preparatory meeting to UNEA. It takes place before the OECPR, and is self-organized by the Major Groups through the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, and facilitated by the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch of UNEP.

The Forum benefits from the outcomes of the Regional Consultative Meetings, which in turn provide MGS inputs for UNEA. The GMGSF seeks to facilitate civil society participation in the Assembly and associated meetings, identifies important themes and decisions under consideration by UNEA, and provides a platform for an exchange of views and expertise on these themes between governments and civil society. Traditionally, the Forum also features an open dialogue between UNEP's Executive Director and MGS ahead of UNEA.

Dependent on available funding, the participation of members of the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, Regional Representatives, speakers and resource persons, and MGS from developing countries can be financially supported by UNEP.

[Regional Consultations](#)

UNEP has six regional offices: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and West Asia. As MGS organizations work at national and regional levels they are well placed to work in co-operation with the regional offices.

The above-mentioned GMGSF is built through six Regional Consultative Meetings (RCMs), of which there is one per UNEP region. Representatives of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are invited to two to three-day consultation meetings in each region, three to four months prior to the GMGSF. Each region engages in a substantive dialogue on environmental issues that will be discussed during the next UNEA and produces a regional statement. Around 300 representatives are involved in the process at the regional level.

The RCMs constitute the main platform for the Major Groups to engage with the Regional Offices of UNEP. While allowing MGS to prepare for UNEA, RCMs also serve as capacity-building and networking exercises for the Major Groups in the regions. The RCMs are organized under the responsibility of the Regional Offices and held, whenever possible, prior to, or in conjunction with, relevant major regional meetings, events or fora. The choice of the date, the setting of the agenda and the selection of organizations to be invited to the RCMs is the responsibility of the Regional Offices. MGS assist the Regional Offices in organizing the meetings. All organizations that are accredited to UNEP are invited to the RCM of their respective region, but invitations do not have to be limited to accredited organizations.

At the RCMs, two representatives for each UNEP region are elected. These regional representatives serve a one-year term as observers on the [Major Groups Facilitating Committee](#) and also participate in the GMGSF.

Civil Society Space

Shrinking civil society space is a constant concern and ongoing advocacy theme. At UNEA 3, budgets for attendance of civil society were slashed. Meaningful engagement at the official parts of UNEA can be problematic, and speaking slots for MGS limited, and often dependent upon the goodwill of the session Chair. While it is theoretically possible for accredited organizations to speak at UNEA sessions, in practice such opportunities appear to be given to MGS.

Conversely, the influence of business appears to be growing as it has the ability to provide funding towards meetings. An example of this is the addition of business to the Science-Policy-Business Forum, and the pro-business stance of the agenda and panel selection.

Advocacy Opportunities Leading Up to UNEA

General

The background above gives some avenues for advocacy in the lead-up to UNEA. There are clearly more opportunities open to organizations accredited to UNEP – including attending CPR meetings and providing written and (sometimes) oral comments. Therefore, we recommend that any eligible APO wanting to advocate at UNEA obtains accreditation. However, even without accreditation it should be possible to advocate through national governments, MGS, UNEP regional offices/consultations and attending some of the open meetings/conferences which lead up to UNEA (as in the roadmap).

However, in order to prioritise advocacy in a way which affects outcomes, as opposed to just proceedings, it is necessary to understand the relative importance of UNEA outputs. These may also vary from UNEA to UNEA, but for UNEA 3 they included the following:

[A political declaration on pollution](#), linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, to signal that humanity can work together to eliminate the threat of pollution and the destruction of our planet.

[Resolutions and decisions](#) adopted by Member States to address specific dimensions of pollution.

[Voluntary commitments](#) by Governments, private sector entities and civil society organizations to clean up the planet.

[The #BeatPollution Pledge](#), a collection of individual commitments to clean up the planet

The last two – voluntary commitments by governments and individuals – were simply web-based pledges; akin to goodwill gestures.

The political declaration (Ministerial Declaration) was initiated by the President of the Assembly, Dr. Edgar Guttierrez-Espeleta, Minister of Environment and Energy of Costa Rica. The main objective of this was to develop in a transparent and inclusive manner a joint vision and achievable actions to address pollution at a global scale. However, with an aspirational rather than operational tone, its major contribution was probably to generate a little more political will and commitment to action.

The most concrete outputs were the resolutions and decisions, which mainly related to specific actions needed to address significant thematic (pollution in the case of UNEA 3) issues. These were proposed by certain member states, or groups of member states, and carefully drafted in the CPR and working meetings at UNEA. Resolution working groups were, in theory, open to accredited organizations. However, some rooms were very small, and Member State participation was prioritized.

The report of the Executive Director on the theme – “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet” was the key backing document for UNEA. This would have, in turn, influenced the political declaration and resolutions.

Some possibilities on avenues to influence the political declaration, resolutions and decisions are given below.

Resolutions

- *Targeted research/reports and related advocacy (for example, the Lancet Commission report on pollution and health was very influential. This was publicized well before UNEA, and promoted at UNEA through a side event, stand and advocacy).*
- *Proactive advocacy on desired resolutions (research, advocacy with sympathetic governments/regional groupings, through relevant meetings/conferences etc.).*

- *Proactive advocacy leading to influence at regional consultation meetings.*
- *Advocacy on contents once drafted (e.g. through governments, CPR, meetings/conferences).*
- *Direct comments/positions - from accredited organizations.*
- *Contribution to comments/positions of Major Groups.*
- *Formation of alliance on priority issue (for example, alliances against plastics and fertilizers were influential at UNEA 3).*

Political Declaration

- *The advocacy possibilities for the political declaration are the same as for the Resolutions above. Early influence is necessary to make any difference. It is also less likely to be able to influence the Declaration through targeted research or to include any far-reaching suggestions.*

Advocacy Opportunities at UNEA

Accredited APO Input

Only accredited APOs are allowed to attend the UNEA Plenary, Committee of the Whole and Ministerial Consultations (the decision-making parts of UNEA). Although in theory accredited organizations are also permitted to circulate written statements to Governments through the UNEP secretariat and to make oral statements at the invitation of the chairperson, in practice MGS are prioritized over individual organizations (and as time is usually overrun and MGS are last to be called after country delegations, there is frequently no time left). Thus, the opportunities for accredited APOs to input directly in UNEA plenary meetings in ways that will directly influence key outcomes is limited.

Advocacy Opportunities

This means that the main ways in which APOs will be able to advocate at UNEA are:

- *Through Major Groups (for example, supporting drafting, positions, statements etc. Including offering spokesperson for Major Groups in area of expertise).*
- *Attending and contributing expertise to working groups.*
- *Side Events: Organizing a side event on a key theme (taking care with timing and promotion to ensure participation) or attending other side events and sharing advocacy messages.*
- *At breakfast meetings (such as the Women Ministers meeting, as part of Women's Major Group delegation).*
- *Individual meetings with country or regional representatives or delegations.*
- *As part of Major Group meetings with country or regional representatives or delegations.*
- *Targeted advocacy at relevant meetings, such as the Science-Policy-Business Forum and Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues.*

Prioritizing Inputs

The priority should be meetings that feed directly into UNEA, such as those working on draft resolutions and the various UNEA official meetings (the plenary, the Committee of the Whole and the Ministerial Consultations). Similarly, any position statements should be designed to feed into desired outcomes, rather than just be general grievances or case studies with no associated "ask." However, where there are important fundamental root causes to problems – structural and systemic barriers – then these should be "outed" wherever possible. While they may be too major or too political to expect immediate action, the repeated reference to these may lead to recognition and acceptance over time, and ignoring them will not solve fundamental problems.

Key Objectives for the Animal Protection Movement at UNEA

Why Advocate for Animals at UNEA?

UNEA is the world's highest leading environmental authority for the global environmental agenda, and there are frequent discussions of issues impacting animal protection interests. Key areas where UNEP's work intersects with animal protection interests include wildlife trade, biodiversity and ecosystems, climate change and the environmental impact of animal production/consumption, seas and oceans, pollution, and environmental legislation.

While UNEA is a relatively new process, it is an important one strategically. UNEP is heavily involved in work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly as regards consumption (as production falls under the remit of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). A 2010 [UNEP report](#) assessing the environmental impacts of consumption and production includes food impacts. Section 6.4. of the report, which deals with consumption clusters which contribute substantially to total environmental pressures, begins with food, outlining some of the environmental and resource implications of fisheries and animal products. The conclusions include: "A substantial reduction of impacts would only be possible with a substantial worldwide diet change, away from animal products."

As regards wildlife, UNEP has developed a "[Wild for Life](#)" campaign against wildlife crime. Countries around the world, the UN, many other international and national organizations, businesses, governments and key opinion leaders are working together to raise awareness, enact and enforce stronger laws, and step up support to local communities' efforts to stop the illegal trade in wildlife. The [Great Ape Survival Partnership \(GRASP\)](#) also includes some animal welfare-related aspects.

Although UNEP is leading internationally on environmental matters, it does not specifically include animal welfare in its remit. However, it does have an interest in animal welfare, and in 2017 partnered with ANAW to host an African Animal Welfare Conference. This gives hope that there is scope to influence its programs in favor of animal welfare.

Status of Animals in UNEP

UNEP currently deals with animals primarily in a conservation context. See above for more information on areas of intersection between UNEP's work and animal protection interests. However, there is no indication that UNEP is considering bringing animal protection/animal welfare into its sphere of activity in the near future.

Immediate Goals

- Influence subject of next UNEA
- Depending on theme for next UNEA, maximize animal protection opportunities through targeted, proactive advocacy.
- Research and briefings for next UNEA.
- Ensure that more APOs gain accreditation with UNEA.
- Involve more APOs in UNEA advocacy and Major Groups membership/influence.
- Ensure effective coordination/collaboration of APOs advocacy for UNEA.
- Consider extending Animal Issue Thematic Cluster within the HLPF's NGO Major Group to cover UNEA once this has been well established and active within the NGO Major Group and at the HLPF.

- Influence/contribute to Major Groups positions, ensuring that these cover animal protection issues effectively.
- Take advantage of advocacy opportunities with UNEP, such as: more APOs to join the [Wild for Life](#) campaign as collaborators; advocacy opportunities through climate change and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, and advocacy/collaboration in the field of biodiversity/wildlife.
- Ensure that UNEP influence includes sustainable consumption aspects which favor APO issues.

Long-Term Goals

- Influence the development of more animal welfare/protection considerations and coverage within UNEP/UNEA.
- Ensure that UNEP includes animal welfare/protection issues within its remit.
- Develop a body of APO representation within UNEA, and a dedicated animal issue cluster/stakeholders group for UNEA.
- Through coordinated animal welfare/protection advocacy influence the conservation/sustainable use policies of UNEP, ensuring that these are changed to recognize animal sentience and animal welfare, as opposed to just conservation aspects.

Acronyms

ANAW - Africa Network for Animal Welfare

APOs – Animal Protection Organizations

CIWF – Compassion in World Farming

CPR - Committee of Permanent Representatives

CSOs - Civil Society Organizations

ECOSOC – Economic and Social Council (of the UN)

GMGSF - The Global Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum

HLPF – Higher Level Political Forum (of the UN)

MGS - Major Groups and Stakeholders (of the UN)

OECPR - Open-Ended Meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

RCMs - Regional Consultative Meetings

SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals

UN – United Nations

UNEA - United Nations Environment Assembly

UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme (sometimes also referred to as UN Environment)

UNGA - UN General Assembly

WAN – World Animal Net