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Meeting of the Bureau of the Environment Assembly  
8 October 2020  
16:00 – 18:00 (GMT +3 – Nairobi time)  
Online meeting

### **MEETING SUMMARY**

*Meeting background documents and presentations are available on the [meeting portal](#).*

#### **Agenda item 1: Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda**

1. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, President of the UN Environment Assembly and Minister of the Climate and Environment of Norway.
2. The meeting welcomed H.E. Ms. Andrea Meza Murillo, Minister of Environment and Energy of Costa Rica and H.E. Béragère Abba, Secretary of State of Biodiversity of France as duly elected members of the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly.
3. The meeting was attended via video conference by the following Members of the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly:
  - Norway (P) H.E. Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, Minister of the Climate and Environment, Western European and Others Group;
  - France (VP) H.E. Ms. Béragère Abba, Secretary of State for Biodiversity, Western European and Others Group;
  - Indonesia (VP) Ms. Laksmi Dhewanthi, Senior Advisor to the Minister of Environment and Forestry, Asia-Pacific Group;
  - Estonia (VP) Mr. Ado Lohmus, Permanent Representative, Eastern European Group;
  - Bahrain (VP) H.E. Dr. Mohamed Mubarak Bin Dainah, Chief Executive of Supreme Council for Environment, Asia-Pacific Group;
  - Burkina Faso (VP) H.E. Mrs Madina Kassamba, Permanent Representative to UNEP representing H.E. Mr. Bassiere Batio Nestor, Minister of Green Economy and Climate Change, African Group;
  - Costa Rica (VP) H.E. Ms. Andrea Murillo, Minister of Environment and Energy, Latin America and Caribbean Group;
  - Suriname (VP) H.E. Mr. Reggy Nelson, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Latin America and Caribbean Group;
  - Serbia (VP) H.E. Mr. Goran Trivan, Minister of Environment, Eastern European Group;
  - South Africa (Rapporteur) Ms. Shahkira Parker, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries representing Hon. Ms. Barbara Creecy, Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, African Group.

Other representatives present:

- H.E. Mr. Dragan Županjevac, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Serbia to

Kenya;

- H.E. Ms. Elin Bergithe Rognlie, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Norway;
- H.E. Ms. Aline Kuster-Menager, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of France;
- Ms. Guri Sandborg, Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway;
- Ms. Amanda Mkhwanazi, Deputy Permanent Representatives of South Africa;
- Ms. Ana Campos, Minister Counsellor and General Consul – Chargé d'affaires of Costa Rica;
- Ms. Estelle Halimi, Deputy Permanent Representative of France
- Mr. Yago L. Abdoul Kader, Deputy Permanent Representative of Burkina Faso

The Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives was represented ex officio by:

- H.E. Mr. Fernando Coimbra, Chair of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Brazil;
- Mr. Patrick Luna, Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil.

The Secretariat of the UN Environment Programme was represented by:

- Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director;
- Ms. Joyce Msuya, Deputy Executive Director;
- Mr. Jorge Laguna-Celis, Secretary of Governing Bodies;
- Mr. Ulf Bjornholm, Deputy Secretary of Governing Bodies;
- Mr. Rafael Peralta, Chief of Staff a.i.;
- Mr. Stadler Trengove, Legal Officer.

4. The meeting heard opening remarks from the Executive Director of UNEP, Ms. Inger Anderson, whereby she referred to the upcoming Seventh meeting of Annual Subcommittee to be held next week and underlined the need to reach agreement on important matters concerning the organization of the fifth UN Environment Assembly building on the leadership provided by the UNEA Bureau and on the recent 75<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly and its Biodiversity Summit. She pointed to the fact that Nature remain front and center for a sustainable recovery from the COVID pandemic, and that UNEA has an important role to play. She also expressed readiness by the Secretariat to engage in consultations with member States and Stakeholders towards the finalization of a new Medium-Term Strategy as well as Programme of Work and Budget.
5. The meeting adopted the provisional agenda.

#### **Agenda item 2: Consideration of the timing and format of UNEA-5 in view of COVID-19**

6. The President of UNEA invited the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to give a brief summary of the discussions held on the timing and format of UNEA-5 at the [meeting of the CPR subcommittee held on 1 October](#).
7. The Chair of the CPR informed the Bureau that the CPR had a very rich and constructive debate on 1 October, and that a proposal from the UNEA President, entailing that UNEA be conducted in two separate parts, with UNEA-5 commencing on 22 February 2021 in a virtual format, followed by an adjournment of the meeting to allow for a resumed meeting which could take place in person in February 2022, had been met with wide support. Several Member States also expressed support for

a high-level segment in February 2021 where a political message would be adopted, and some expressed a preference to reconvene the second part of UNEA-5 in late 2021 instead of in early 2022. Several other delegations, however, had expressed reservation with the idea of organizing any part of UNEA-5 as a virtual meeting, with a preference to postpone UNEA 5 in its entirety to 2022, referring to the need for ensuring equal opportunities for participation, universality, and effective and fair negotiations. Several member States also expressed concerns about the possible adoption of a ministerial declaration at a virtual session.

8. The President of UNEA referred to the proposal on the two-step approach as outlined in the [Note from the UNEA-President on date and format for UNEA-5](#) which was made available on 7 October, to convene the Assembly as planned in February 2021 in a virtual format, but with a revised and streamlined agenda that includes both essential procedural decisions such as the medium-term strategy, the programme of work and the budget that allow UNEP to function, as well as high-level dialogues and messages. He underlined that a formal decision on date and format to reconvene should be taken in accordance with the rules of procedure, to provide clarity to other international meetings and processes and the necessary certainty to the Secretariat to begin preparations. He indicated his conviction that reconvening in February 2022 was an important part of a compromise that all member States would be able to accept. He then opened the floor for discussion.
9. Several Members of the UNEA Bureau conveyed tier support for the President's proposed two-step approach for UNEA-5, underling the need for UNEA to meet virtually in February 2021 as planned to take decisions critical to the functions of UNEP, and agree on important political messaging, while referring other substantive matters to a later date when meetings can take place in person. Some Members expressed a preference for an earlier date in 2021 for the resumed session, but indicated flexibility with a view to find consensus. Some other members expressed a preference to postpone UNEA-5 in its entirety either to later in 2021 or to 2022, but found the proposal from the President acceptable as a way forward while also underlining that the first meeting must focus on procedural decisions only and that there is a need to have a clear understanding on the scope for the two UNEA-5 meetings in 2021 and 2022. With regard to the political outcome, Members were divided, with some expressing strong support for a political declaration to be adopted in 2021, while others were of the view that the virtual meeting format may not be conducive to a transparent and fair negotiation process.
10. Following the discussion, the Bureau of the Assembly decided:
  - i. To support of the [proposal by the UNEA President](#) to adopt a "two-step" approach that will allow to convene UNEA-5 in February 2021 at the dates previously agreed, preferably in a virtual format with a revised and streamlined agenda. This session would be complemented by a second component in the form of a resumed UNEA-5 to be held in-person in Nairobi in February 2022 in a format to be defined and agreed upon.
  - ii. To invite the CPR Chair, with the support of the Secretariat, to initiate the intergovernmental work towards the definition of the decisions and resolutions to be considered at UNEA-5.
  - iii. To request the Secretariat to propose a structure for the first part of UNEA-5 in February 2021 for consideration at the forthcoming annual subcommittee and thereafter, on the basis of feedback from Member States, at the next meeting of the Joint Bureaux of UNEA and of the CPR, scheduled for 1 December 2020.

### **Agenda item 3: Preparation of a UNEA-5 Ministerial Declaration.**

11. The President of UNEA introduced a zero draft of the Ministerial Declaration for UNEA-5 which had been made available on Friday 2 October, and invited comments from the Members of the Bureau prior to its circulation to the wider UNEA membership and Stakeholders.
12. Several Members of the Bureau expressed appreciation for the President's zero-draft, as an important step towards an ambitious political message to be agreed at UNEA-5. Some Members of the Bureau suggested that the draft declaration should include strategic political messages for relevant upcoming meetings of Multilateral Environmental Agreements, and include explicit recommendations relating to chemicals and waste as well as marine litter.
13. One Member of the Bureau announced that the draft would be discussed at an upcoming regional meeting. Another Member expressed concern that the digital divide may provide an obstacle to the possibility for all countries, especially from the Global South, to fully take part in negotiations on a Ministerial Declaration, and pointed out that the negotiation process would in part have to take place during a holiday period. Yet another Member noted with concern that there is a lack of common understanding on some of the concepts referred to in the current draft, and that the section on means of implementation would need to be strengthened.
14. In conclusion, the President of UNEA thanked the Members for their guidance and proposed to consult further with Member States in the coming weeks as set out in his roadmap to identify which type and format of political messages can be agreed upon, while respecting the challenges associated with online negotiations. The matter would be further considered at the next meeting of the Bureau on in December.

**Agenda item 5: Date for the next meeting**

15. The Bureau decided to hold the next meeting on 1 December, as Joint meeting with the Bureau of the CPR.

**Agenda Item 6: Other Matters**

16. No other matters were introduced for consideration by the meeting.

**Agenda Item 7: Closing of the Meeting**

17. The meeting closed at 17:19.