



UNEP: 154th Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) 20 May 2021

Statements by Switzerland

Agenda Item 3. Report by the Executive Director

Mr. Chair

Thank you, Madame Executive-Director, for the update on UNEP's activities in the first quarter of this year.

We have, indeed, witnessed a successful UNEA 5.1 in a virtual setting and under difficult circumstances. Switzerland was encouraged to see the broad participation of government delegations, including at ministerial level, and civil society. Switzerland is pleased with the tangible outcomes achieved as a result of the inclusive UNEA, the CPR-chairmanship of Norway and Brazil and the constructive spirit of all delegations.

The success of virtual negotiations depends on our political will – just like negotiations with physical presence. We welcome the assessment and lessons learned of UNEA 5.1 prepared by the Secretariat and look forward to the discussion later today.

The same constructive spirit should continue to guide the work of this Committee. *Only together* can we prepare and realize a successful UNEA 5.2 and UNEP@50 celebration, *only together* can we effectively carry out our oversight function on UNEP.

If we do not work with each other, if we start to question each other's credibility and if we uproot well established practices in the UN system, only one faction will win: those who want to stall the environmental agenda, destabilize UNEP, and weaken the importance of Nairobi as the global center of environmental governance.

Switzerland expresses its gratitude to the bureau nominees from all regional groups for their readiness to assume the important task in the new Bureau. Switzerland pledges its support to the new bureau, as soon as it will be elected respecting the principles of rotation and equitable geographical representation.

Switzerland emphasizes the fact that well established principles of rotation and equitable geographical representation in the governing organs of UN bodies and organization have served the UN well for the last 75 years. They shall not be disregarded for momentary, short-term and particular interests.

Switzerland urges all delegations to come together to overcome the current polarization and politization of this Committee. Let's turn our focus from harmful procedural in-fights to substantive work. Let's jointly improve the oversight of UNEP and embark on the preparation of successful UNEA 5.2 and UNEP@50 celebrations.

Madame Executive Director,

As you are getting UNEP ready for implementation of the new MTS and programme of work, allow me highlight three issues:

- First, Switzerland very much welcomes the fact that science-policy is further strengthened as a priority of UNEP in the new MTS. Unlike climate and biodiversity with the IPCC and IPBES, the third pillar of UNEP's activities, chemicals and pollution, lacks a solid scientific underpinning. This is why our Minister for the Environment highlighted the idea of creating an inter-governmental science-policy body for chemicals & waste at UNEA 5.1. Switzerland will reach out to interested parties to jointly develop this idea in the coming months.
- Second, Switzerland sees a lot of potential in UNEP's support to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and the promotion of synergies between their Secretariats. A lot has been achieved in Geneva in this regard. But there is still sufficient untapped potential. Switzerland supports UNEP and the secretariats of the relevant MEAs in their effort to streamline reporting obligations of States on biodiversity conventions. The Bern-II-consultations in January, which are mentioned in the quarterly report of the Executive Director, were an important milestone in this process. The new post-2020 framework on "biodiversity and chemicals and waste" should be used to further synergies.
- Third, all big environmental Conferences were postponed last year and therefore a lot is at stake in the months to come. We all know that the global environmental governance is disaggregated. Well-coordinated timing and sequencing of the different Conferences are important. UNEP is uniquely positioned to provide guidance and take on a supportive and coordinating role. We ask UNEP to spare no effort in shaping the global environmental agenda actively, including through a smart agenda setting.

Madame Executive Director,

Welcome back to Nairobi. We are very pleased that you have returned to your duty station. Your presence here is important also in a view of building bridges in an unfortunately highly polarized Committee.

Polarization and unnecessary politization of the CPR risks to paralyze its functioning and might ultimately harm UNEP as an organization. We all look forward to re-engaging with you!

Thank you

Agenda item 4: Consideration of the cycle of term of office of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

Switzerland aligns itself with the WEOG statement and the Swiss position was expressed under the previous agenda item.

We would like to add some comments from a UN system-wide perspective. Focused on our important work in this Committee and with UNEP, we sometimes forget that UNEP is part of something bigger, the UN family. Previous speakers rightfully mentioned the unprecedented and special circumstances that we've faced due to the Covid pandemic. These circumstances are not specific to the UNEP, but affect the whole UN system.

And yet:

- No other UN body has challenged the principle of rotation of regional groups neither in its bureau neither in the last decades nor during the pandemic.
- No other UN body has challenged the existing rules for its governing bodies
- Regional rotations of bureaus of plenary and subsidiary bodies are not aligned in the UN system and in no other body has this been challenged.

We have heard, loud and clear, the call of the African group for a 2 years UNEA-6 presidency and are grateful for the legal considerations provided by the Secretariat. This would imply a return to a UNEA cycle from odd to even years. There were systemic reasons for the change to odd years, mainly the system-wide alignment of the planning cycles of the UN agencies, funds and programmes within the so-called QCPR. Possible system-wide implications of a change of UNEA cycle should be taken into account before taking a decision as well as implications for UNEP (endorsement of MTS/PoW/Budget). Therefore, we kindly invite the Secretariat to shed some light on the system-wide implications of a change of the UNEA-cycle and the implications for UNEP. We would welcome to receive an expert briefing on the UN reform and the UN planning cycle (QCPR) at the 155th meeting of the CPR.

Agenda Item 6: Assessment and lessons learned from the online session of the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly

We would like to thank the Secretariat for the excellent lessons learned paper. With the first online UNEA, we broke new ground, which understandably had caused some insecurity in its run-up. Thanks to inclusive preparations and conduct led by the presidency of UNEA and the chair of the CPR in their respective areas of responsibility and a constructive spirit of all stakeholders involved, the first virtual UNEA was a success in terms of outcome, participation and outreach!

Allow me to comment on two issues raised in the lessons learned paper:

First, online negotiations and digital divide

The broad participation from all over the World in the debates and in the negotiations clearly showed that there was no digital divide. We disagree with the Secretariat that 'the so-called digital divide is relevant for all parts of the world' (para 15.). Delegates from all parts of the world, including from Switzerland, faced some technical glitches and connectivity challenges, which can to some extent be effectively addressed in future as stated in para 15 of the background paper. And we should stop to refer to a digital divide, when there is none, as this notion can be misused for political reasons.

Whether or not we manage to have successful online meetings and online negotiations is first and foremost a question of political will and not a question of technology. Switzerland calls for a broad acceptance of online or hybrid negotiations, when in-person meetings are restricted, and supports the recommendations prepared by the Secretariat in Annex II. Switzerland also adds that online negotiations can be improved by adapting the format of the meetings. Virtual negotiations require an iterative set-up with shorter meeting times over a longer period of time. Innovative elements such break out and contact groups should be organized in a virtual setting to advance negotiations.

Second, on stakeholder engagement

Major Groups, with their contributions, enrich our thinking and our debates. An online format should not reduce their opportunities to participate. We support the recommendation that all of the nine Major Groups should be given at least one dedicated speaking slot each during both OECPR and UNEA.