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

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

**International environmental policy and
governance issues**

**Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/3 on
contributions of the United Nations Environment Assembly to
the high-level political forum on sustainable development**

Report of the Executive Director

Introduction

1. In its resolution 3/3, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP to, inter alia, enhance the annual contributions of the Environment Assembly in the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, and to report thereon to the Committee of Permanent Representatives with a view to providing feedback to the Environment Assembly.
2. The high-level political forum on sustainable development takes place annually in July under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council and every four years in September under the auspices of the General Assembly. In 2020, the forum took place in July with the theme “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”. The present report outlines the steps taken to provide meaningful contributions to the forum and suggests concrete steps for further enhancing contributions. In doing so, it elaborates on progress in the implementation of paragraphs 3 and 4 of resolution 3/3, on substantive inputs and increased interaction between the Environment Assembly and the forum; paragraph 5, on the role of the President of the Environment Assembly in actively participating in and conveying the main messages to the forum; and paragraph 7, on supporting preparations for the annual meetings of the regional forums on sustainable development.

* In accordance with the decisions taken at the meeting of the Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly held on 8 October 2020 and at the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives held on 1 December 2020, the fifth session of the Assembly is expected to adjourn on 23 February 2021 and resume as an in-person meeting in February 2022.

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Progress in the implementation of resolution 3/3

3. In paragraph 3 of resolution 3/3, the Environment Assembly decided to provide timely, substantive inputs to the annual meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Since 2017, UNEP has followed a process whereby it prepares draft inputs for initial consideration by the President of the Environment Assembly followed by consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The inputs are only prepared once the invitation from the Economic and Social Council President is received, as the invitation contains concrete questions to be addressed and a template to be used to assess the progress, challenges and lessons learned in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in relation to the overarching theme of each forum.¹

4. In paragraph 4 of resolution 3/3, the Environment Assembly encouraged interaction between the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the Assembly and the strengthening of that interaction, and in paragraph 5 of the resolution, the Environment Assembly recommended that the President of the Environment Assembly actively participate in and convey the main messages of the Environment Assembly to the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Pursuant to that, the President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, was accorded a separate slot for addressing the ministerial segment of the forum in order to convey the main messages of the Environment Assembly and to present its contributions as an input to the forum's debates. That was an opportunity to reiterate the important role of the Environment Assembly as the highest decision-making body on environmental matters in the United Nations system and to convey key messages and recommendations to the forum. The key messages were also a contribution to the implementation of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In his statement, Mr. Rotevatn highlighted the fact that the world was not on track to achieve the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and he stressed that, while attention was focused on the social and economic consequences of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises persisted and should be addressed. He acknowledged the increasing awareness of the links between ecosystem stability, the environment and human health and called for urgent action to address those threats, stressing that the world could not afford delays in key environment-related decisions and investment. He shared key recommendations of the Environment Assembly and invited all delegations to participate in the fifth session of the Assembly.

5. Paragraph 7 of resolution 3/3 reflects the importance of the role of regional-level coordination in addressing environmental challenges and the need to build on existing regional mechanisms and frameworks to address Sustainable Development Goal interlinkages and accelerate implementation. In that connection, following Mr. Rotevatn's address as President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, Mr. Trevor Prescod, President of the Latin America and Caribbean Forum of Ministers and Minister for the Environment of Barbados, shared messages from his region, which had been strongly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. He stressed the need to implement health/environmental surveillance to effectively respond to the pandemic, which would require the assistance of the international community; the high-level political forum on sustainable development could provide a mobilization framework in that regard. He also indicated that green, resource-efficient technologies and circular economy principles had to be central to the post-COVID-19 recovery. Finally, he stressed that the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration would contribute to a nature-based, people-centred recovery with access to sustainable financing.

6. UNEP has acted on the request to enhance consideration of the contributions of the Environment Assembly to the high-level political forum on sustainable development by participating in and organizing several events to spur discussion on the substantive environmental topics introduced by the President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. UNEP was involved in a number of special events and side events on environmental topics during the 2020 forum, including water management, green economy, biodiversity and nature-based solution, as well as on the thematic session on building back better, with a special focus on the 2020 environmental targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNEP organized and co-organized several events, all very well attended, including a side event on "Engaging industry through the Global Partnership on Marine Litter to deliver Sustainable Development Goal 14", which provided an opportunity to further implement resolution 4/6 on marine plastic litter and microplastic, in particular by taking stock of existing activities and action by Governments, regional and global instruments, international organizations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other relevant contributors to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics, with the aim of the long-term elimination of discharge into the oceans. UNEP also co-organized and participated in several side events aimed at increasing

¹ UNEP/CPR/150/5.

ambition in leveraging the environmental dimension of sustainable development, including on “Green economy and COVID-19 recovery: implications for the Decade of Action”, “Accelerating transformation to build back better and achieve the 2030 Agenda: nature-based solutions for people and planet”, “Recovering better: global opportunities for jumpstarting the real economy #GOforSDGs”, “Urgent action on biodiversity for sustainable development”, “Building back better for nature and people to achieve the 2030 Agenda, through a transformational green recovery and recognizing the right to a healthy environment” and “Advancing human development through social and environmental justice for all”.

7. With a view to implementing paragraph 3 of resolution 3/3, UNEP supported the seventy-sixth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, including collaborating in a special session on oceans, where a video message from the UNEP Executive Director and a message from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change framed the discussions. UNEP also co-authored chapters² of the Commission’s regional report, titled “Changing Sails: Accelerating Regional Action for Sustainable Oceans in Asia and the Pacific”, which highlighted the importance of building capacity on ocean data and the consistent enforcement of existing international conventions, frameworks, norms and standards for the sustainable use of the oceans.

8. Additionally, in 2020, UNEP and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean signed a memorandum of understanding defining areas of cooperation related to intergovernmental processes (including the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the Regional Forum of Ministers of the Environment); data and knowledge (particularly regarding the work on the environmental indicators of the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development and the Statistical Conference of the Americas); coherence and coordination; and the implementation of United Nations reform at the regional level through various initiatives, including in relation to climate change and sustainable consumption and production.

9. Pursuant to paragraph 7 of resolution 3/3, specific activities undertaken by the regional offices in support of the respective regional forums on sustainable development include the following:

(a) In Asia and the Pacific, UNEP worked with the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) Secretariat to prepare joint policy briefs and roundtables for the acceleration of action on key areas identified in the Global Sustainable Development Report, adapted to the region’s context, namely: sustainable and just economies; enhancing power grid connectivity to achieve affordable and clean energy for all; and global environmental commons. UNEP was also part of the first joint regional United Nations system results report, “Highlights of system-wide contributions of the United Nations at the regional level in support of the 2030 Agenda”, and its support was acknowledged in the APFSD report on “Advancing partnerships for the implementation of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific” and the APFSD paper on “Opportunities and entry points for transformative change in Asia and the Pacific”.

(b) In Europe, UNEP co-organized, with the International Telecommunication Union, the “Economic transformation, finance and technology for Sustainable Development Goal acceleration” session at the 2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe Region, held in Geneva on 19 March 2020. The session offered an opportunity to highlight the delicate interaction and links between humans, animals and nature, as well as how ecosystem degradation increases the risk to humans from emerging infectious diseases, including COVID-19. It was also an opportunity to increase understanding of the need for a rapid, integrated and just green transition to respond to planetary, social and economic challenges, which meant redirecting financial flows towards sustainability. There was a call to invest in a new type of growth based on circularity and carbon neutrality. During the session, a UNEP representative reported that, to influence demand-side drivers and align finance with sustainability, UNEP was partnering with more than 150 banks on the Principles for Responsible Banking framework, with partners currently representing over \$42 trillion in assets that would be aligned with the 2030 Agenda. The initiative had tremendous potential with regard to aligning financial portfolios and assets with the Sustainable Development Goals through an approach based on peer benchmarking in the financial services industry. UNEP also engaged in the civil society consultation held prior to the regional forum.

² Chapter 2, “Data on Sustainable Development Goal 14: life below water in Asia and the Pacific”, and chapter 5, “Plastic pollution in the marine environment” (<https://www.unescap.org/publications/changing-sails-accelerating-regional-action-sustainable-oceans-asia-and-pacific>).

(c) In Latin America and the Caribbean, the president of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean conveyed the main messages and policy recommendations to the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development at its third meeting, held in Santiago de Chile in April 2019. UNEP provided substantive input to that regional forum on sustainable development, by providing evidence-based analysis of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals for the “Quadrennial report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean”, taking part in the session on the contributions of the United Nations system to the regional dimension of the 2030 Agenda and providing speakers for various side events.
