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

**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the
United Nations Environment Programme
153rd meeting**
Nairobi (online), 19 November 2020

**Minutes of the 152nd meeting of the Committee of Permanent
Representatives to the United Nations Environment
Programme, held on 19 November 2020**

Agenda item 1

Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting, which was held online, was opened at 1.15 p.m. on Thursday, 19 November 2020, by Mr. Fernando Coimbra, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP.
2. The meeting was attended by participants representing 79 Member States, 1 observer mission and 24 UNEP-accredited organizations from among the major groups and stakeholders.
3. The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Committee: Ms. Monica De Greiff Lindo (Colombia); Mr. Vilhjálmur Wíium (Iceland); Mr. Virander Kumar Paul (India); Ms. Sasirit Tangulrat (Thailand); Ms. Kapampa Joyce Kasosa (Zambia).
4. He then bade farewell to the following departing member, thanking her for her contribution to the work of the Committee: Ms. Unnur Orradóttir Ramette (Iceland).

Agenda item 2

Adoption of the agenda

5. The agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/152/1).

Agenda item 3

**Adoption of the draft minutes of the 151st meeting of the Committee of
Permanent Representatives**

6. The Committee adopted the minutes of its 151st meeting, held on 14 September 2020, on the basis of the draft minutes of the meeting (UNEP/CPR/152/2).

Agenda item 4

Chair's summary of the seventh annual subcommittee meeting

7. The Committee adopted the document entitled "Chair's summary of the seventh annual subcommittee meeting" (UNEP/ASC.7/10).

Agenda item 5

Report of the Executive Director

8. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the report entitled “Quarterly report to the 152nd meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (advance unedited version), July–September 2020”, noting that it provided an update on key developments relevant to UNEP during that period.
9. In her oral briefing, the Executive Director of UNEP, Ms. Inger Andersen, thanking representatives for their commitment and patience in adapting to conducting business online as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, said that 2020 had been a tumultuous year. All the peoples and countries of the world had suffered from the effects of the pandemic, whose consequences had gone beyond solely health-related impacts. For the first time in 30 years, poverty was on the rise across the globe, and the pandemic was driving the world further off course from achieving the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
10. While the challenges of confronting the impacts of the pandemic were steep, the advent of COVID-19 had underscored the urgency of meeting global environmental, climate and biodiversity goals. As for past pandemics, the current pandemic was closely linked to the way humanity treated nature as a commodity to be consumed in order to fuel economies. There was an urgent need to step up ambition and action on the three planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution to head off pandemics and other, far graver, shocks.
11. In response to the pandemic, UNEP had refocused its efforts to deal with the immediate challenges and to push harder for long-term solutions. The work of UNEP was now focused on four broad areas: delivering transformational change for nature and people, investing in a green economic recovery from the pandemic, helping countries to manage COVID-19 waste, and modernizing global environmental governance.
12. With regard to transformational change for nature and people, on World Zoonoses Day, on 6 July, UNEP, together with the International Livestock Research Institute, had published a joint report entitled *Preventing the next pandemic – zoonotic diseases and how to break the chain of transmission*. The report identified the root causes of zoonotic diseases and highlighted that, in keeping with the “One Health” approach, it was crucial to treat human, animal and planetary health as a single interconnected issue in planning and policymaking.
13. In that regard, UNEP was working with the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Organization for Animal Health and other experts as part of a process to strengthen environmental science and expertise for securing human, animal and ecosystem health. Part of that collaboration included addressing poor air quality, which had been closely linked to human vulnerability to COVID-19. UNEP had collaborated with other United Nations entities and private sector partners to launch the world’s largest urban air quality data platform. The tool, which included data from more than 7,000 cities, would enable better and greener decision-making, policies and products, and would equip citizens to hold their leaders accountable.
14. Turning to air quality and climate change, she said that UNEP had launched a report calling for minimum quality standards for used vehicles imported to developing countries. As a result, and with leadership from Ghana, the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States had announced new vehicle standards for its member States. UNEP had also participated in convening the Global Tailings Review, which had led to the launch of the first-ever global industry standard covering the entire life cycle of tailings. In 2020, UNEP had also helped over 50 Member States to develop national plans and early warning systems for climate change, and had launched new projects in many countries, including Benin, Ghana, Iraq, Lesotho and Mauritania.
15. To find innovative ways to engage the next generation on environmental issues, UNEP had also partnered with TED Conferences LLC, popularly known as “TED talks”, to develop the Earth School for children, the largest online learning initiative in UNEP history. In another youth outreach effort, gamers were being engaged through Playing for the Planet Alliance, under which some of the video game industry’s biggest developers were including green activities in games in order to plant millions of trees and reduce plastic use. That initiative was expected to lead to a reduction in CO₂ emissions of 30 million tons by 2030.
16. The UNEP *Emissions Gap Report 2020* focused on how stimulus packages could help countries to catch up on lagging climate action through a greener and more sustainable pandemic recovery. Insufficient international commitments had left the world on track for warming in excess of 3°C before the end of the century. However, the report showed that a green pandemic recovery could

help to bring emissions in 2030 to levels that would be nearly on the path to enabling global warming to be limited to no more than 2°C.

17. While much of the responsibility to act lay with Governments, the private sector must also shoulder its share of the burden, and, in that regard, UNEP was playing a key role in strengthening public-private collaboration. The sustainable agriculture and forestry initiative, AGRI3 Fund, which was a blended finance fund for channelling commercial bank finance into projects supporting the transition to more sustainable agricultural practices and forest protection, was set to mobilize \$1 billion, and the Global Fund for Coral Reefs aimed to invest \$500 million by 2030 to improve the health and sustainability of coral reefs. In another of the bold initiatives that were required to enable the world to meet its climate-related goals, the Net-Zero Asset Owner Alliance, which had \$5 trillion in assets under management, had committed to implementing major greenhouse gas emissions reductions, in the range of 16 to 29 per cent between 2019 and 2025.

18. UNEP continued to work with Member States to address the challenges of reducing pollution and waste, including hazardous chemicals. The pandemic represented a setback, as it had caused a spike in hazardous waste and wastewater production, and a massive increase in the use of detergents, disinfectants and antimicrobial solutions. UNEP provided technical advice on medical waste management to Afghanistan, Haiti, South Sudan and the Sudan as well as to United Nations peacekeeping operations. UNEP had also published a report, *Waste Management during the COVID-19 pandemic: from response to recovery*, providing practical information and guidelines on health care and municipal solid waste management.

19. Turning to the modernization of global environmental governance, she said that, despite the many negative impacts of the pandemic, it had hastened the move towards the use of collaborative online platforms and online meetings. Those changes provided an opportunity to reduce carbon footprints long after the pandemic had passed, at the same time as they highlighted the importance of reducing the digital divide. The sixth annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, and the first virtual ministerial meeting on COVID-19 and the environment in West Asia, called for and hosted by Bahrain in August 2020, were among the meetings successfully conducted using an online format. The fourth meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics had been held online, resulting in the identification of a way forward to address the issue at the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, which might entail the launch of negotiations for a global agreement on marine litter and microplastics.

20. Perhaps the best example of successful online work had been the development of the UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and its programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023 through an iterative process that had begun in October 2019 with a road map and had continued in 2020, including constant engagement with the Committee to gather feedback. The medium-term strategy represented a point of entry to align the systems, operations, procedures and culture of UNEP to scale up impact and enable the transformative shift required to target the drivers of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. It was grounded in the 2030 Agenda and it recognized the current decade as the decade of action that would shape how humanity could live sustainably and within planetary limits. The seventh formal consultation on the strategy during the current meeting should lead to a version that could be submitted for the approval of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives. It would be critical to begin work on the strategy as soon as possible, as 2021 could be a “make or break” year.

21. With recent news of successful COVID-19 vaccine trials, the world’s citizens could begin to hope that an end to the current phase of the pandemic was in sight. However, an end to the pandemic could not mean a return to business as usual. The year 2020 was on track to be the warmest year on record, with wildfires, droughts, storms and glacier melt intensifying. It was crucial that the coming year – 2021 – be used to create a brighter, greener future. Ambitious policies and investments for a green pandemic recovery needed to be put in place before economies slid back into the old carbon-intensive approach. Words needed to be turned into actions and deeds. Of key importance would be the announcement of more ambitious nationally determined contributions by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at its twenty-sixth session, to be held in 2021, and agreement on a stronger post-2020 biodiversity framework by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its fifteenth meeting, also to be held in 2021, with a commitment to act at every level and in every sector. The United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) must deliver.

22. Turning to the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, the President of the Environment Assembly had made a proposal outlining a two-step approach to the session, comprising an online meeting in 2021 and an in-person meeting in 2022. The secretariat had submitted a proposal for the

structure of the online meeting of the session, which offered a basis for compromise to ensure that the Assembly not only took the necessary decisions to ensure the effective management of UNEP, but also allowed the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment to have a voice, even in the midst of a pandemic. She said that she looked forward to the guidance of the Committee on the online meeting of the fifth session, to be held in February 2021, and on the resumed, in-person meeting, to be held in 2022.

23. The fiftieth anniversary celebrations – UNEP@50 – would be the subject of discussion at a subcommittee meeting in early December 2020 and were set to culminate at the in-person meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, in 2022. The launch of the celebrations at the online meeting of the fifth session, in February 2021, would begin a year of intensive work leading up to an ambitious commemoration.

24. In closing, she stressed the importance of the Committee and UNEP delivering on their mandates, not in spite of adversity, but precisely because of it. It was a common human flaw that sometimes only a bitter blow to health would trigger action. COVID-19 represented a collective health scare for humanity and the environment on a planetary scale. The response must be appropriate and immediate, and entailed a shift from destructive economic activities to investing in a healthy planet. In the wake of 2020, the year of the pandemic, everyone should strive to make 2021 the year of action for a green recovery.

25. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the Executive Director for her comprehensive and informative report, with one thanking the secretariat for its efforts to ensure that online meetings were conducted with remote simultaneous interpretation. Several representatives expressed their appreciation for the strong involvement of UNEP in the United Nations system-wide response to the pandemic.

26. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, underscored the important role played by UNEP, as the body providing global environmental leadership, in promoting a green recovery from the pandemic. One representative said that building back better would be crucial to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, requested that the Committee be regularly updated on efforts by UNEP to support countries in that regard. Another representative noted that the work of UNEP in supporting countries to move towards sustainable consumption and production could be a key part of the global effort to build back better.

27. Two representatives underscored that, in the light of the links between human and environmental health, a green recovery would be the best protection against future pandemics. One representative drew attention to the collaboration between the Governments of France and Germany, UNEP, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Organization for Animal Health in convening the One Health High-Level Expert Council, which was aimed at gathering and disseminating to citizens and decision makers reliable scientific information on the links between human, animal and environmental health.

28. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that they supported a two-step approach to the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. A number of representatives expressed serious reservations about holding any negotiating meetings online and requested that the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly be limited purely to the consideration of procedural matters.

29. One representative noted that online meetings had recently led to important achievements by various United Nations bodies, including in New York, Geneva and Nairobi, and said that meetings of ministers of the environment had been and were continuing to be conducted online in Western Asia and in Africa. Another representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed satisfaction at the successful conclusion of the fourth meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics, which had also been held online, and its outcome, which had fulfilled the group's mandate and provided a solid basis for the Environment Assembly at its fifth session to address the global problem of plastic pollution. Several representatives suggested a hybrid approach to the first part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, whereby representatives of Nairobi-based delegations would still meet in person at the headquarters of UNEP, maintaining strict social distancing, and would be joined online by those who were unable to be present.

30. One representative noted that only through effective multilateralism could the serious global challenges facing the world be addressed, also recalling that effective multilateralism depended on funding. A number of representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed their appreciation for the financial contributions made by Member States to UNEP, pledged

their countries' willingness to continue contributing, and urged States that had not yet done so to make their contributions. With regard to funding, one representative noted that important donors to the United Nations system had convened a body, known as the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network, to provide spending oversight for multilateral organizations. It would conduct an assessment of UNEP work in 2021 and regular briefings would be provided to the Committee on its work.

31. A number of representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, urged the Committee to give serious consideration to a strong political message being delivered by the Assembly at its fifth session on the urgency of implementing a green pandemic recovery. One noted that, in the absence of the willingness or ability of the Assembly to join forces to elaborate a political outcome in 2021, by 2022 three years would have elapsed since the world had last heard a significant political message from the governing body of UNEP on the perilous state of the environment. He suggested that the draft political messages prepared by the President of the Environment Assembly provided a sound basis for discussions by the Committee on the matter.

32. Many representatives welcomed and expressed support for the medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025, and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023. A representative speaking on behalf of a group of countries expressed appreciation for the focus of the medium-term strategy on the three environmental crises and on the central role of the transition towards sustainable consumption and production, noting that it aligned with the mandate of UNEP to set the global environmental agenda. Several representatives expressed their appreciation for the information provided on gender and geographic equity in staffing at UNEP, while remarking that continued efforts would be required to rectify the imbalances that remained. One representative sought clarification on the process via which the topics of conflict and disaster preparedness were being updated in UNEP policies and on the judicial capacity-building courses and support for environmental defenders mentioned in the Executive Director's report.

33. Responding to the comments, the Executive Director thanked representatives for their valuable input. On gender and geographical representation in UNEP staffing, she requested the forbearance of representatives, explaining that it would take time to achieve balance in the light of the marked imbalances present when she had assumed her position, in particular at the P-5 and D-1 levels, especially as it was not possible to dismiss staff based on their gender or nationality.

34. On the updating of the UNEP conflict and disaster preparedness policies, she said that the review conducted related only to how the work was organized under the mandate already given, with a view to ensuring the efficacy of the internal structure of the delivery mechanism in the context of the United Nations system-wide reform process, and in the context of the climate and security mechanism, an inter-agency mechanism of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and UNEP, established in October 2018.

35. With regard to judicial capacity-building courses and support for environmental defenders, she said that the work being done was based on the Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law, in particular its fifth iteration, adopted in Environment Assembly resolution 4/20; and in keeping with UNEP Governing Council decision 27/9. UNEP work in that regard was performed within the purview of the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Environment Assembly.

Agenda item 6

Consideration of the medium-term strategy 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget 2022–2023

36. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to document UNEP/CPR/152/3, noting that the current iteration of the document was the result of an inclusive and transparent process involving several rounds of feedback from the Committee, most recently during the seventh annual subcommittee meeting in October 2020.

37. The representative of the secretariat said that the fourth draft of the medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 was set out in document UNEP/CPR/152/3, while the third draft of the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023 was set out in the annex to that document. Both were the result of a process that had begun in October 2019 with the introduction to the Committee of the medium-term strategy road map. The draft strategy had been amended to refine the level of UNEP ambition with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Decade for Action on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030); to employ internationally agreed terminology; to better describe the synergies between the work of

UNEP and that of the multilateral environmental agreements; to improve the structure of subprogrammes; to explain the role of UNEP in facilitating capacity-building and financial and technical support at the country level; and to mainstream and promote sustainable consumption and production.

38. In response to input from the Committee, with regard to the programme of work and budget, its indicator framework had been updated with clearer outcomes and with quantitative indicators, baselines, targets and units of measure. Qualitative indicators had been developed for thematic programmes, in the form of narratives, to provide a more complete picture of the results achieved. Dedicated indicators had also been developed for enabling and foundational subprogrammes and each had been linked to the outcomes of the three thematic programmes. Each programme indicator was now mapped to a Sustainable Development Goal, and corporate indicators had been developed for the cross-cutting initiatives of achieving gender equity and implementing the United Nations system-wide reform. Improvements had also been made to the programme management and support section, emphasizing geographic equity in secretariat staffing; efficiency, risk management and the importance of due diligence; and personnel capacity-building.

39. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the secretariat for the revised draft medium-term strategy and programme of work and budget, and many endorsed the most recent drafts, expressing their satisfaction with the tireless efforts made by the secretariat to incorporate input and feedback. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the shift in the medium-term strategy to better illustrate how each of the seven subprogrammes contributed to helping countries move towards sustainable production and consumption, while noting that the same shift should be more obviously reflected in the programme of work and budget, and that the overall framework of performance indicators could benefit from further critical review. Regarding the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) published periodically by UNEP, he requested the removal of its description as currently reflected in the draft documents, given that discussions were ongoing as to the future of the publication and its complementarity with the World Environment Situation Room. Together with another representative, he underscored that the outcome of the discussions on GEO to be held during the fifth session of the Environment Assembly should not be prejudged.

40. With regard to action for nature, he said that the comparative advantages and strengths of UNEP in contrast to other programmes should be more strongly emphasized, especially its strengths in matters related to climate and biodiversity. In terms of climate action, the mitigation potential of the oceans and the need for adaptation measures should be highlighted by clearly elucidating the link between the sustainable management of the world's oceans and seas and effective climate action. In the sections on background and situational analysis, the intrinsic link between a healthy environment and social and economic well-being should be made more explicit.

41. A number of representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, sought clarification regarding the significant budget increases under the "executive direction and management" line item.

42. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed satisfaction with the enhanced focus on sustainable consumption and production in the documents, and one underscored the importance of maintaining the references to green finance, green recovery, the circular economy and sustainable food systems. Another representative noted nevertheless that the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns (10YFP), instituted as an outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), would come to an end in 2022, and requested that an explicit call for the continuation of the Framework be embedded in the medium-term strategy and programme of work. One representative urged UNEP to further emphasize the message that a green and resilient pandemic recovery represented a huge opportunity to take action for sustainability and give a much-needed boost to the environment.

43. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the budget prepared by the secretariat, which they described as realistic. A number of representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, while welcoming the contributions made by Member States to the Environment Fund, expressed concern that the UNEP funding burden continued to be borne by a small group of countries, and encouraged all Member States to make their contributions in order to enhance the predictability of voluntary funding, thereby enabling UNEP to deliver results under its core programmes. One representative said that the allocation of resources from the Environment Fund should focus on the foundational programmes of UNEP, which were less likely to receive earmarked funding. A number of representatives welcomed the soft earmarking proposed as

a way to increase funding for core programmes, as long as utilizing that approach did not add an administrative burden or detract from the importance of the Environment Fund.

44. One representative said that UNEP should ensure that official development assistance and other forms of financial assistance from developed to developing countries were actually delivered, noting that private-sector financing should not be presented as an alternative to North-South cooperation, while another said that UNEP should elucidate its approach to ensuring that adequate means of implementation for all sustainability initiatives were supplied to all developing countries, in particular regarding the implementation of paragraph 88 (a)–(h) of the outcome document of Rio+20, “The future we want”.

45. Several representatives, stressing the importance of mainstreaming gender in the medium-term strategy and programme of work, expressed their appreciation for the inclusion of an indicator on gender equality, although one noted her concern that the structure of the gender indicators for the seven subprogrammes would not facilitate the implementation by Member States of related initiatives. One representative noted that the gendered impacts of pollution on health were not sufficiently highlighted in the section on pollution, in the light of the particular vulnerability of women of child-bearing age and children to those impacts. She called for the documents to recognize the impact of pollution on death, disease and disability. One representative welcomed the focus across the programmatic work of UNEP on mainstreaming the preservation of biodiversity.

46. One representative, reiterating the importance of ensuring equitable geographical representation in UNEP staffing, noted that work done in that regard seemed to be limited to monitoring, without concrete action to address the issue. One representative called for more attention to be given to the work of scientists from the developing world. Several representatives expressed concern with regard to the restructuring of some performance indicators, including those related to gender and disaster risk resilience.

47. A number of representatives expressed concern that references in the documents to protecting environmental defenders and to matters related to peace and security might be overstepping the mandate of UNEP in contrast to other international agreements, conventions or bodies, and could lead to its politicization, while others said that UNEP should play a role in promoting coherence and synergies between the multilateral environmental agreements. One representative asked what action would be taken by UNEP to address issues that had not yet been resolved and that fell under the purview of dedicated multilateral agreements. One representative suggested the use of the term “sustainable” in places where “green” was used, noting the lack of an agreed definition of the latter. A number of representatives expressed concern at the removal of “resilience to disaster and conflict” as a separate subprogramme with its own indicators and requested information on how the topic would continue to be addressed in the work of UNEP.

48. A number of representatives expressed disappointment that the reference to monitoring threats against environmental defenders had been removed from the documents, with one noting that human rights were a fundamental part of the 2030 Agenda and highlighting the adoption by consensus by the Human Rights Council on 21 March 2019 of resolution 40/11 on recognizing the contribution of environmental human rights defenders to the enjoyment of human rights, environmental protection and sustainable development. She noted that General Assembly resolution 74/146, on implementing the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms through providing a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders and ensuring their protection, had also been adopted by consensus and affirmed the important and legitimate role of human rights defenders, including in relation to natural resource exploitation and environmental, land and development issues. She said that, on that basis, the United Nations, including UNEP, and its Member States had a responsibility to ensure the development of strong institutions with the necessary capacity to ensure the effective protection of human rights defenders, and she looked forward to constructive engagement on the matter by the Committee and within relevant United Nations bodies.

49. Responding to the comments, the representative of the secretariat said that, in drafting the documents, care had been taken to use internationally agreed language, ensure geographical diversity in the origin of scientific inputs, integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into each subprogramme, align the work of UNEP with the needs of countries in keeping with the United Nations system-wide reform and ensure synergies with the work programmes of the multilateral environmental agreements in keeping with paragraph 88 of “The future we want”. The call for the continuation of the 10YFP, which had been included as a footnote, could be given greater prominence. The secretariat appreciated the active engagement of the Committee and of civil society organizations in the drafting of the documents and would continue to incorporate the feedback of

representatives into the final drafts, including comments relating to indicators, gender, synergies with the multilateral environmental agreements, alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, and disaster and conflict.

50. The Chair said that the substantive nature of the comments received would require a further round of amendments to the draft documents. A representative of the secretariat urged members to submit their further contributions in writing without delay to ensure that they could be incorporated into the drafts in time to meet the deadlines for the submission of documents for translation for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. Another representative of the secretariat noted that the increases to the budget for executive direction and management were largely driven by earmarked funds for Junior Professional Officers supporting programme policy duties and the transformation exercise. The increase of \$800,000 for executive direction and management was strictly related to the increase in staff standard costs and yearly incremental costs. The \$2 million increase for programme support was required based on the expected decrease in programme support related to the continuing trend towards a reduction in earmarked funds. In the event that contributions for earmarked funds increased, followed by a rise in programme support income, those resources would be shifted back to programme support.

51. The Chair proposed that the Committee consider the inputs made at the present meeting, then revise and submit the medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023 as part of the pre-session documentation for the fourth meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives and the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. He also proposed that the Committee request the Executive Director to submit elements for a draft decision on the medium-term strategy and programme of work and budget to enable the Bureau to prepare the first version of the draft decision at its next meeting. The decision would be finalized during the fourth meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives.

52. The Executive Director requested the cooperation of the Committee in enabling her to finalize the draft decision based on the eight rounds of inputs already received, expressing concern that, if inputs were received during the fourth meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, the process would be further delayed.

Agenda item 7

Preparations for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly

53. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to document UNEP/CPR/152/4 on the structure of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, noting that a final decision on the matter would be made during the joint meeting of the bureaux of the Committee and the Environment Assembly to be held during the first week of December. He invited the representative of Norway to address the Committee on behalf of the President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

54. The representative of Norway said that the world remained in an extraordinary situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many families across the globe paying the ultimate price. Although a multilateral meeting focused on the environment might seem insignificant in comparison to other current priorities, the Environment Assembly at its fifth session would play a key role in helping countries to recover from the pandemic, address grave environmental crises and set a path towards the long-term safety of humankind. The Committee had an important part to play in facing the challenges that lay ahead. The President of the Environment Assembly was convinced of the importance of putting forward a strong political message on the critical need to continue multilateral work on the environment. Such a message was urgently needed to ensure a focus on environmental concerns as countries made policy and investment decisions for pandemic recovery, in particular in the light of the perilous global situation resulting from the triple environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and proliferating pollution, whose ravages had not been stayed by the pandemic. The Environment Assembly and the world's environment ministers should not remain silent at such a critical juncture, which also represented an opportunity to highlight their relevance as part of the solution.

55. She suggested that the content of the political message could include recognition of the effects of the pandemic on global efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda; state that concern for the triple threat facing the environment had not abated; highlight the continuing crucial importance of multilateral action for the environment, including through the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity; reiterate the strong commitment of Member States to the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda; and note that Member States looked forward to the in-person meeting of the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly in 2022 and to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of UNEP, while calling for action on the environment in the interim. A draft of the

proposed message had been circulated to Member States. She recalled that finding common ground was the essence of the work done within the United Nations, and said that, as a young forum with a strong mandate, it was incumbent upon the Environment Assembly to issue a strong political message from the world's environment ministers at such a critical moment. She urged representatives to present their feedback on the matter in writing to enable its consideration during the joint meeting of the bureaux of UNEP and the Environment Assembly to be held during the first week of December.

(a) Structure of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly

56. Introducing the sub-item, the Executive Director thanked the representative of Norway for providing an overview of the proposed political message and said that the proposal for the structure of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, which was set out in document UNEP/CPR/152/4, entailed a very short initial online meeting, lasting no more than one or two days. She drew attention to document UNEP/CPR/152/5 and invited a representative of the secretariat to present an overview of the proposed outcomes of the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

(b) List of outcomes to be considered by the Environment Assembly at its fifth session

57. The representative of the secretariat said that the three suggested draft outcomes were the result of an attempt to adhere to the mandate provided by Member States in that regard during the seventh annual subcommittee meeting, notably a minimalistic outcome limited to ensuring the business continuity of UNEP. Based on that approach, three draft decisions would be put forward for the consideration of the Environment Assembly at its fifth session. The first draft decision pertained to the approval of the draft medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023; the second draft decision pertained to the management of trust funds and earmarked contributions; and the third pertained to the date and format for the in-person meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in 2022.

58. Other proposed outcomes required the input of the Committee, including whether to welcome the outcome of the stocktaking review conducted in accordance with Environment Assembly decision 4/2, in which the Chair of the Committee had been requested to present to the Committee of Permanent Representatives for its deliberation and decision at the sixth annual subcommittee meeting a consolidated proposal outlining a consensual process for review by the Committee of Permanent Representatives and its subsidiary bodies, with a view to providing concrete proposals for the improvement of their efficiency and effectiveness, for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session. The Committee might also wish to draft a procedural decision to welcome the outcome of the fourth meeting of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics, and to welcome, endorse, or take note of the progress report of the steering committee on the future of GEO, the UNEP flagship environmental assessment reports. In conclusion, strong consensus would be required on the fundamental outcomes of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, either at the online meeting of the fifth session, in February 2021, or at the resumed session in 2022, in order to provide absolute clarity on how to organize the intersessional process.

59. In the ensuing discussion, most of the representatives who spoke welcomed the proposal to hold the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in two parts, with an initial online meeting being held in February 2021 and an in-person meeting being held in 2022. Many representatives expressed a strong preference for the online meeting to focus solely on matters essential to the continuation of UNEP work during the intersessional period, and many reiterated that no substantive matters requiring negotiation should be addressed until representatives could meet in person. One representative requested clarification on the implications for UNEP of postponing important substantive work until 2022, and several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, called for hybrid meetings to resume as soon as possible in 2021.

60. One representative welcomed the launch of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of UNEP during the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in 2021, while another representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, requested further details on the series of events planned in that context and suggested that the matter be discussed during the next subcommittee meeting.

61. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that consideration of the stocktaking exercise for the review by the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the Environment Assembly and its subsidiary bodies, of the future of GEO and of the implementation of paragraph 88 (a)–(h) of “The future we want” should be postponed until 2022. One representative suggested that the Committee take note of the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine

litter and microplastics during the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly and adopt its outcome later, during the in-person meeting of the fifth session, while another representative expressed strong support for the launch of negotiations on a global legally binding agreement to address the issue of marine plastic litter and microplastics.

62. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the proposal to hold a multi-stakeholder dialogue during the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, and one representative sought clarification on the structure of the groups for the proposed leadership dialogue. A number of representatives said that a leadership dialogue should not be held during the online meeting of the session, while one noted that the exercise of calling together high-level representatives from around the world would be pointless unless a dialogue were held and a political message issued. A number of representatives expressed strong support for holding the leadership dialogue.

63. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the theme of the leadership dialogue should be strongly linked to the challenges posed by the pandemic and the need to focus on concrete actions by Governments, financial institutions and the business sector for a green recovery to build back better. He suggested that the original theme for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly could serve as the basis for the theme of the leadership dialogue, as it had been carefully negotiated, proposing the theme “Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals: building back better”, rather than the suggested theme of “Strengthening UNEP to help us build back better”.

64. Regarding the issuance of a political message during the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that a strong political statement by the Environment Assembly at the online meeting of its fifth session was essential. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, insisted that a ministerial declaration should be issued in order to maintain political momentum at the start of the “super year for nature”, ensure that the Environment Assembly lived up to its mandate, ensure meaningful engagement and strengthen the position of UNEP as the global authority on environmental issues. Several representatives expressed reservations regarding a political message and sought clarification regarding its legality and whether it would conflict with the ministerial declaration. A number of representatives noted that other United Nations bodies had been able to conduct substantive work during online meetings.

65. Regarding the report on the outcome of the stocktaking meeting for the review process mandated under Environment Assembly decision 4/2; the outcome of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics mandated under Environment Assembly resolution 4/6; the report of the steering committee on the future of GEO mandated under Environment Assembly resolution 4/23; and the action plan for the implementation of paragraph 88 (a)–(h) of “The future we want” mandated under Environment Assembly decision 4/2, a number of representatives said that they did not support the consideration of the related reports at the online meeting of the fifth session in 2021, with one noting that his opposition was based on avoiding duplication of work across the two parts of the session. Another representative advocated taking note of the reports but not welcoming them. One representative said that no procedural decision was required regarding the future of GEO and the outcome of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics given that both matters would be the subject of resolutions in 2022. He noted, however, that the Committee’s stocktaking and review process and the implementation of paragraph 88 (a)–(h) of “The future we want”, both mandated under Environment Assembly decision 4/2, had been discussed in detail, and that failing to take action on them would represent a wasted opportunity and might lead to having to repeat work. A number of representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noted that, since no negotiations would take place during the online meeting of the fifth session of the Assembly, there would be no need to form contact or working groups and appoint facilitators.

66. A number of representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed concern that the integrity of the presidency of the African States of the sixth session of the Environment Assembly could be affected by the altered format of the fifth session, and called for clarity on the transitional process to ensure that the term of the presidency would not be compromised.

67. Responding to the comments, the Executive Director welcomed the consensus on approving the decisions on the medium-term strategy and programme of work and budget, the trust funds and the dates for the in-person meeting of the fifth session of the Assembly.

68. The UNEP Legal Officer emphasized that, although it had been proposed that the fifth session of the Environment Assembly be held across two meetings – an online meeting and a subsequent in-person meeting – it remained one session. The rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly did

not limit or stipulate for how many days its sessions should last. However, Environment Assembly decision 4/2 stated that the fifth session would begin on 22 February 2021 and last for five days, and although the Assembly could adjourn and reconvene at any time, for practical reasons it was important to determine the date of resumption, how long the resumed session would last, and what format it would take. In addition, the Environment Assembly could choose to follow previous decisions, but was not bound to do so. There was, however, a legal requirement to approve decisions on the medium-term strategy, on the programme of work and budget, and on the trust funds. He noted that questions on the review of the Environment Assembly and its subsidiary bodies, the outcome of the work of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics, and the work of the steering committee on the future of GEO would need to be taken up for discussion at a later date, given that the Environment Assembly itself was the body that needed to make the decisions on the type of action needed. There was a requirement for action to be taken during the fifth session of the Assembly, but that action could take place either during the online meeting or the in-person meeting. All reports to be presented to the Environment Assembly must be submitted 42 days in advance of the session at which they were to be considered.

69. A representative of the secretariat confirmed the legal mandate for documents to be submitted six weeks before the session began, but said that the Assembly would decide which documents to consider. Responding to the comments about the structure of the leadership dialogues, he said that, to ensure the ability of representatives from different time zones to fully contribute to the leadership and multi-stakeholder dialogues, and to promote an interactive dialogue, the secretariat had envisaged two time slots and four different groups.

70. The Chair noted that although there was consensus on three procedural draft decisions to be considered for adoption at the online meeting of the fifth session, further discussion was required on other matters raised, including on the process for conducting the intersessional work between the online and the in-person meetings of the fifth session, and consideration of the relevant matters would continue at the subcommittee meeting in December.

Agenda item 8

Report of the subcommittee

71. The Committee took note of the document entitled “Chair’s report of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives” (UNEP/CPR/152/6).

Agenda item 9

Other matters

72. The representative of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of her country, Belgium and Switzerland, said that the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) was a network of 19 countries that had been created to monitor the performance of multilateral organizations at the national level in respect of their mandates. She invited Member States to an informal presentation on the work of the organization, the date of which was still under discussion but would be announced in the coming weeks. The briefing would provide an opportunity for Member States to be apprised of details on the assessments, including their timelines, and to ask questions.

Agenda item 10

Closure of the meeting

73. The meeting was declared closed at 8.30 p.m. on Thursday, 19 November 2020.