

154th Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives
20 May 2021
2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Online meeting

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

Note: This Chair's summary complements the detailed minutes of the meeting developed by the UN Office in Nairobi. All pre-meeting and post-meeting documents, including statements provided in writing by member States, are available [here](#).

Agenda Item 1: Opening of the meeting by the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

1. The meeting was opened by H.E. Mr. Fernando Coimbra, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Brazil and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The meeting welcomed newly arrived representatives to the Committee and bid farewell to departing representatives.
2. Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP, provided brief opening remarks, expressed appreciation at being back in Nairobi, and further expressed hope that in-person meetings will become possible at the UN compound in Gigiri in the near future.

Agenda Item 2: Adoption of the provisional agenda of the 154th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

3. The provisional meeting [agenda](#) was adopted.

Agenda Item 3: Report of the Executive Director.

4. Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP, provided a statement, available [here](#). The Quarterly Report of the Executive Director to the 154th meeting of the CPR is available [here](#). In the ensuing dialogue between the Executive Director and Member States, delegations who took the floor, inter alia:
 - Welcomed the report and statement of the Executive Director and welcomed Ms. Andersen back to Nairobi;
 - Congratulated UNEP for the successful organization of the online session of UNEA-5 (UNEA-5.1);
 - Expressed appreciation to UNEP for its continued efforts to strengthen the science-policy interface including through several recent flagship scientific reports;

- Welcomed UNEP's participation in the One Health process and reiterated their support for UNEP to join the Tripartite Alliance on One Health;
 - Exchanged views on the assessment and lessons learned from UNEA 5.1 and looked forward to further discussions on how to ensure the success of the resumed session of UNEA-5;
 - Highlighted the benefits of including the poverty perspective in UNEP's work and recognizing the links to the pandemic, and stressed that promoting sustainable growth and decent jobs needs to be included in efforts to tackle poverty reduction;
 - Stressed the need to adhere to the rules of procedure and established practices in order to ensure an effective and rules-based multilateral cooperation in the field of the environment, with one delegation expressing concern over a politicization of processes within UNEP;
 - Underlined the importance to provide core funding to the Environment Fund for the fulfillment of UNEP's mandate, and invited Member States to contribute as suggested by the Voluntary Indicative Scale of Contributions (VISIC) their "fair share", and one delegation announced that they will provide financial support amounting to 3 million USD for the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.
 - Reiterated the need to ensure geographical as well as gender parity in staffing and recruitment of senior positions within UNEP;
 - Several delegations made commitments to support green recovery and sustainable development and provided additional information on the various initiatives being undertaken in their countries, including on sustainable consumption and production, action on plastics, carbon neutrality, nitrogen pollution, climate multilateralism, and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;
 - One stakeholder representative stressed the need for inclusivity, unity and cooperation as well as meaningful and active youth participation in UNEP and UNEA related processes, further underlining that the level of engagement of stakeholders should be the same as that of member States. Another stakeholder representative stressed the need to ensure stakeholder access to UNEP meetings, whether held online or in-person.
 - Thanked the departing representative, H.E. Ms. Julia Pataki, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Romania, for her exemplary leadership in the work of UNEP, the CPR and the UNEA Bureau;
5. The Executive Director thanked the delegations for their inputs and guidance and expressed her appreciation for the environmental leadership demonstrated by many countries on environment-related issues, including in the context of the One Health process, preparations for the COP-15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming, implementation of the Montevideo programme and other key multilateral processes. She took note of the comments made relating to staffing of UNEP and reiterated her commitment to address geographical underrepresentation, while also underlining the importance of Member States from these regions undertaking outreach efforts to encourage eligible professionals to apply for UNEP job openings, for example by inviting UNEP to job fairs and disseminating job openings within their professional networks. Progress had been made on gender parity, but much remained to be done at P5 and D1 levels. The Executive Director highlighted UNEP's support to the Africa's green recovery initiative, as well as its technical support to various countries including the stimulus to support sustainable and decent jobs for poverty eradication. The Executive Director also recognized the urgency to act for nature and the need to actively involve stakeholders in UNEP's and UNEA's work.

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

6. The Secretariat presented a [note](#) providing the procedural and legal background to delegations on the election of Officers to the Bureau of the CPR, taking into account relevant the UNEP Governing Council and UNEA decisions, as well as the UNEA Rules of Procedure and established practices, in support of an efficient election process.
7. The Chair recalled the discussion that was held on this matter at the CPR subcommittee meeting on 6 May and the extended Bureau meeting on 12 May, and reemphasized the importance and urgency to find broad agreement to ensure a well-functioning governance of UNEP. The Chair also reiterated his intention of stepping down from his position as CPR Chair on 30 June 2021.
8. Delegations who took the floor thanked the Secretariat for the background document, welcomed the efforts made to come to an agreed solution, and provided the following comments:
 - Commended the Chair for the way in which he has conducted the meetings of the CPR and for his outstanding work over the past two years, including to ensure transparency and inclusivity in spite of the many challenges, including relating to the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - One representative of a regional group supported by several delegations reiterated their preference for option B in the secretariat note and underscored that this is fully in line with the relevant rules of procedure. They also underlined the importance of ensuring that the next Presidency and Bureau of UNEA will enjoy a full 2-year term, and in this context requested clarification from the Secretariat on possible implications of returning to an even year meeting cycle;
 - One representative of a political group also supported the preference for option B, on the basis that it promoted diversity, inclusivity and geographical balance in support of a healthy multilateral process, also pointing out that a completely new Bureau under option A could lead to a scenario where only 7 months would be provided for the Bureau Members to prepare for UNEA-7;
 - Another representative of a regional group supported by several delegations reiterated its preference for option A, while expressing concern that both options B and C would require a post-facto UNEA decision to endorse a recommendation to change the two year term as referred to in Governing Council decision 19/32. The representative also recalled that the group had nominated the Permanent Representative of Portugal and the Permanent Representative of Finland as the representatives of the Western European and Other States Group to the position of Chair of the CPR Bureau, with a view to share the envisaged mandate 2021-2023;
 - Another representative of a political group expressed a strong preference to proceed with the election of officers in accordance with Option A, in line with the rules of procedure and established practices;
 - A third regional group, while strongly favoring option B, presented a compromise proposal that would entail: 1) to elect a new CPR Bureau for 1 year, based on the current regional distribution but with new Members; and 2) to agree on a CPR recommendation to UNEA to a) align the terms of offices for the CPR and UNEA Bureaux in future, to prevent the situation whereby one regional group holds the presidency of both Bureaux at the same time; and b) ensure a 2-years term of office for the Bureau of UNEA 6.

- One delegation in support of option A expressed concern on the potential long-term implications of the increasing division within the CPR, and emphasized the need to stay on track in order to fulfill UNEP's mandate, further emphasizing that the division may undermine the role of Nairobi as the international hub for environmental negotiations;
 - One delegation in support of option B expressed concern that undue pressure inhibits the nature of negotiations and processes within UNEP, further stressing that no one region should be denied the right to serve their full term in either Bureaux. In response to this intervention, another delegation requested the Executive Director to clarify if she had any knowledge of such undue pressure exerted on the UNEP Secretariat.
 - One delegation supported by some other delegations indicated that the decision to organize UNEA-5 in two steps should not automatically lead to a shortened term for the next the next UNEA President and Bureau.
 - One delegation cautioned against UNEP setting a precedence in challenging existing the rules and established practices with regard to the election of officers to the CPR Bureau, while another delegation noted that option B could also lead to future overlaps in the geographical rotation within the CPR Bureau.
9. The Executive Director encouraged the Committee to find a way forward to ensure an effective governance of UNEP and UNEA, and reconfirmed that the Secretariat stands ready to assist in the organization of in-person informal meetings, as necessary and respecting the COVID-19 restrictions as laid out by UNON. The Legal Advisor took note of the requests to provide further clarification the rules governing the length of the period between UNEA-5 and UNEA-6, and the system-wide implications of an even-year cycle for UNEA.
10. The Chair thanked all delegations for their contributions and constructive approach. He concluded that as there was no agreement on the matter as yet, it would be necessary to call for an extraordinary meeting of the CPR before the end of the term of the current cycle, and asked the Secretariat to identify a suitable date. The Chair also announced a meeting of the CPR Bureau to take place in the upcoming week and suggested that the invitation for this meeting would be extended to the regional and political chairs. All regional groups and Member States were encouraged to explore options towards an agreement that will be acceptable to all delegations.

Agenda Item 5: Election of officers.

11. The Committee agreed to defer the item to an extraordinary meeting of the CPR to be held by mid-June.

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

12. The Secretariat gave a [presentation](#) on the draft Secretariat document, [Assessment and lessons learned from the online fifth session of UN Environment Assembly](#), which took place on 22-23 February 2021.
13. Delegations who took the floor thanked the Secretariat for the presentation and provided the following comments:

- Thanked the UNEA Presidency and Bureau, the CPR Bureau and the Secretariat for their strong commitment and leadership in preparing for the successful first step of UNEA-5, and looked forward to substantive preparations of UNEA-5.2.
- Recognized that the goals of the online session were well attained, including the adoption of a limited number of administrative, programmatic and procedural decisions, and that the Assembly as well as the preceding OECPR-5.1 were carried out in accordance with UNEA the rules of procedure;
- Expressed the hope that in-person meetings will be possible again as soon as possible, to ensure a successful UNEA-5.2 and UNEP@50.
- One representative from one regional group noted that while online meetings can be useful for purposes of information sharing and exchanges of views, they are not ideal for the realization of an inclusive, transparent and effective process with equal participation from all member States.
- One representative from another regional group recalled that online meetings is the result of exceptional circumstances and presents many challenges, particularly for negotiations, and considered that future online meetings requires caution and consensus. The Secretariat's assessment was considered overly optimistic, including with regard to challenges related to technology, multilingualism, connectivity, time zones and limited interaction between delegations. While recognizing that virtual or hybrid formats may have some advantages, it was not considered realistic to resort to this format to negotiate a significant number of resolutions on substantive issues and a Ministerial Declaration for UNEA-5.2.
- One representative from a political group considered that UNEA-5.1 demonstrates that virtual negotiations are demanding, but possible, and considered that online or hybrid meetings can be effective both for informal and/or consultative meetings, and, if well prepared, for negotiations and decision making. Such meetings can facilitate a broader participation and engagement, save costs and reduce the environmental footprint. Different options should therefore be kept open regarding the format of future meetings and consultations, and the Secretariat was requested to develop possible scenarios to this end. The group also supported the suggestion to provide dedicated speaking slots for each Major Group at relevant meetings.
- One delegation suggested that the list of challenges and opportunities should feature more prominently in the main text, including with regard to multilingualism, the digital divide, interactivity, and different time zones. While online meetings may be possible under certain circumstances, they are less efficient and less effective, and should not become the "new normal" of multilateral diplomacy.
- One delegation called for the opening of the UN complex in order to resume in-person meetings. To this end, another delegation stressed the need to go back to in-person meetings when it is feasible and safe to do so.

14. The Chair thanked delegations for their feedback and invited Member States and stakeholders to provide comments in writing on the draft document by 27 May at the latest to allow the Secretariat to prepare a revised document for consideration by the CPR Bureau.

Agenda Item 7: Report of the Subcommittee.

15. The Committee adopted the report from the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on the main activities and outcomes of the subcommittee meetings held after its 153rd meeting on 26 January 2021.

Agenda Item 8: Closing of the meeting.

16. The delegation of Chile announced the formation of a Group of Friends to Combat Marine Plastic Litter in Nairobi in conjunction, with Portugal as co-convener, with an aim to help raise awareness of the urgency of the issue of plastic pollution into the oceans, and that further information about this initiative would be share with Member States in the form of a concept note.
17. The delegations of Peru and Rwanda informed the meeting of their plans to present a draft resolution on marine plastic litter and microplastics to be considered by UNEA-5.2 and called for member States' support for this initiative.
18. The delegation of Germany informed the meeting of an initiative co-convended with Ghana, Ecuador and Vietnam, to host a Ministerial Conference on marine plastic litter and plastic pollution in September 2021, with the purposed of providing a political platform to build momentum to act on this matter ahead of UNEA 5.2.
19. Delegations welcomed the information provided on these initiatives.
20. The co-facilitators in the lead for the process to implement General Assembly resolution 73/333, entitled "Follow-up to the report of the ad hoc open-ended working group established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/277", provided an update and proposed to postpone the second consultation meeting from June to early November, in order to allow for an in-person, or possibly a hybrid meeting, and announced a series of informal online workshops planned for June and July which would be open to all Member States, Members of Specialized Agencies and interested Stakeholders. The meeting agreed to the approach proposed by the co-facilitators.

Agenda Item 8: Closing of the meeting.

21. The meeting closed at 7:15 pm.