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

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

Nairobi (online), 22 and 23 February 2021

**Proceedings of the United Nations Environment Assembly at its
fifth session**

1. Owing to the exceptional circumstances associated with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme and of the Committee of Permanent Representatives decided, at their joint meeting held on 1 December 2020, that the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly would be held in two parts, comprising an online meeting, to be held on 22 and 23 February 2021, and an in-person resumed meeting, to be held in February 2022.
2. Accordingly, the online meeting of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly was held on 22 and 23 February 2021.

I. Opening of the session (agenda item 1)

3. The online meeting of the fifth session was opened at 11 a.m. (Nairobi time (UTC+3)) on Monday, 22 February 2021, by Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, President of the Environment Assembly.
4. Opening statements were delivered by Mr. Keriako Tobiko, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Kenya; Mr. Rotevatn; Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); Ms. Hera Ali and Mr. Gyubin Hwang, representatives of the children and youth major group; Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly of the United Nations; and Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.
5. In his capacity as representative of the host country, Mr. Tobiko welcomed representatives to the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, noting that it was being held against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and its serious consequences for economies, communities and livelihoods around the world. Speaking from a green space in Nairobi, the site of UNEP headquarters and the global capital of environmental matters, he stressed the importance of green spaces, most recently in helping people to relate and relax during the lockdowns necessitated by the pandemic. Given that the current meeting was being held online, it would focus on administrative and budgetary matters and include a leadership dialogue that would enable ministers of environment and other high-level representatives to discuss salient issues relevant to the theme of the session, "Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals". It was to be hoped that the substantive agenda items could be discussed at an in-person resumed meeting to be held in 2022.
6. In his statement, Mr. Rotevatn said that, owing to the unprecedented times, the world was adapting to new ways of doing things, including the convening of the current meeting online. The participation of 151 Member States in the meeting was a testament to the importance attached to environmental issues. With 2022 marking 50 years since the creation of UNEP, the Environment

Assembly at its current meeting would launch the celebration of “UNEP@50”, which provided an opportunity to look back with pride at what had been achieved as inspiration for the global environmental agenda for the future. The real challenge ahead was to get back on track after the pandemic to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That called for a transformed relationship with the planet and a higher scale of impact, potentially achievable through the co-benefits of action to address climate change in a way that also protected biodiversity or reduced pollution. Member States had to respond together, each doing its part. The United Nations was built on hope and solidarity, as was the Environment Assembly, and it was to be hoped that the fifth session would inspire real action. In closing, he acknowledged the hard work and cooperation of the Bureau, the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the secretariat in preparing for the session, which, he said, exemplified the spirit of the United Nations.

7. In her opening statement, Ms. Andersen highlighted the inextricable linkages between the COVID-19 pandemic and the three continuing planetary crises: the climate crisis, the nature and biodiversity crisis, and the pollution and waste crisis, which, she noted, were of humankind’s own making. Drawing attention to the UNEP report *Making Peace with Nature: A Scientific Blueprint to Tackle the Climate, Biodiversity and Pollution Emergencies*, recently launched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which provided a comprehensive breakdown of the immediate peril facing planet Earth and the scientific underpinnings for the UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025, she said that much had been achieved in the 50 years since the creation of UNEP in understanding the causes of and solutions to the environmental crises. The issues were widely known, and much effective action had been taken to remedy them, including through the multilateral environmental agreements. Nevertheless, the situation was continuing to worsen, requiring a drastic change in response, namely a radical transformation of behaviour by the whole of society in order to create the environmental conditions needed to enable present and future generations of humankind to thrive. As the world’s leading environmental authority, the United Nations Environment Assembly was responsible for driving that change towards an era of action. Thanking Member States for supporting UNEP through increased contributions to its core fund, she said that the adoption of the medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023 at the current online meeting of the fifth session would ensure that the organization could work harder, faster and with greater impact. She urged representatives to continue their fight for the environment, addressing the existential challenge that was facing humanity.

8. In her statement, Ms. Ali said that the online meeting not only set an example across the United Nations system, showing that intergovernmental work could take place in a virtual format, but also made the meeting accessible to more people around the world. Considering the unprecedented times, she urged the Bureau and the Secretariat to prepare a sound alternative plan for an online second part of the fifth session of the Assembly planned for 2022, in case it were needed. She urged Member States and the secretariat to ensure that intergovernmental processes became more resilient so that real progress could be achieved independent of circumstances.

9. She drew attention to a five-day virtual Youth Environment Assembly held in February 2021 that had brought together young people from over 170 countries, representatives of several United Nations entities, Member States and other institutions on the topic of co-leadership by young people. She stressed that meaningful youth engagement had to be rights-based and equitable. It was necessary to provide designated spaces for young people to self-organize and engage in the United Nations. During the Youth Environment Assembly, chemicals and waste youth platforms had been launched in cooperation with the secretariat of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions and the Minamata Convention on Mercury, and work had begun on the science, policy and business forum youth working group. More needed to be done, however, to ensure the involvement of children and youth and to cater to their needs of additional capacity building and new open forms of working and cooperation.

10. Mr. Hwang congratulated the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Executive Director of UNEP on the launch of the report *Making Peace with Nature*, which showed that the solution to the three environmental crises had to be a collective one. The children and youth major group also considered that the solution needed to be intergenerational. Highlighting a key message from the report, Mr. Hwang said that the economic and financial systems that were relied upon to shape policy were no longer fit for purpose, and conventional analyses of economic development did not take into account the loss to future generations that would be caused by climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. He called for the omission to be rectified and for the loss to future generations to be mentioned in communications by UNEP. Another key message was that advanced science-policy processes were essential for meeting climate-related targets. In closing, he called on Member States to establish a trust fund for youth engagement to be administered together with the

youth constituency and to adopt a resolution on youth engagement at the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

11. Expressing his appreciation to the Government of Kenya for hosting the fifth session of the Environment Assembly and for serving as the host country of UNEP headquarters, Mr. Bozkir drew attention to the tragic irony of the linkage between a scaled-down fifth session of the Environment Assembly and humanity's continued encroachment on the natural world. It was to be hoped that the emergency linked to the COVID-19 pandemic would be brought under control, but further such crises, including those linked to highly contagious zoonotic diseases, were quite possible in the years to come. The warnings on the threat of environmental challenges abounded: at the current level of use and exploitation, humankind would require 1.6 Earths to maintain current living standards; extinction rates were around 100 to 1,000 times higher than the baseline rate and were increasing; the average temperature had risen 1.18°C, with 2016 and 2020 tied as the warmest years on record; and land degradation had reached 24 per cent of global land. As the recovery from the pandemic unlocked unparalleled resources, and with public and political will at an all-time high, the time was ripe to pursue true, transformational change in responding to the existential threat posed by the many pressing demands on a planet whose capacity could not meet the needs of its citizens. In that regard, the General Assembly would support each of the upcoming three Conference of the Parties-level environmental events relating to biodiversity, land degradation and drought, and climate, including by building political support through a series of high-level meetings. Emphasizing the urgency of action and the importance of building global consensus on environmental issues, he urged Member States, using the Sustainable Development Goals as a compass, to turn the tragedy of the pandemic into an opportunity to build a world that was more resilient, more equitable and more sustainable.

12. In his opening remarks, the Secretary-General of the United Nations noted that the Environment Assembly was meeting at a time of global crisis and fragility as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to cause turmoil worldwide, with millions of people being pushed into poverty, and with women bearing the heaviest burden. Inequalities among people and countries continued to grow in the face of a triple environmental emergency – climate disruption, appalling biodiversity decline and a pollution epidemic that was cutting short some 9 million lives a year. Emphasizing the importance of a healthy planet for sustainable development and of nature-based solutions for improving human well-being and prosperity, and noting that 2021 was a critical year to reset humankind's relationship with nature, he said that the important intergovernmental meetings to be held over the coming months all presented opportunities to increase ambition and action. Drawing attention to the ozone treaties as examples of the potential of concerted multilateral action, he highlighted commitments required in the coming months that would be key in transforming humankind's relationship with nature, including agreement on more ambitious nationally determined contributions and 2030 targets that were consistent with carbon neutrality by 2050; clarity by countries on how to reverse species and ecosystem loss, with concrete targets and means of implementation; a strong post-2020 framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste; and intense efforts to prevent the decline of the oceans by ending unsustainable fishing practices, expanding marine protected areas and drastically reducing maritime pollution, including plastic. Those commitments must be underpinned with clear and credible plans. In closing, he pledged to facilitate participation by all countries in online negotiations, noting that he had directed United Nations officials around the world to make offices and venues available to that end. Wishing representatives a productive meeting, he stressed that the viability of humanity depended largely on the efforts of the Environment Assembly. With leadership, determination and commitment to future generations, a healthy planet could be provided for all of humanity not just to survive, but to thrive.

II. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work (agenda item 2)

A. Adoption of the agenda

13. The Environment Assembly adopted the following agenda for the session, on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1).

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Credentials of representatives.
4. Report of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
5. International environmental policy and governance issues.

6. Programme of work and budget and other administrative and budgetary issues.
7. Stakeholder engagement.
8. Contributions to the meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development and implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
9. Commemoration of the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972.
10. High-level segment.
11. Provisional agenda and dates of the sixth session of the Environment Assembly.
12. Adoption of the resolutions, decisions and outcome document of the session.
13. Election of officers.
14. Other matters.
15. Adoption of the report of the session.
16. Closure of the session.

B. Organization of work

14. The Environment Assembly agreed that, in the light of the exceptional circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Environment Assembly at the online meeting of its fifth session would undertake initial consideration of agenda items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12 and 15. The Environment Assembly would consider the remaining items on the agenda at the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session, to be held in February 2022.

15. The Assembly further agreed that two identical sessions of a leadership dialogue would be held on the afternoon of Monday, 22 February, and the morning of Tuesday, 23 February, respectively, on the theme of “Contribution of the environmental dimension of sustainable development to building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world”, in order to facilitate the participation of representatives from different time zones. A summary of the leadership dialogue is set out in annex III to the present proceedings.

C. Attendance

16. The following Member States were represented at the online meeting of the fifth session: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d’Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechia, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

17. The following non-Member State was represented: Cook Islands.

18. The Holy See and the State of Palestine were represented as observers.

19. The following United Nations bodies, conventions and related secretariats were represented: Common Fund for Commodities, Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region Secretariat, Convention for the Protection of the

Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution (Barcelona Convention), Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia, Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, Global Environment Facility, Minamata Convention on Mercury, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Ozone Secretariat, Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the Global Environment Facility, Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, United Nations Office at Vienna, United Nations Office for Project Services, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, United Nations System Staff College, United Nations University, United Nations Volunteers, World Food Programme.

20. The following United Nations specialized agencies and related organizations were represented: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Organization for Migration, International Telecommunication Union.

21. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: African Development Bank, African Union Commission, European Commission; European Union, Global Biodiversity Information Facility, International Development Law Organization, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Islamic World Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, League of Arab States, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme, Southern African Development Community, Union for the Mediterranean.

22. In addition, a number of non-governmental and civil society organizations were represented as observers.

D. General statements

23. Following the opening of the online meeting of the fifth session, representatives of regional groups of Member States and representatives of Member States made general statements on the items on the agenda for the session.

1. General statements by regional groups

(a) African States

24. The representative of South Africa, introduced by the representative of Eritrea, made a statement on behalf of the African States. She reported on the outcome of the eighth special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), on the theme “Enhancing environmental action for effective post-COVID-19 recovery in Africa”, at which ministers had discussed Africa’s engagement in the current session of the Environment Assembly. At the eighth special session of AMCEN, ministers had reaffirmed their commitment to conserving, protecting and enhancing the resilience of Africa’s environment and natural resources as part of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. They had also considered, and since adopted, the African Green Stimulus Programme, aimed at addressing the devastating socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the pandemic in a sustainable manner, harnessing opportunities for Africa and mobilizing financial and technical resources to upscale and enhance the implementation of green economy and climate change initiatives.

25. She welcomed the proposed mid-term strategy and programme of work and budget, while stressing the need for more coordinated and coherent regional delivery of the programme of work, including through the strengthening of UNEP in Nairobi. She expressed support for the decision to limit the online meeting of the fifth session to consideration of administrative and procedural matters, emphasizing that online negotiations of substantive matters should be avoided, given the challenges that some countries faced with the virtual meeting format. She acknowledged the importance of commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP and pledged the cooperation of the African States in the necessary preparations. Lastly, she said that the African States looked forward to a possible consensual message or statement integrating the key messages highlighted by ministers as an outcome of the fifth session.

(b) Asia-Pacific States

26. The representative of Oman, speaking on behalf of the Asia-Pacific States, reported on the outcomes of recent regional meetings. At the third session of the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia and the Pacific, held in 2019, member States had emphasized the urgency of taking action on integrated and innovative solutions that would transform Asia and the Pacific, making it resource efficient and environmentally friendly through the adoption of sustainable consumption and production patterns. More recently, environment ministers from West Asia had met in August 2020 and agreed that the pandemic called for “build back better” policies and strategies supporting more innovative, more inclusive and greener socioeconomic development. The COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the need for international cooperation and multilateralism in building back better, such as in the sharing by Governments across the world of the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision to reduce additional pollution by marine plastic litter to zero by 2050.

27. Healthy and diverse ecosystems provided a natural defence against climate change and acted as carbon sinks. In the Asia-Pacific region, Bhutan, Fiji, Japan, Korea, the Marshall Islands, New Zealand and Singapore were aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050, and China, by 2060. During the Saudi Arabia presidency of the Group of 20, three initiatives had been launched to accelerate coral reef conservation, land restoration and economic carbon circularity. Sand and dust storms were also of concern, and the countries of the region were calling for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 70/195 on combating sand and dust storms and requesting UNEP to take coordinated and prompt action to address the challenge. It was to be hoped that the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration would inspire collaboration and support the implementation of restoration initiatives, and that an ambitious, realistic and balanced post-2020 global biodiversity framework would be adopted. The fourth session of the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia and the Pacific and the first meeting of the West Asia Environment Forum, both planned for late 2021, would provide opportunities to discuss options for accelerated action and transformative pathways, and formulate regional input to the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

(c) Latin American and Caribbean States

28. The representative of Argentina, speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States, said that the COVID-19 pandemic had challenged the entire United Nations multilateral system, but that UNEP had risen to the occasion, keeping up its work and delivering on its objectives. By participating in the online meeting of the fifth session, Member States were reaffirming their commitment to multilateralism and sustainable development, and confirming the role of UNEP as the leading global environmental authority, even though they acknowledged that a virtual meeting format created new imbalances. Under such circumstances, it was particularly important to respect the objectives, goals and principles set out in agreed language in the multilateral environmental agreements.

29. Reporting on the twenty-second meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in early February 2021, he drew attention to the outcome document of that meeting, the Bridgetown Declaration, in which ministers had stressed the importance of multilateralism and strengthened international cooperation in developing pandemic recovery strategies centred on the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability, while also reiterating the principles of the Rio Declaration, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. In closing, he said that the countries of the region considered it important to strengthen UNEP in Nairobi and to advance the review process, and hoped that good use would be made of the intersessional period prior to the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session, with the transparent, inclusive and democratic participation of Member States, to prepare the substantive issues to be discussed.

(d) Group of 77 and China

30. The representative of Malawi, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the online meeting of the fifth session was taking place as the world attempted to overcome a pandemic that had reversed much of the development gains of the past decades. The Group of 77 and China Ministerial Declaration, adopted in November 2020, stated that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, remained the greatest global challenge and a prerequisite for sustainable development. Harmony with nature was required to achieve that goal, as well as all the other Sustainable Development Goals. The fifth session of the Environment Assembly was an opportunity to reflect on how to build back better and accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The challenges of online meetings in terms of participation, inclusivity, transparency, effectiveness and multilingualism were of concern, however, and digital tools should remain a

complement to, rather than a substitute for, in-person meetings. She reiterated the importance of international cooperation and multilateral institutions, as well as the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, in dealing with environmental challenges and building back better in the post-pandemic world. The Group of 77 and China were committed to strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and supported the three decisions proposed for adoption at the online meeting of the fifth session and the development of a consensual outcome message for the session.

(e) European Union and its member States

31. The representative of Portugal, speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States, made a statement with which Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine were also aligned. He stressed the urgency for decisive action to address the pressing challenges faced by humankind, whose strength and resilience had been put to a test by the ongoing pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic had also presented an opportunity to revisit the fundamental role of nature and the environment. The theme of the current session was timely, as nature and the pressing environmental and socioeconomic challenges, could not wait, with 2030 just around the corner. He welcomed the decisions proposed for adoption at the online meeting of the fifth session, notably on the medium-term strategy and the programme of work and budget, and expressed appreciation and support for the efforts of the President of the Environment Assembly to preserve a level of ambition that met the urgent need to address specific global challenges for the environment and human health, such as waste, chemicals, marine litter and plastics. While the upcoming meetings of the parties to the three Rio Conventions would provide opportunities for accelerated action, a global agreement on plastics was needed, and the hope was that the relevant negotiations could begin at the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. The European Union's determination and commitment was reflected in the European Green Deal and strategies on circular economy, climate neutrality, biodiversity, food systems and chemicals, but everyone had to join in a global transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and circular economy, with a view to continued engagement in enhanced international cooperation and strengthened global environmental governance. The European Union and its member States looked forward to collaborating in the intersessional period leading up to the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session, as well as a successful commemoration in 2022 of the achievements of UNEP over the past 50 years.

(f) Arab States

32. The representative of Oman began his statement on behalf of the Arab States by stressing his region's commitment to multilateral action, with the pandemic highlighting the need for mutual support between countries on important topics that had immediate repercussions for humanity and future generations, such as the environment. The need for an online meeting limited to procedural issues such as the medium-term strategy due to the pandemic underscored the need to activate environmental agreements and the provisions for their implementation, including in terms of financing and technical empowerment. It was also necessary to emphasize the centrality of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and take into account different capabilities and different national circumstances, all within the framework of the right of States to achieve sustainable development and combat poverty. The proposed UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 addressed the special needs of developing countries and countries exposed to or affected by disasters and conflicts.

33. The online meeting format, while valuable, should not be considered a substitute for in-person meetings; it presented significant technological challenges and highlighted the "digital divide" that could hamper the achievement of the digital transformation goal of the medium-term strategy. Finally, he expressed support for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP in Nairobi and the emphasis on the organization's pioneering role and its centrality in dealing with environmental issues. In the context of the United Nations reform, it would be important to allocate the resources needed for UNEP to fulfil its assigned tasks and provide Member States with the required support within the framework of regional and bilateral cooperation.

2. General statements by representatives

34. Following the regional group statements, various representatives took the floor. Several representatives highlighted the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic had posed to the continuation of progress towards halting environmental degradation and achieving sustainable development, including owing to its economic consequences. They nevertheless stressed the importance of forging ahead with such initiatives in the face of ongoing degradation. In that regard, several representatives described the steps that their Governments had taken at the national, regional and international levels.

35. Two representatives said that sustainable development or the protection of natural resources and the environment had been enshrined in the constitution of their countries, one of which had used the Sustainable Development Goals as the framework for its national development strategy. Several representatives highlighted efforts related to the preservation of biodiversity and the restoration of ecosystems, such as the enactment of related domestic legislation and the development of a post-2020 global biological diversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

36. Several representatives said that their countries had made great strides in combating climate change through the adoption of initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including through greater efficiency in the transportation and energy sectors, or to achieve a climate-neutral economy. One representative said that her country had established a national carbon monitoring centre as part of carbon sequestration efforts.

37. Other national efforts described by representatives included the development of strategies related to persistent organic pollutants, mercury and hazardous wastes, including a ban on plastic carrier bags, and to the achievement of a green economy, focusing on waste management, the tourism sector and optimized use of energy resources.

38. It was pointed out that the pandemic had forced into the spotlight the relationship between humans and the environment and the inadequacies of current approaches to consumption and production, but it had also provided an opportunity to change current development models. Although a great deal had been achieved by, and through, UNEP over the past 50 years, much more needed to be done. Looking ahead, two representatives underscored the need for ambitious goals to drive action. One also advocated the development of governance tools that set targets, the launch of negotiations on a global instrument on plastics, the establishment of a scientific panel on chemical waste and the drawing up of guidance to halt the harm caused by the exploitation of raw materials.

39. Several representatives stressed the need for concerted efforts, at different levels, across sectors and among developed and developing countries, to address the environmental challenges facing humanity. Several representatives called for greater financial, technical and capacity-building support for developing countries, both in implementing environment-related programmes and to enable them to build more resilient, inclusive economies in the post-COVID era.

40. Acknowledging the critical role of UNEP as the global environmental authority during the pandemic, one representative encouraged UNEP to continue to improve its platform for holding online meetings and to look into both online and hybrid meeting formats to advance work ahead of the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Assembly planned for 2022.

III. Credentials of representatives (agenda item 3)

41. At the first plenary session of the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, the Chair of the Credentials Committee, Mr. Ado Lõhmus (Estonia), reported that the Bureau had received and examined the credentials of Member States submitted in accordance with rules 16 and 17 of the rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly. As at 22 February 2021, a total of 151 Member States had submitted copies of formal credentials issued by the Head of State or Government or the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Executive Director of UNEP. A total of 42 Member States had not submitted any information regarding their representatives to the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. The Bureau recommended that the Assembly accept the credentials of the Member States.

42. The Environment Assembly took note of the report of the Bureau on credentials.

IV. Report of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (agenda item 4)

43. Mr. Fernando Coimbra, Permanent Representative of Brazil and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives presented the report of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, including the outcomes of the fifth session of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, held from 15 to 17 February 2021 (UNEP/EA.5/INF/2).

44. Since the fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, the Committee had convened eight regular meetings, dealing with a wide range of topics, such as follow-up to the outcomes of the fourth session, the process mandated by General Assembly resolution 73/333, preparations for an action plan to implement paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development entitled “The future we want”, preparations

for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of UNEP, and presentations of UNEP flagship reports.

45. The Committee had also convened one or twice a month, in the format of its subcommittee, and had twice held the annual subcommittee meeting, in October 2019 and October 2020, to undertake, review and oversee the implementation of the UNEP programme of work for the biennium 2020–2021 and engage in consultations on the preparation of a new medium-term strategy for 2022–2025 and a programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023. The subcommittee had also discussed the review of its internal structures and working methods.

46. At its fifth session, the Open-ended Committee had taken note of the official reports of the Executive Director of UNEP to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session and had agreed to recommend the adoption by the Assembly of three draft decisions on: the management of trust funds and earmarked contributions; the medium-term strategy for 2022–2025 and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023; and the adjournment and resumption of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

47. Following a briefing by the President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, the Open-ended Committee had also taken note with appreciation of his intention to present a proposal for a consensual message to be endorsed by the Assembly at the online meeting of its fifth session, on the understanding that it would not constitute a negotiated outcome of the fifth session and would not set a precedent for future sessions.

48. The Committee had held all its meetings online since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and none had been postponed or delayed. The holding of meetings online, however, had not been without its challenges, ranging from those stemming from the digital divide to those associated with ensuring multilingualism. That was why the bureaux of the Environment Assembly and of the Committee of Permanent Representatives had decided that the current online meeting of the fifth session should focus solely on urgent and administrative decisions and to postpone the preparation of substantive negotiated outcomes until in-person meetings were able to resume.

49. Further information about the fifth session of the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives was available in the draft Chair's summary (UNEP/OECPR/5/3).

50. In closing, he thanked his fellow members of the Committee for their work, the secretariat for its support and the former Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, Ms. Francisca Ashietey-Odunton, Permanent Representative of Ghana to UNEP, who had led the Committee until June 2019, for her diligent leadership.

51. The Environment Assembly took note of the report of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

V. Commemoration of the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972 (agenda item 9)

52. Participants viewed a short video showcasing the achievements of UNEP over its 50-year history, following which statements were made by Mr. Stephen Stec, the lead of the major groups and stakeholders task force on UNEP at 50 (UNEP@50); the Executive Director; the President of the Environment Assembly; and Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya.

53. Speaking on behalf of the science and technology major group, Mr. Stec described the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UNEP as an opportunity to both celebrate the organization's accomplishments over the last half-century and look forward to its future. It had always been understood that the work of UNEP would be impossible without major group and stakeholder involvement in agenda-setting and policy development and implementation. That had been evidenced in 1972 at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, the first meeting at which civil society organizations had been permitted to address States Members of the United Nations directly, and had been confirmed in 1987 by the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development entitled "Our Common Future", which had introduced the concept of sustainable development and had declared that it would require the widespread support and involvement of an informed public, non-governmental organizations, the scientific community and industry.

54. While engaged with UNEP in the preparations for the fiftieth anniversary celebrations, major groups and stakeholders had also embarked on their own commemorative process, starting with a snapshot survey of Member States. The survey had revealed deep appreciation for the achievements of UNEP and high expectations of an enhanced future role for the organization, including a stronger mandate and a voice in coordinating the environmental programmes of other United Nations entities to enhance efficiency. The process would continue in 2021 with four global consultations and a more substantive survey, culminating in a report, “The UNEP we want”, to be presented at the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. The major groups and stakeholders invited everyone to join them in shaping the UNEP they wanted and determining the future role of UNEP in inclusiveness, environmental justice and giving purpose to the world’s restless and impatient youth.

55. The Executive Director, welcoming Mr. Kenyatta, said that it was fitting for UNEP and the Government of Kenya to come together to launch the commemoration of UNEP at 50, given the deep and unique bond between UNEP and Kenya and their shared history of action on environmental issues such as decarbonization, plastic pollution, biodiversity loss and governance. UNEP had made significant progress since its creation in 1972, expanding the environmental rule of law in countries, consistently shepherding scientific knowledge as an important policymaking tool, playing a critical role in environmental governance and helping to propel the environmental conversation into classrooms, the media, homes, voting booths and the financial and economic sectors. None of that would have been possible without the men and women that had shaped UNEP or the many visionaries that had brought the Programme to life. The coming year would provide an opportunity to learn from those visionaries and reflect on lessons from the past to chart a path for strengthening UNEP. There was much to consider, such as how to make UNEP “the” authority rather than “an” authority on the environment; craft meaningful relationships among UNEP-hosted multilateral agreements; reinvigorate multilateralism; carve a space for the voices of the youth; use digital technologies for faster delivery of real-time solutions to environmental crises; deepen environmental engagement in every step taken by the United Nations system; and keep scanning the horizon for environmental change. The UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025, which sounded the alarm on the three planetary crises of climate change, nature loss and pollution and waste, represented a first step in making UNEP stronger and fit for purpose. Ultimately, the strength and mandate of UNEP was rooted in the fact that it was the only institution in the world that could provide the “30,000-foot view of the 3,000-piece puzzle”, as Ms. Maria Ivanova had put it in *The Untold Story of the World’s Leading Environmental Institution: UNEP at Fifty*.

56. Echoing the two previous speakers, the President of the Environment Assembly reiterated that UNEP had marked important milestones over its 50-year history that functioned as places to pause and look back, but also as pit stops for refuelling and finding inspiration for informed, strategic choices in going forward. With the significant knowledge gained over the past 50 years of how environmental issues were interlinked, the time had come to reflect on how UNEP could help Member States to increase impact, and how institutions and actors standing ready to do their part could be better used to make peace with nature. The UNEP@50 celebration would ideally contribute to that, marking the start of a process of transforming UNEP into the catalyst needed to achieve a resilient, sustainable world for all.

57. In his address, Mr. Kenyatta said that it was an honour to launch the commemoration of fifty years of UNEP, established at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. Noting that the anniversary provided an opportunity to honour the foresight of pioneer leaders who had realized that every action taken by humankind altered the Earth that future generations would inherit, he said that the Conference had marked a turning point in how the international community viewed sustainable development. The fiftieth anniversary of that Conference and of the creation of UNEP came at a time when the world was striving to find ways to address record levels of environmental degradation, food insecurity, poverty and unemployment. It offered an opportunity for introspection and correction, for States to take transformative remedial action, make the right financial and social decisions and change their course where necessary. The role that UNEP played in offering global leadership in the management of international environmental affairs was fundamental; the strides made towards safeguarding the environment were testament to its work.

58. Kenya was proud to host the headquarters of UNEP and of UN-Habitat at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the only United Nations headquarters duty station in the global South. He expressed his gratitude to all the States Members of the United Nations, the President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly and the Executive Director of UNEP and her staff for their commitment and determination to ensure the continued success of the Programme. Assuring UNEP and the United Nations family in Nairobi of the country’s enduring support, he pledged to continue to improve the local infrastructure and general services to that end. In closing, he called upon all the people and

nations of the world to increase their commitment to, and actions aimed at, safeguarding the environment.

59. In the ensuing discussion, several representatives welcomed the decision to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of UNEP in Nairobi in March 2022 in conjunction with the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. It was important to celebrate the achievements of UNEP, which had been instrumental in the development of the current system of international environmental governance, and to show that its role was more relevant than ever.

60. Two representatives, each speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed the hope that activities linked to the commemoration would increase the visibility of UNEP and raise awareness of its added value and fundamental role in driving the international environmental agenda and sustainable governance. Both representatives, however, underscored the need for substantive issues to be tackled as part of the events. One representative referred to the ongoing process to strengthen the role of UNEP as the leading global environmental authority in accordance with paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”. Another representative said that the commemoration of the creation of UNEP and the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session offered an excellent opportunity to communicate the outcomes of the road map for the implementation of relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 73/333 in the form of a high-level ministerial declaration.

61. Several individual representatives expressed views with regard to the future role of UNEP, including that UNEP should step up efforts to strengthen processes in its decentralized offices to ensure that no one was left behind; support countries in drawing up national plans and policies in line with national priorities; do more to uphold the rights of the defenders of environmental rights, indigenous peoples and women; hold polluters accountable for environmental degradation; and develop new strategies in relation to protected areas.

62. The representative of Sweden, host of the high-level meeting planned for June 2022 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, said that his Government would collaborate with the Government of Kenya, host of the event to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of UNEP, to ensure that the two events complemented each other and were mutually reinforcing.

63. The representative of Germany, speaking also on behalf of Ecuador and Ghana, said that the three countries had decided to join forces to keep the topic of marine litter and plastic pollution high on the political agenda in the run-up to the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. They planned to host an international ministerial conference towards the end of the third quarter of 2021 to explore the next steps towards the development of a new global agreement on marine litter and plastic pollution. A representative of a major group urged UNEP to help make such an agreement a reality.

VI. Adoption of the resolutions, decisions and outcome document of the session (agenda item 12)

64. At the first plenary session of the online meeting of the fifth session, the Environment Assembly adopted by consensus the following decisions, which are set out in annex I to the present proceedings:

<i>Decision</i>	<i>Title</i>
5/1	Management of trust funds and earmarked contributions
5/2	Medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023
5/3	Adjournment and resumption of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

65. The Environment Assembly had before it a conference room paper containing a draft outcome message of the online meeting of the fifth session, prepared by the President. Introducing the draft outcome message, the President stressed that it did not constitute a negotiated outcome of the online meeting and would not set a precedent for the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session or for any subsequent sessions.

66. The Assembly endorsed the outcome message of the online meeting of the fifth session, which is set out in annex II to the present proceedings, without formal editing.

67. In the ensuing discussion, several representatives, including a number speaking on behalf of groups of countries, thanked the President for his leadership, in particular in the light of the exceptional circumstances against the backdrop of the pandemic. Nevertheless, some representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, pointed out that the format of the meeting had not been conducive to transparent and inclusive decision-making and that all participants should be involved in the outcomes of the in-person resumed meeting of the session, with their views reflected in an equitable manner.

68. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, reiterated the urgent need for action. Climate change, the loss of biodiversity, land degradation and pollution continued apace and the deadline for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals was fast approaching. A number of representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the response plan should be ambitious. One representative proposed areas of focus, including climate-change adaptation; ecological corridors to minimize the negative impact of fragmentation in infrastructure development planning; and the creation of a circular economy in the construction sector.

69. Several representatives, including a number speaking on behalf of groups of countries, welcomed the adoption of the decision on the medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023, which would guide UNEP work in the coming years and demonstrated the Programme’s commitment and ability to continue work despite the pandemic. A number of representatives highlighted the importance of predictable, adequate and timely financing and capacity-building as well as other kinds of support to aid implementation. One representative expressed the hope that future efforts would be facilitated by wider geographical representation and an improved gender balance among UNEP staff.

70. Many representatives emphasized the importance of cooperation and enhanced multilateral efforts, and stressed their readiness to work with other Member States, the regional groups, the Bureau and the secretariat in the lead-up to the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. One representative underscored the need for Governments to work with the private sector, civil society, indigenous peoples and academia, with another advocating that cooperation be based on the principles of transparency, accountability and common but differentiated responsibilities.

71. Several representatives described efforts undertaken by individual countries or groups of countries to resolve the ongoing environmental crises, including the adoption of a set of policy initiatives that aimed for climate-neutrality by 2050; the enactment of domestic legislation to implement the Paris Agreement; the development of a national climate-change adaptation plan; research and development on climate-change adaptation technologies; and the creation of a global alliance on the circular economy and resource efficiency.

VII. Other matters (agenda item 14)

72. During the closing session, a statement was delivered by Mr. Munir Akram, President of the Economic and Social Council, which was followed by presentations on various events held in connection with the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly.

73. Following Mr. Akram’s remarks, the President of the fifth session noted that many international organizations and treaty bodies had sent special video messages to the Environment Assembly at its fifth session, including the United Nations Industrial Development Organization; the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the secretariats of various multilateral agreements and of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa; the Special Rapporteur for human rights and the environment and the World Bank. Those messages were available on the webpage of the Environment Assembly.

74. The Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, Ms. Joyce Msuya, reported on the leadership dialogue, which had been held on the afternoon of Monday, 22 February, and the morning of Tuesday, 23 February. A summary of the leadership dialogue is set out in annex III to the present proceedings.

75. Representatives also heard reports on the key outcomes of the nineteenth session of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, the third session of the United Nations Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment and the Youth Environment Assembly, which had taken place in the weeks leading up to the meeting.

76. Characterizing the Earth as hospitable and biodiverse when the human species had first emerged, Mr. Akram described how humans had assaulted nature and significantly altered the planet over time. Nature was now fighting back, resulting in the visible impacts of global warming and climate change and less visible but equally devastating impacts of biodiversity loss. It was time to discard the economic models driving States to fight nature and each other, and to transition to a new economic and social paradigm that valued nature conservation over gross national product and enshrined sustainability as an integral part of the development paradigm. Member States were urged to ensure that the achievement of environmental targets was incorporated into their national Sustainable Development Goal strategies and reflected in their voluntary national reviews. For its part, the Economic and Social Council would endeavour to align the United Nations development system more closely with the sustainability targets in its Development Cooperation Forum and to mobilize the energy of young people to fight for nature at its Youth Forum.

77. For 2021, the Council had identified finance, sustainable infrastructure and science and technology as its three areas of focus, all three of which were vital to achieving environmental goals. Developing countries needed an estimated \$4.3 trillion to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and achieve the Sustainable Development Goal targets. Access to adequate finance was essential for the post-pandemic recovery, let alone for a green recovery. The promise of \$100 billion annually in climate finance also had to be fulfilled. Developing countries needed a further \$1.5 trillion in sustainable infrastructure investment annually; such investment would have an impact on 92 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets and form the heart of the transition to a green economy. Science and technology offered answers to the challenges of post-pandemic recovery and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and climate and environmental goals. As the rapid production of vaccines had shown, when requirements were clearly identified, innovation was possible. Member States were urged to identify the scientific breakthroughs needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to deploy the needed financial and human capital, marshal the power of digitalization to accelerate equitable and green growth and mobilize the political will to take the decisions needed to prevent humanity from destroying the hospitality of the planet.

78. Ms. Fatema Frutan, representing the major groups and stakeholders, said that science had shown that the triple environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution were an existential threat for nature, animals and humankind. The pandemic was a wake-up call highlighting the need for faster global environmental decision-making, higher ambition for transformative action and an increased pace and scale of implementation. She drew attention to the core messages of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum at its nineteenth session, which are available at: <https://www.unep.org/events/global-major-groups-stakeholders-forum-gmgsgf/online-global-major-groups-and-stakeholder>.

79. The outcomes of the third session of the United Nations Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment were presented by digital spokesperson Sam and his colleague, Bella. The third session of the Forum, on the theme “Integrated Solutions for Nature”, had been attended by 5,000 people, including 126 expert speakers from key sectors. A youth and children United Nations-Science-Policy-Business Forum working group had been launched to focus on green entrepreneurship and green jobs. At its third session, the Forum had emphasized the need for united, multisectoral, multilateral action supported by science as well as policies that empowered the equitable and fair deployment of new technologies for the environment as a prerequisite to the implementation of the UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025. The specific recommendations of the Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment are available at: <https://un-spbf.org/>.

Ms. Judy Njenga, speaking on behalf of the children and youth major group, drew attention to the flagship report, “The UNEP we want”, which was being prepared by the children and youth and the science and technology major groups for launch in 2021. Children and the youth were calling on Member States to table a resolution on youth engagement in the Environment Assembly and its subcommittees, and would share a road map to youth engagement in the lead-up to the in-person resumed meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. The messages formulated by children and youth attending the Second Global Youth Environment Assembly are available at: <https://www.youthenvironment.org/yea>.

VIII. Adoption of the report of the session (agenda item 15)

80. The Environment Assembly adopted the present proceedings on the basis of the draft proceedings that had been circulated, on the understanding that they would be completed and finalized by the Rapporteur, working in conjunction with the secretariat.

IX. Closure of the session (agenda item 16)

The online meeting of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP was declared closed at 6.50 p.m. on 23 February 2021 and the fifth session was thus adjourned pending the in-person resumed meeting to be held in 2022.