

AFRICAN GROUP STATEMENT DURING THE 153RD MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES

ON TUESDAY, 26TH JANUARY 2021

Agenda Item: Message from online UNEA-5 (UNEA Presidency)

The African Group wishes to thank the UNEA Presidency for its tireless efforts thus far throughout its tenure, despite the significant and unprecedented challenges we have all faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptions to our work. The Group takes note of the letter circulated by the President of UNEA regarding the proposed adoption of “messages” during the virtual session of UNEA-5 in February 2021.

In this context, the African Group wishes to recall its long standing position that in order to ensure inclusivity and collective ownership of all outcomes, no negotiations should be held virtually. The Group also wishes to emphasize that UNEA-5 is one assembly with one Ministerial Declaration to be negotiated, according to established practice, prior to the in-person UNEA in 2022.

Generally the Group is not opposed to having messages released during the online UNEA-5 session mainly serving a purpose of highlighting that the Assembly recognizes the importance of maintaining high-level discussions on the environment, despite all the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Group is encouraged to see that the UNEA Presidency intends to uphold the cardinal principle of “no virtual negotiations”. The Group however seeks more clarity on how negotiations will be avoided in preparing this document as well as its “legal status”. This of course based on our pointed view that the traditional Ministerial Declaration will be adopted at the resumed session for UNEA-5 in 2022.

Chairperson,

As mentioned on previous occasions, the African Group would appreciate a document without binding language, or one that will be referred to in future sessions. Furthermore, the Group is concerned on the possible establishment of a precedent for future sessions of the Environment Assembly. In this regard, the Group seeks clarity from the Presidency and Secretariat as to how this can be avoided? There

should be a clear understanding that the adoption of such “messages” is an exceptional case arising from exceptional circumstances.

The African Group recognizes that a message can be concluded without referring to substantive matters that have the potential to lead to negotiations. Without listing a few resolutions in the message, we believe that a common approach can be reached by highlighting thematic areas such as public health, pollution control, climate action, biodiversity conservation, ecosystems integrity, socio-economic equity, inclusiveness, and prosperity while calling for further engagement on international environmental governance; an approach that will put more emphasis on achieving sustainable development and eradication of poverty.

I thank you!