

U.S. Comments on a Virtual AHEG Meeting and Path Forward

The United States would like to further share our views on a possible virtual meeting of the AHEG and our path forward. We note that we do not see a need to hold such a meeting given the inherent difficulties of a virtual format. If the Bureau considers holding a virtual AHEG meeting, we note that any such meeting must ensure participation by all interested countries without undue inconvenience or burden, should give due consideration to limits of technology access in some cases, and should not involve negotiation for any type of outcome.

We believe our path forward, whether in a virtual meeting or other format, should be the development of a factual, non-negotiated Secretariat summary paper that describes the AHEG process and outputs, which would include information from previous meetings and deliverables that are directly responsive and limited specifically to the mandate in resolutions 3/7 and 4/6.

A virtual AHEG meeting could be an opportunity for Members to provide feedback on the draft of the Secretariat summary paper such as ensuring all inputs by the Members are included and characterized accurately. A virtual AHEG meeting could also allow Members to ensure the Secretariat summary paper is policy neutral, rather than prescriptive.

As part of the virtual AHEG meeting, we would welcome an opportunity to discuss how the information presented in Secretariat summary paper, including the deliverables developed through the AHEG process, respond to the mandate. We would expect that a virtual AHEG meeting would replace the “Virtual working group on Elements Paper” as proposed in the Intersessional Roadmap (Version as of 6 July 2020). We do not support using ‘elements’ of response options to organize a virtual AHEG meeting or other technical briefings related to the AHEG’s mandated outputs. We would prefer a discussion organized around how information in the Secretariat summary paper responds to the mandate in UNEA resolutions 3/7 and 4/6.

Given the significant challenges with the virtual format, such as limited technological access and time zone differences, it will be very important that the outcome of any such meeting not in any way be considered a negotiated consensus outcome. Rather the preferred output for a virtual AHEG meeting would be: (1) a meeting report that summarizes the Member interventions made during the meeting, and (2) a Secretariat summary paper updated based guidance received from the virtual AHEG meeting. We expect the virtual AHEG meeting to conclude the AHEG’s work and the updated Secretariat summary paper forwarded to UNEA-5.

We are flexible on the format of a virtual AHEG meeting, and would suggest organizing an agenda such that there is one session per day, limited to 3 hours maximum, to facilitate global participation and robust dialogue. Other global meetings have identified times that can accommodate all time zones. We do not support a hybrid approach with in-person and online participation as that may advantage in-person participants, and we do not want participants to be in a position where they could feel pressure to travel to a meeting to ensure effective participation that may also put their health at risk.