

CONCEPT NOTE

Draft resolution on mineral resource governance at UNEA 5.2

v.27.10

Submitted by Argentina, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Senegal and Switzerland

The draft resolution on mineral resource governance aims to strengthen the sustainable management and financing of mineral resources, in alignment with the SDG, the Paris Agreement and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. To that end, it proposes to establish an ad hoc open-ended working group (OEWG) tasked with developing recommendations to UNEA on how to enhance environmental coverage of existing instruments, and on the development of new international instruments, in order to fill environmental governance gaps related to minerals.

What are the key challenges with respect to mineral resources?

- The extraction of minerals and metals plays a key role with respect to addressing **climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution**. The topic is therefore at the core of the theme of UNEA 5 “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”.
- **Minerals are essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement**. Low-carbon technologies are far more mineral-intensive than traditional technologies. The demand for graphite, lithium and cobalt for instance is expected to increase by circa 500% by 2050 to meet the needs of a low-carbon world.¹ Sand and gravels – the extraction increased almost fivefold since 1970² and this trend will continue in order to cover the needs of big infrastructure projects. Over the next 2-3 decades, the extractive industry will struggle to meet the demand for several materials.³
- **Focus on an adequate environmental management permits to avoid the occurrence of negative environmental and social impacts**. Environmental damages could occur at local and global scales, and can be long lasting. The whole production chain of metals and non-metallic minerals (cradle to gate) accounts for 20% of total greenhouse gas emissions⁴, disrupts important biodiversity services and livelihoods, requires significant amounts of water, and is a major source of pollution (extraction and processing of minerals resources cause about 20% of human health impacts due to particulate matter)⁵. With declining ore grades, more waste is produced for each unit of metal, requiring more energy and water⁶. Mining companies report that in the coming 5 years, the amount of mining waste will increase by 25%⁷.

¹ World Bank Group (2020) [Minerals for Climate Action: The mineral Intensity of the Clean Energy Transition](#), IRP (2020). [Mineral Resource Governance in the 21st Century: Gearing extractive industries towards sustainable development, summary for policy makers](#).

² IRP (2019) [Global Resources Outlook: Natural Resources for the Future We Want](#).

³ Recycling - less than 1% for most metals used for innovative technologies- and substitution will by far not be sufficient to cover the increase in demand (e.g indium in solar cells). See IRP (2013) Metal Recycling: Opportunities, Limits, Infrastructure. The IBRD/World Bank (2017), “The Growing Role of Minerals and Metals for a Low Carbon Future”; Ali S. et al., Nature (2017), Mineral supply for sustainable development requires resource governance.

⁴ IRP (2019) [Global Resources Outlook: Natural Resources for the Future We Want](#).

⁵ IRP (2019) [Global Resources Outlook: Natural Resources for the Future We Want](#).

⁶ IRP (2020). [Mineral Resource Governance in the 21st Century: Gearing extractive industries towards sustainable development, summary for policy makers](#).

⁷ The mineral governance podcast, episode 2 on preventing tailings facility failures.

Why do we need a resolution on mineral resource governance?

- It is a **global challenge that requires urgent global action**: all countries are dependent on minerals – whether extractive, trading, investing or consuming activities take place.
- **The existing fragmented international governance poses a challenge to transformative change**. There is a need to intensify the changes on mineral resources governance to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. We lack a global and integrated approach to sustainable mining. Despite their essential role, minerals are not referenced in the SDGs. Furthermore, the multitude of instruments runs the risk of incoherence and inefficiency⁸, while some issues are neglected. **Sand** for instance is the largest volume of solid materials extracted globally, yet one of the least regulated in many regions⁹.
- This might also prevent **responsible investments**, further exacerbating environmental problems. A high burden exists for mineral-intensive countries to regulate the sector, while insufficient support is available.
- Despite the fact that the **safe management of tailings** is achievable, the number of *serious* tailings dam failures has increased in recent years, and climate change increases the risks¹⁰. The newly launched *Global Industry Standard on tailings management* is a milestone, but needs further steps towards efficient implementation with setting up an independent entity.
- **Strengthening the governance of mining is more important than ever before**. The challenges have further aggravated with the COVID-19 pandemic. International cooperation can help ensure that governance efforts are aligned with internationally agreed environmental goals, and mining positively contribute to sustainable development.

What does the resolutions calls for?

- The draft resolution **builds on the outputs of the implementation of the UNEA-4 resolution on mineral resource governance (EA.4/Res.19)**¹¹, in particular the regional consultations facilitated by UNEP.¹² These demonstrated the need for global policy action in a number of pressing areas such as: artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM); transparency and accountability; environmental due diligence; tailings management; the role of the financial sector, with the recommendation of setting up an intergovernmental working group¹³.
- The draft resolution takes the work one-step forward **by calling for an ad hoc open-ended working group** to further work on these pressing issues. It focuses on addressing **environmental impacts** linked to the extraction, processing and refining of mineral resources where relevant, and along the full life cycle of the mine.
- It complements work undertaken under EA.4/Res.1 on sustainable consumption and production and EA.4/Res.5 on sustainable infrastructure. The way in which we use mineral and metals is a key aspect in a **circular economy** and can provide a fundamental contribution to achieving **sustainable consumption and production** (SDG 12) globally.

⁸ [IRP \(2020\). Mineral Resource Governance in the 21st Century: Gearing extractive industries towards sustainable development, factsheet.](#)

⁹ UNEP Grid (2019), [Sand and sustainability: Finding new solutions for environmental governance of global sand resources](#)

¹⁰ UNEP Grid Arendal (2017) Mine Tailings Storage: Safety Is No Accident

¹¹ It requests UNEP to collect information on sustainable practices, identify gaps and options for the sustainable management of mineral resources.

¹² To that end, UNEP facilitated a series of 23 consultative meetings held between July and November 2020, during which 1,280 people, from 123 countries shared best practices and challenges. 111 written submissions were received.

¹³ [Report of the Executive Director on Progress in the Implementation of Resolution 4/19, MRG Report Executive Summary.pdf](#)

What is the outline of the resolution?

- In the preamble, the draft resolution describes **the context**. It recognizes the urgency and importance of ongoing action at international level. It recalls previous commitments under the SDGs, including SDG 12 and its target 12.2¹⁴, relevant UNEA resolutions and developments. It states the important role of minerals in this context, and refers to pressing issues, such as tailings safety, sand, ASM.
- In the operative paragraphs, the draft resolution outlines **key elements** setting out the **mandate** of the OEWG. It is proposed that the OEWG develops a vision and objectives for sustainable mining, and makes recommendations to UNEA on how to strengthen the environmental dimension of existing initiatives and standards, as well as on the need to develop new voluntary and legally binding instruments towards filling environmental governance gaps related to minerals.
- **Thematic areas** indicated are not exhaustive, but would include artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), sand, tailings management, repurposing of mining sites, the role of the financial sector, marginalized groups, local content. It will be for the OEWG to define the exact scope, prioritize work, and decide on the final content of the outputs.
- The draft resolution requests more research and work by UNEP with relevant stakeholders to address the current **lack of data, monitoring and regulation on sand**.
- The draft resolution also highlights the need for an authoritative certification process for the *Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management* via the establishment of an independent entity.
- Action developed under the resolution should use **synergies with existing initiatives and be mutually reinforcing**. The OEWG will be informed by and building upon other relevant resolutions, reports by the UNEP, the International Resources Panel, the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development, and other initiatives as appropriate.
- Work under the resolution will be funded by voluntary contributions.

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¹⁴ [Goal 12](#) on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, target 12.2 on achieving the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources by 2030.