

**Subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the UNEP  
(Online meeting, 2 July 2020)**

**Agenda item 2. Preparations for UNEA5**

*Comments by the European Union and its Member States*

- The EU and its Member States wish to thank UNEP for submitting the note on the preparations for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. In our view, the document provides an excellent basis for discussion addresses pertinent questions and makes a number of meaningful proposals that can inform our deliberations.

On "The UNEA-5 theme in the context of the response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic":

- The current pandemic and its subsequent social and economic impact is unprecedented in our modern times in terms of its rapid pace, its global scale and the challenge it constitutes for our collective recovery. Also unprecedented, are the actions, which have been taken in response by governments and stakeholders worldwide thus far.
- While we currently struggle with the immediate effects of the pandemic and the emergency response in the short term, international cooperation and solidarity remain indispensable and absolutely necessary if we wish to make a more successful and green recovery from this global crisis. Despite the quick initial governmental and market reactions, it is now of the utmost importance to keep a cool head and begin with careful, deliberate and meaningful planning of a medium- and long-term policy response.
- In the words of the Secretary-General: "We all know what we need to do. It is laid out in the global roadmap for the future – the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change", as well as other multilateral frameworks, in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Against this backdrop, the EU and its Member States welcome that the note establishes a strong link to the current developments and identifies opportunities for a balanced UNEA5 narrative. Alignment to both the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreements is a key step in this regard. The focus and the desired outcomes to be aspired to under the UNEA5 theme must therefore flexibly adapt to the new policy context and embrace the new reality presenting the green agenda as an opportunity to deliver as part of the "building back better and greener" after the crisis.
- In this context, placing natural capital at the centre of solutions with the need to leverage innovation and sustainable consumption and production patterns will be key to ensuring a successful sustainable green recovery. UNEP and UNEA play a vital role in many areas that are relevant to the success of sustainable and green recovery, including addressing the root causes of zoonotic diseases, such as destruction and fragmentation of natural habitats. It will

be crucial to position UNEA5 within the broader global climate, environment and biodiversity agendas. UNEA5 should seek synergies and broadly support other global environment related processes taking place in 2021, notably the Climate, Biodiversity, Chemicals & Waste COPs and the Food Systems Summit as well as the kick-off of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

- Key cross cutting elements should be:
  - to promote sustainable consumption and production, and phasing out unsustainable practices
  - Engaging and enabling actors and stakeholders, including by raising their knowledge and awareness, to enhance the knowledge and awareness necessary for effective action and acceptance of changes.

On “UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategy for 2022-2025 as a main outcome to support Member States in “shifting the needle” on the environmental dimension of sustainable development”:

- The EU and its Member States agree that the new Medium Term Strategy is a critically important element for ensuring that UNEP adequately and effectively contributes to the global transformation towards sustainable development, systematically taking into account current global developments. In doing so, the MTS will also have to meaningfully bridge the operationalisation and implementation of political decisions taken at UNEA5, including past UNEAs, on the one hand and accommodate new and emerging trends on the other. The adoption of the MTS will be a key part of UNEA5.
- UNEP’s active involvement and environmental leadership in the UN System and the ongoing Reforms continue to be crucial for implementing the MTS and for ensuring mainstreaming of environment and implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda. We also look forward to a MTS that mainstreams gender, indigenous peoples and local communities’ issues across all programmes, where relevant.
- This is why the process of drafting the MTS is a key priority for the EU and its Member States and has to move forward as soon as possible in a transparent and inclusive manner, despite the difficult challenge that COVID-19 constitutes for us all in terms of working methods.
- In this context, the EU and its Member States would also like to thank UNEP for the opportunity to engage in a first exchange on the MTS in the context of the “interactive discovery tours” envisaged by the Secretariat for 5, 11 and 13 May.

On “Action areas where UNEA-5 can contribute to strengthen actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”:

- The EU and its Member States wish to thank UNEP for proposing the four transformative action areas, which we find well balanced and helpful for achieving a substantive focusing of discussions.

- We also welcome the explicit linkage of the chosen transformative areas to the implementation of relevant SDGs, in particular SDG 8, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15, which are likely to be the principal points of the Assembly. As the world is not on track to achieve the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and internationally agreed environmental goals by 2050, we can use this ready available framework to cluster the various work streams under UNEA5 and, more importantly, to monitor progress towards meeting the targets.
- In this context, it will be crucial to emphasize the important interlinkages and synergies existing between the different action areas as well.

#### Specific comments on Action areas:

- We believe that Action Area 1, Nature for Jobs, Poverty Eradication and Economic Prosperity is very timely with regard to the challenges following the COVID- 19 crisis. UNEA5 should be an opportunity to highlight green recovery.
- Action Area 2, Nature for Human and Ecosystems Health, includes very important actions related to limiting the future emergence of zoonotic diseases. Unless we manage to address habitat encroachment and destruction as well as wildlife trade, the likelihood of epidemics occurring in the future cannot be avoided. We would welcome if even more attention was to be given to this issue along with the necessary measures needed for supporting developing countries in managing and controlling habitat destruction, sustainable management of forests and wildlife as well as wildlife trade. The link to air pollution and AMR should be highlighted further. Regarding marine litter, the ambition for UNEA5 should be to set this global collective structural response, rather than develop it as it now stands in box 2. Furthermore, microplastics should also be included in this context (Setting a global collective structural response for marine litter and microplastics). We also encourage further actions to improve the state of freshwater including through using and wasting less water as well as taking advantage of more sustainable, nature-based solutions to mitigate the effects of floods and droughts.
- Furthermore, Action Area 1 and 3:
  - Nature for Climate, are closely interlinked through the sustainable consumption and production nexus. The SCP angle should therefore be reinforced and a link to UNEA4 and SDG 12 be made more explicit (in the same way as action area 2 is linked to UNEA3 ‘pollution free planet’).
  - We also suggest broadening Action Area 3 to include the biodiversity-resource angle, as per IRP findings, which basically link material resource extraction and processing with biodiversity and climate change impacts. The role circular economy and resource efficiency can play in this regard needs to be highlighted, possibly with a reference to salient examples having a higher impact on the economy (e.g. current and future initiatives on plastics, textiles, construction material).
  - Furthermore, green finance and investment is the best approach to creating growth and jobs and improving the resilience of our economies. Therefore, key action areas must include shifting to a more sustainable financial system, including fiscal reforms,

- and to circular economy models that enable a decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation.
- In addition, strengthening environmental governance can also contribute to the achievement of SDG16, including through UNEPs work. UNEA could consider UNEPs crucial role on the climate/environment security nexus, in particular on guiding global environmental and climate data management. Aggregating data will improve our overall understanding and thereby aid and assist countries in finding the right tools to tackle the challenges they face. Strengthening this role could help address the need to strengthen foresight capacity by working towards accessible and interoperable international data on climate-related security risks.
  - Linkage to Nature Based solutions should also be established in these two Action Areas.
- Action area 4, Nature for Sustainable Food Systems is closely related to destruction of habitat as well as wildlife trade. Avoiding future epidemics also requires ensuring food security while protecting nature. In order to strengthen monitoring and accounting of global wildlife trade, we need to improve access to information. All these areas require close collaboration with MEAs such as CITES and CBD as well as other UN organizations such as FAO. In this area, we would also like to highlight hazardous pesticides and AMR.
  - We would be interested in discussing further how to better engage the private sector. Many of the action areas presented in the background document require investments and risk-taking by the private sector while at the same we are sliding towards a global recession – which is a challenging combination but also provides opportunities. Could the Secretariat provide an update on options for possible engagement with the private sector and other relevant stakeholders towards UNEA5?
  - Finally, it should be considered to have a separate cross-cutting focus area relating to means to address the key drivers of environmental degradation and systemic obstacles that are generally relevant, especially relating to sustainable consumption and production and resource use and lack of available financing for green investments, and efficient policies/policy approaches for green transition.

On “Enhancing the authority, impact and relevance of the Assembly through a limited set of ambitious resolutions and decisions”

- The EU and its Member States thank UNEP for proposing an innovative way to structure resolutions at UNEA while keeping the workload for participating delegations in mind.
- While we agree that the number of resolutions should be limited, taking into account the already charged agenda of UNEA-5, this approach should not prevent that all important issues can be dealt with. We would like to reiterate that the pros and cons of omnibus resolutions must be taken into account, especially in relation to impact, visibility and effective implementation. In this regard, we welcome the replacement by UNEP of the reference to “omnibus” resolutions by a reference to “strategic and comprehensive” resolutions and look forward to receiving more insight from UNEP on what this new term embodies.

- UNEP’s suggestion to provide draft action points for resolutions for consideration by the MS could help guide further discussions on this approach. Hereby, receiving these action points (well in advance) of the ASC in October will ensure substantive discussions and serve the intended purpose.

On “Advancing an innovative communication approach to help the messages of the Assembly reach citizens and key stakeholders”

- The EU and its Member States welcome a strong emphasis on transparent, understandable and compelling communication efforts in the run-up, during and after UNEA5 that will serve to convey the narrative and key messages of the substantive discussions during the Assembly. It is also important when communicating to use internationally agreed terminology in order to ensure full understanding of the messaging.
  - In our view, it will be important to endeavour to strike a positive note in communication efforts that put the potential of nature front and centre. We think it essential to strike a delicate balance in communications around COVID-19 and green recovery, so as to avoid any interpretation of economic considerations being weighed against environmental concerns. The synergies of protecting nature and ensuring human well-being should permeate our messaging, including on action to be taken to avoid future epidemics caused by zoonotic diseases.
  - If there is such a thing as a positive recognition stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, it is that “if we want to, we can do it”. The unprecedented scale of immediate and medium-term actions taken by governments and stakeholders alike serves as an example of what determination and solidarity can achieve.
  - Re-evaluating our relationship with nature is a very timely message, which in our opinion, can be well utilized in the communication strategy.
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