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

**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the
United Nations Environment Programme
156th meeting**

Nairobi (online), 1 February 2022

**Draft minutes of the 155th meeting of the Committee of
Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment
Programme, held on 28 September 2021**

Agenda item 1

Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting, which was held in a hybrid format, both online and with a limited number of representatives attending in person, was opened at 10.00 a.m.¹ on Tuesday, 28 September 2021, by Ms. Luísa Fragoso, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations Environment Programme and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
2. The meeting was attended by 68 participants representing 67 members and 1 observer missions. The representatives of the Bureau, the chairs of regional groups and the representative of the host country attended the meeting in person. All other representatives participated remotely.
3. The Chair noted that the United Nations Office at Nairobi had announced plans to reopen the compound in Nairobi to all Nairobi-based delegates in October 2021. Work was underway to finalize the health and safety protocols and guidelines that would enable a safe re-opening, and the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi would brief Member States on the matter. Prior to the full reopening of the compound, members and stakeholders would continue to be able to participate in all meetings remotely.
4. The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Committee: Mr. Ruslan Nasibov (Azerbaijan); Mr. Peters Maddens (Belgium); Mr. Robert Bunbury (Canada); Mr. Zhou Zhuang (China); Ms. Rasa Sceponaviciute (European Union); Mr. Pirkka Tapiola (Finland); Mr. Clément Payeur (France); Mr. Dampsey B. Asare (Ghana); Mr. Jose Antonio Teixeira Alves (Holy See); Mr. Rózsa József (Hungary); Ms. Dvora Dorsman Yarkoni (Israel); Mr. Kwanghyun Shim (Republic of Korea); Ms. Fatin Zafirah Haris (Malaysia); Jorge Mario Rosas Pineda (Mexico); Mr. Gunnar Andreas Holm and Mr. Øystein Størkersen (Permanent Representative and Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway, respectively); Mr. Khalid Abdullah A. AlSalman (Saudi Arabia); Ms. Katarina Zuffa Leligdonova (Slovakia); Mr. M.J. Mahlangu (South Africa); Ms. Cristina Díaz-Fernández-Gil (Spain); and Mr. Torsak Janpian (Thailand).
5. She then bade farewell to the following departing members: Mr. Dmitri Panin (Azerbaijan); Mr. Jahangir Kabir Talukder (Bangladesh); Mr. Nicolas Nihon (Belgium); Mr. Marcus Davies (Canada); Mr. Xia Yingxian (China); Mr. Sebastian Gil (European Union); Mr. Erik Lundberg (Finland); Ms. Estelle Halimi (France); Mr. Visvaldas Kulbokas (Holy See); Mr. Judit Galambos (Hungary); Mr. Eyal David (Israel); Mr. Suleiman Arabiyat (Jordan); Mr. Changgyu Lee (Republic of

¹ All time references are to East Africa time (UTC + 3).

Korea); Mr. Ahmad Hafizuddin Zainal Abidin (Malaysia); Mr. Francisco Ernesto Romero Bock (Mexico); Mr. Slaoui Mohamed (Morocco); Ms. Elin Bergithe Rognlie (Norway); Mr. Mohammed A. Khayat (Saudi Arabia); Mr. František Dlhopolček (Slovakia); Javier García de Viedma Bernaldo de Quirós (Spain); and Mr. Korn Suwanasai (Thailand).

Agenda item 2

Adoption of the agenda

6. The agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda and the annotated provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/155/1 and UNEP/CPR/155/1/Add.1, respectively).

Agenda item 3

Adoption of the draft minutes of 154th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

7. The Committee adopted the minutes of its 154th meeting, held online on 20 May 2021, and its extraordinary meeting, held online on 23 June 2021, on the basis of the draft minutes of the meetings (UNEP/CPR/155/2 and UNEP/CPR/155/8, respectively).

Agenda item 4

Report by the Executive Director

8. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the report entitled “Quarterly report to the 155th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. April – June 2021,” noting that it provided an update on significant developments during the second quarter of 2021 of relevance to UNEP.

9. In her oral report, Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP, said that the current meeting was being held in the wake of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, during which the Secretary-General had pointed out that the world had never been more threatened or more divided. He had presented a report entitled “Our Common Agenda,” which contained a blueprint with proposals for consideration by Member States on how to strengthen multilateralism, re-embrace global solidarity and work together for the common good.

10. On the climate crisis, the new synthesis report on nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, released in September 2021 by the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ahead of the twenty-sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, stressed that despite the long-term progress achieved, a continuation of current climate efforts would lead to a warming of 2.7 degrees Celsius by the year 2100. The report also projected that global emissions could peak by 2030 if the conditional commitments set out in nationally determined contributions by developing countries were fully implemented. However, as highlighted during Climate Week, held on the margins of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, the implementation of conditional commitments depended on enhanced developing country access to financial resources, technology and other forms of support. In essence, a much greater level of ambition on climate finance, mitigation and adaptation was needed to live up to the letter of the Paris Agreement.

11. The message that more ambition and solidarity were needed [to address the climate crisis?] had also come out of the first part of the eighteenth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), held online from 13 to 16 September 2021, at which ministers had made a commitment to set up Africa’s response to accelerate a green and sustainable recovery through the Africa green stimulus programme.

12. With regard to food and agriculture, a report jointly released by UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations ahead of the United Nations Food Systems Summit, held on 13 September 2021, had found that 87 per cent of current government support to agricultural producers supported practices that made food systems unsustainable. At the Summit, more than 100 Member States, companies and foundations had made commitments to address the critical need for a complete overhaul of the world’s food systems, and numerous potentially game-changing coalitions had emerged, including on food loss and waste, a repurposing of support provided to agricultural producers, deforestation-free commodity supply

chains, climate resilience, agroecology and regenerative agriculture, and the “One health” approach. There was considerable political will at the national level to work on food systems and, as chair of the United Nations system task force, UNEP would work with the Rome-based United Nations entities and other partners in the follow-up to the Summit.

13. On biodiversity, ahead of the first part of the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, to be held in Kunming, China, from 11 to 15 October 2021, UNEP had been actively supporting the Convention by convening platforms to facilitate the development by Member States of the post-2020 biodiversity framework, and by providing scientific analysis around potential indicators for proposed targets. UNEP was also working closely with the Global Environment Facility, UNDP and others to support the rapid mobilization of financial resources for stocktaking, updates to national biodiversity plans, and improved reporting, thereby preparing the ground for the swift implementation of the framework once it was agreed and adopted.

14. Considerable work had been undertaken in preparation of the resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and “UNEP@50”, the special session of the Environment Assembly that would be held on 3 and 4 March 2022 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP. Owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, neither session was likely to be a large in-person gathering. Thus, she encouraged Member States to ensure their success by adopting a strategic lens and by focusing all their efforts on a limited number of high priority outcomes that would help to advance the global environmental agenda.

15. With regard to UNEP@50, during her informal consultations with regional groups in recent months, Member States had expressed a strong desire to use the event as an occasion both to reflect on the challenges that lay ahead and to strengthen UNEP. As decided by the General Assembly in its resolution 75/280, UNEP@50 would be mutually reinforcing with the international meeting entitled “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity”, to be held on 2 and 3 June 2022 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. It was to be hoped that both commemorative events would steer action in the following decades towards healthy people and a healthy planet, and would ideally be influenced or inspired by the Secretary-General’s report entitled “Our Common Agenda”.

16. A major milestone for human and environmental health had been achieved recently with the global phase-out of leaded petrol, thanks to two decades of multi-stakeholder efforts undertaken under the UNEP-led Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles, which had helped 82 countries that still used leaded petrol in 2002 to phase it out. Other UNEP achievements were described in the quarterly report.

17. Regarding the issue of funding, as of 31 August 2021, Member States had contributed more than \$75 million to the Environment Fund for 2021, which was more than the Fund’s total income in 2020. She expressed her deep appreciation to Member States for their contributions and trust, thanking in particular those who represented approximately half of the membership and had made their voluntary indicative contributions, also known as “fair share”, contributions. She encouraged all other Member States to follow suit.

18. With regard to administrative matters, UNEP had continued to make reforms to bolster its ability to implement the medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025. A decision had been made to relocate the UNEP Regional Office for West Asia to the premises of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in Beirut, while maintaining a light presence in the current Bahrain office. Once completed, the relocation to Beirut would enable UNEP to have greater impact on the sustainable development agenda in the Western Asia subregion, in line with the United Nations system-wide reform. Another reform that would enhance UNEP impact was the integration of the Sustainable United Nations team, which worked to improve the sustainability of the United Nations system’s facilities and operations, into the UNEP New York Office.

19. Increasing diversity would remain a central area of focus for UNEP over the following year. Specifically, a new talent acquisition and outreach strategy had been developed to strengthen gender and geographical representation in 2022; a dedicated Outreach Officer would be recruited to support the implementation of the new strategy, and to increase regional representation from under- and unrepresented Member States; and internal monitoring systems would be set up to enable managers to monitor diversity indicators when screening and recruiting candidates.

20. With regard to recent senior leadership appointments, Ms. Jacqueline Alvares Mourelle (Uruguay) had been appointed as the Director of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean; Ms. Patricia Kameri-Mbote (Kenya) would join UNEP as the new Director of the Law Division; Ms. Tatjana Hema (Albania) had been appointed as the Executive Secretary of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the

Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention); and Ms. Ermira Fida (Albania) had been appointed as the Deputy Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Secretariat. Lastly, Mr. Juan Bello (Colombia) and Ms. Haruko Okuko (Japan) had been appointed as coordinators for UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50, respectively.

21. In closing, she bade farewell to the Secretary of Governing Bodies, Mr. Jorge Laguna-Celis, who would be moving to Paris to take on a new role as the Head of the Secretariat of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, thanking him for his leadership and contribution to environmental governance. She then welcomed Mr. Ulf Bjornholm, Deputy Secretary of Governing Bodies, as Secretary ad interim of Governing Bodies, pending finalization of the recruitment process for the position.

22. In the ensuing discussion, all those who took the floor thanked the Executive Director for her oral briefing and quarterly report, commending the secretariat for the impressive amount of work undertaken during the reporting period despite the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including work on biodiversity and climate change, the provision of capacity-building support to developing countries to help them address environmental challenges, the production of scientific and other reports, and the organization of major environmental events.

23. Many representatives welcomed the imminent re-opening of the Conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi compound, stressing that personal contact was indispensable for successful multilateralism. One representative called on the United Nations Office at Nairobi and UNEP to provide clarity on the size of delegations and the safety protocols that would need to be followed at the eighth annual subcommittee meeting, and suggested that each Member State should be able to determine the composition of its own delegation, including whether capital-based members should attend the meeting in person.

24. One representative said that the guidelines to reopen the Nairobi compound should be strengthened to ensure that the level of precaution followed in Nairobi was at the very least equivalent to that exercised at United Nations Headquarters. For instance, prior to entering the Nairobi compound, all delegates should be required to provide proof of vaccination with a vaccine approved by the World Health Organization. He also requested UNEP to make all meetings accessible online to ensure equitable access for Nairobi-based and capital-based missions.

25. Another representative drew attention to technical difficulties experienced by some delegations during virtual meetings and urged the secretariat to engage in further efforts to ensure that all Member States had an equal opportunity to discuss important matters in the lead-up to the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly, including draft resolutions to be considered at the session.

26. The representative of Kenya, said that his Government, as the host country of UNEP and the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, would continue to collaborate closely with the United Nations Office at Nairobi, UNEP and other entities to ensure compliance with safety protocols, a safe reopening of the Nairobi compound, and a successful resumed fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and related meetings.

27. Turning to the quarterly report, many representatives welcomed the efforts and progress made towards achieving gender parity and ensuring a more equitable geographical distribution in the secretariat, including through the adoption of a new talent acquisition and outreach strategy to improve diversity and regional representation in UNEP. Two representatives requested the secretariat to provide regular updates to Member States on the implementation of the new strategy, and on progress made towards achieving equitable geographic representation in the organization. Another representative requested more information on the strategy itself.

28. Two representatives expressed concern that, despite efforts to achieve equitable regional representation in UNEP, the Group of Western European and other States continued to be overrepresented in the secretariat, with more than 50 per cent of UNEP staff, and six out of the ten most recent senior appointments at UNEP headquarters, coming from that group. One of the representatives said that such regional imbalance undermined the status of UNEP as a truly multilateral platform, where all Member States could come together to achieve common goals.

29. One representative requested information on recruitments and regional representation at the regional offices. Another representative requested the secretariat to provide a breakdown of regional representation in the different parts of the organization, including at UNEP headquarters, in its offices, and in the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements administered by UNEP. A third expressed support for further strengthening UNEP headquarters by locating all UNEP-administered multilateral environmental agreements in Nairobi.

30. Drawing attention to specific sections of the quarterly report, one representative said that more information should be provided therein on the work of UNEP in the area of air pollution. Another representative said that UNEP seemed to have carried out fewer activities in Africa compared to other regions and queried whether there were challenges specific to the region that might explain this apparent imbalance.
31. One representative asked the secretariat to make a minor edit to the quarterly report to specify that the virtual meeting of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) held in May 2021 had been a meeting of the Bureau of AMCEN, rather than a session of AMCEN. Another representative urged the secretariat to avoid the use of concepts that had not been agreed upon by Member States, and which could therefore be misinterpreted, including terms such as “nature-based solutions”, “green recovery”, “green economy” and “blue economy”.
32. One representative drew attention to the findings of the UNEP report *State of Finance for Nature: Tripling Investments in Nature-Based Solutions by 2030*, which had highlighted a \$4.1 trillion finance gap that would need to be filled by 2050 if the world was to meet agreed targets related to climate change, biodiversity and land degradation. The report findings were a stark reminder of the need to raise ambition on finance in tandem with other targets, in line with the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.
33. Many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the momentum achieved on the issue of plastic pollution, including at the Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution, held in hybrid form in Geneva on 1 and 2 September 2021, and expressed support for the adoption by the Environment Assembly, at its resumed fifth session, of a resolution to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee tasked with negotiating a new legally-binding global instrument on plastics.
34. Many representatives thanked the Executive Director for her consultations with regional groups on UNEP@50, which they said should pave the way for the strengthening of UNEP and environmental law. The event would enable a review of all that had been achieved in the last 50 years and provide an overview of the challenges that lay ahead and the role that UNEP could play in finding solutions to the interrelated planetary challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, all of which had been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenge of building back better. A number of representatives said that the outcome of UNEP@50 should be the political declaration on the environment that was being prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/333.
35. One representative announced that French-Swiss artist, Saype, whose giant, ecofriendly frescos painted on meadows left a lasting impression on the public, would contribute his art to the UNEP@50 special session to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP.
36. Many representatives said that, at its resumed fifth session, the Environment Assembly should develop strong messages on the environmental dimension of sustainable development as its input to the Stockholm+50 international meeting, in line with the core expertise and experience of UNEP, and that discussion on that input should commence at the eighth annual subcommittee meeting.
37. Several representatives outlined national-level efforts to support UNEP and its work, including through the signing of new agreements with UNEP and the implementation of activities to protect and restore ecosystems, tackle pollution and address climate change, including by becoming carbon-neutral, and accelerate the transition toward a circular economy.
38. On funding, one representative welcomed the news that, compared to the same period in 2020, UNEP had received a slightly higher number of Member State contributions to the Environment Fund during the second quarter of 2021. Another representative announced that her Government had recently decided to allocate at least 30 per cent of the national budget to tackling climate change and environmental degradation globally, and was reorganizing the budget accordingly, including support provided to UNEP.
39. One representative asked the secretariat to provide more information on the revised resource mobilization strategy and its implementation.
40. Responding to comments, the Executive Director thanked representatives for their statements and said that the secretariat had taken note of their requests. With regard to specific comments on the quarterly report, she said that the report could be strengthened to better capture activities related to air pollution, including the celebration of the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies on 7 September 2021, and UNEP activities in Africa, which had in fact been numerous.
41. With regard to concerns expressed regarding the regional makeup of the secretariat, she said that she concurred with the view that UNEP should reflect its membership. However, the necessary

changes could not happen overnight, but only post by post and recruitment by recruitment, so it was important to consider the issue in a longer time frame. Since July 2021, only one senior leadership position had been filled from the Group of Western European and other States, and the secretariat would continue to push for greater regional representation within its ranks, while abiding by the applicable United Nations rules and regulations.

42. The Director of the Corporate Services Division, Ms. Sonja Leighton-Kone, provided additional information on ongoing efforts by UNEP to increase regional diversity, noting that, following the adoption by the United Nations Secretariat of the geographical diversity strategy in 2020, UNEP had developed its own talent acquisition and outreach strategy to strengthen gender and geographical representation in UNEP. Based on an examination of the existing regional makeup of the secretariat and workforce planning data, including current and projected vacancies and recruitments, as well as retirements, the secretariat had identified Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific as three regions for which more active outreach should be pursued in the search for talent. The strategy had both internal and external components. Internally, it focused on sensitizing hiring managers and increasing internal capacities through the recruitment of an outreach officer. Externally, it involved using recruitment fairs, professional search sites, and engaging with academic and research institutions, including through the Nairobi-based permanent missions, to search for talent from underrepresented countries and regions. As work to improve diversity progressed, the secretariat would provide regular updates to Member States on the implementation of the strategy.

Agenda item 5

Preparations for the commemoration of the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP@50)

43. Introducing the item, the Chair recalled that, by its decision 5/3, on the adjournment and resumption of its fifth session, the Environment Assembly had decided to convene a special session to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UNEP. The special session, known as “UNEP@50”, would be held in Nairobi on 3 and 4 March 2022, in conjunction with the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly, under the leadership of the Presidency and Bureau of the sixth session of the Environment Assembly.

44. The secretariat had prepared and revised, in consultation with Member States, a strategic plan for UNEP@50. At their joint online preparatory retreat, held on 24 June 2021, the bureaux of the Committee and the Environment Assembly had welcomed the revised plan, and had requested the secretariat to launch the process to secure early nominations by the regions to the Bureau of the sixth session of the Environment Assembly, with a view to ensuring Member State ownership of the preparations. Accordingly, the secretariat had issued a call for nominations on 6 July 2021, but had not yet finalized the list of nominees, given that several regional groups were still considering the matter.

45. In parallel, the Executive Director had undertaken informal consultations on UNEP@50 with all the regional groups. The secretariat’s proposals for the session, the key messages of Member States during the informal consultations and a number of questions for further consideration by Member States had all been reflected in the presentation posted on the Committee’s portal for the current meeting.

46. Lastly, at its extraordinary meeting held on 23 June 2021, the Committee had recommended that the Vice-Chair representing the African States be tasked with facilitating the preparations for UNEP@50 within the Committee.

47. The Director of the Policy and Programme Division, Mr. Tim Kasten, presented the key proposals being considered by the secretariat for UNEP@50 and the key messages emerging from the informal consultations held by the Executive Director with regional groups, stressing that the event offered a unique opportunity to strengthen UNEP and reinvigorate the global multilateral environmental system in order to tackle the interrelated planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution in ways that promoted greater inclusivity, equity and solidarity.

48. The ideas presented during the informal regional consultations related to strengthening UNEP by enhancing the policy-science interface to support evidence-based policymaking at the multilateral level; by enhancing its role as a catalyst for action for existing multilateral environmental agreements in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including by promoting an environmental governance system informed by non-traditional coalitions, such as multi-stakeholder partnerships; by further elevating the headquarters of UNEP in Nairobi as a global hub for the environment; and by strengthening the financial capacity of UNEP to fulfil its mandate.

49. The secretariat had identified three concrete areas within its core mandate under which action would be taken to further strengthen UNEP. First, in order to adapt to the changing environmental data landscape, address environmental data fragmentation and leverage the best available data for informed decision-making, UNEP would work on an upgraded world environment situation room with a physical presence in Nairobi. Second, drawing on a forward-looking report that it was preparing, UNEP would take a fresh look at the science-policy interface, focusing on more coherent policy formulation informed by economics, technology and the social sciences to tackle the three planetary crises. Lastly, in order to enhance its financial capacity, UNEP would reinforce the voluntary indicative scale of contributions, also known as the “fair share” concept, and establish three thematic funds to address the three planetary crises, as referenced in the approved medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025.

50. During the informal regional consultations, Member States had voiced a strong desire to hold UNEP@50 in person, and suggested that the event should take stock of the past, reflect on the present and envision the future; strengthen UNEP and its headquarters; support the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda; result in a consensual political outcome document; include plenary sessions and high-level dialogues guided by questions and a report by the Executive Director; and be effectively communicated around the world with Member State ownership.

51. An extensive communications campaign would be deployed around UNEP@50 through a revamped website, an anniversary toolkit, a series of anniversary stories, and a social media campaign to raise awareness around the event under the hashtag “#UNEP@50”.

52. At the current meeting, the Committee was invited to reflect on a few specific questions on which further guidance was needed, namely, whether UNEP@50 should result in a ministerial declaration and, if so, how the declaration should be drafted and negotiated; whether a UNEP@50 declaration should also address the existing process under General Assembly resolution 73/333; and whether UNEP@50 needed a theme beyond commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP.

53. In the ensuing discussion, all those who spoke thanked Mr. Kasten for the presentation and the Executive Director for her consultations with regional groups, stressing that the questions raised by the secretariat and the initial exchange by the Committee should help guide additional and more substantive discussion at the subcommittee meeting of 7 October 2021. In that regard, many representatives said that they looked forward to reviewing the background note to be prepared by the secretariat to guide the subcommittee discussions on UNEP@50.

54. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, recalled that UNEP@50 was a Member State-driven process and welcomed the opportunity to provide further guidance on the session. He proposed as a theme for the session “Towards the implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development”, noting that it reflected a call for ambitious action aligned with the United Nations Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.

55. Reflecting on what UNEP@50 should accomplish, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the session should raise awareness of UNEP added value and its fundamental role in driving environmental governance and the international environmental agenda. Another representative said that the session should recognize that the three planetary crises were intertwined and that addressing them required holistic measures by Member States through cooperation, international financing and individual efforts, taking into account different realities and capacities and existing mandates under multilateral environmental agreements.

56. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that over the next 50 years UNEP should play a greater role in assisting developing country Member States in the implementation of their international environmental commitments. Echoing his support for that vision of the future, another representative suggested that UNEP@50 should examine how UNEP might better assist Member States in implementing their international environmental commitments, for instance by acting as a clearing house on the environmental dimension of sustainable development, and by connecting Member States requiring assistance with those with the necessary capacities, technologies and financial resources.

57. One representative said that UNEP@50 should highlight the need for UNEP to maintain a balanced vision of sustainable development, in all its three dimensions; the continued relevance of all the principles set out in the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; and the need to match ambition on the environment with greater ambition on means of implementation through the provision of sufficient, predictable and adequate financial resources, capacity-building and technology transfer to developing countries, in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

58. One representative, stressing that multilateral action was essential to solving most of the world's environmental crises, said that his Government had made it a top priority to raise ambition to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. To that end, ahead of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, it had doubled its climate finance pledge to \$11.4 billion annually by 2024.

59. Many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed support for strengthening UNEP and its headquarters, and using UNEP@50 as a platform for Member States to recommit to Nairobi-based multilateralism, and to making the UNEP secretariat more geographically representative.

60. With regard to the secretariat proposals to strengthen UNEP, many representatives, including two speaking on behalf of groups of countries, welcomed the initiative to upgrade the world environment situation room through the establishment of a physical and interactive presence at UNEP in Nairobi, but requested more detailed information on the initiative, and how it would affect the existing world environment situation room. Two representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, conveyed their expectation that the initiative would pave the way for enhanced participation of scientists and academia from the global South in the science-policy interface and UNEP science-related work.

61. On the secretariat initiatives to strengthen UNEP financial capacity, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, sought clarification on what the initiative to reinforce the voluntary indicative scale of contributions entailed, bearing in mind that different countries had different national capacities and that financial efforts were underpinned by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

62. One representative expressed support for the "fair share" concept. Another, however, objected to the use of the word "fair", stressing that Member States had intentionally avoided the use of that word when they had agreed to establish the voluntary indicative scale of contributions in 2012, given that, to many Member States, fairness should only be applied in environmental financing if it was in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

63. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, queried how the proposal to establish the three thematic trust funds on the planetary crises would help address the critical funding needs of the science-policy interface. Another representative requested more information on the costs and benefits of setting up the three funds. A third asked the secretariat to confirm that, once established, the three thematic funds would attract new resources for UNEP, rather than take away resources from the Environment Fund.

64. Two representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that it was important for UNEP@50 to reflect on the foundational mandates of UNEP, including governance and the science-policy interface. They expressed concern that, over the previous years, the activities of the Science Division had been severely underfunded, while subprogrammes that were not part of the original mandate of UNEP had been very well-resourced. They therefore welcomed initiatives to encourage donors to soften the earmarking of their contributions to UNEP, thereby giving UNEP greater discretion in directing its resources towards the implementation of the programmes of work approved by the Environment Assembly. Another representative said that, in addressing the three planetary crises, it was critical to emphasize the value of science as a basis for policymaking; a key lesson of the COVID-19 pandemic had been the triumph of science in the rapid detection of the virus and the swift development of vaccines, despite governments failing to take timely coordinated action.

65. With regard to the outcomes of UNEP@50, one representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed support for the possible adoption of a political declaration at the session, and recognized the potential to follow up on General Assembly resolution 73/333.

66. Two representatives said that the political declaration on the environment that was being prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/333 should be the outcome of UNEP@50. One representative expressed surprise that one of the questions raised by the secretariat asked Member States to consider whether a UNEP@50 declaration should also address the process under General Assembly resolution 73/333, thereby implying that there was more than one political declaration under consideration.

67. One representative said that some of the proposed outcomes of UNEP@50 were too ambitious and were not consistent with the commemorative spirit endorsed by Member States in Environment Assembly decision 4/2. He suggested that Member States should be realistic about what could be accomplished in the lead-up to the special session, and urged both Member States and the secretariat to focus all their time and effort on the most pressing environmental issues.

68. On the issue of communication, two representatives said that, in order to effect change at the scale needed, it was vital that UNEP engage not only with governments but also with civil society, the private sector and academia, through the provision of information, both on its website and through social media, related to trends and Member State initiatives in the field of the environment. Two representatives suggested that all UNEP communication materials should provide cohesive and compelling messages that used language previously agreed to by the Environment Assembly and avoided concepts not previously agreed to multilaterally by Member States.

69. Two representatives of major groups and stakeholders, speaking on behalf of the UNEP@50 task force, drew attention to the work being undertaken by the task force in preparation for the special session, including a series of surveys, consultations and interviews with stakeholders from around the world that would form the basis of a report entitled “The UNEP we want.” The report would be released in early 2022, and the task force would organize a round table on the report. With regard to the questions raised by the secretariat, they recommended “The UNEP we want” as a theme for UNEP@50; that one of the plenary sessions or leadership dialogues at UNEP@50 be dedicated to the role of major groups and stakeholders in UNEP; and that the political declaration developed pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/333 be the outcome of UNEP@50.

70. Responding to comments, the Executive Director thanked representatives for their remarks, noting that the secretariat had taken note of their feedback and requests for information. With regard to the secretariat initiative to set up three thematic funds, the intent was in no way to undermine the Environment Fund, but to attract contributions from Member States that were not tightly earmarked or tied to specific projects or activities. Such contributions would give the secretariat greater flexibility in deploying funds toward the science-policy interface and other Member State priorities, as reflected in the approved medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025. With regard to the secretariat’s initiative on the voluntary indicative scale of contributions, the secretariat was not seeking to modify what had been agreed upon by Member States, but, in the spirit of solidarity, to call on all Member States to make a commitment to meet their voluntary indicative scale of contributions. Some of the smallest and most hard-hit small island developing States, for instance, had consistently met their voluntary indicative scale of contributions over the years.

71. On the initiative to upgrade the world environment situation room, she said that the secretariat was developing it as a potential deliverable to strengthen UNEP that could be announced at UNEP@50. The initiative involved integrating the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) and the Global Resource Information Database (GRID) centres, set up in 1974 and 1985, respectively, and enhancing the data and information capacities of UNEP, in line with its core mandate to meet the needs of Member States to access key environmental data for decision-making. The objective of the initiative was thus to integrate the existing hundreds of databases into a single, Global Environment Outlook (GEO)-led, accessible database, and to enhance UNEP capacities to analyse environmental data for use in policymaking.

72. With regard to the outcomes of the special session, she expressed the hope that Member States would agree that no more than two declarations should be foreseen, stressing that a multitude of declarations risked undermining the process. In closing, she expressed confidence that the report entitled “The UNEP we want” would enrich the discussions on UNEP@50.

73. Following the discussion, the Committee agreed that the subcommittee meeting scheduled for 7 October 2021 would be dedicated to further in-depth discussion on the preparations for the UNEP@50 special session, including its structure, the themes for the leadership dialogues, and the possible format of the political outcome, and to request the secretariat to prepare a background note to support the subcommittee discussions. The meeting would be chaired by the Vice-Chair representing the African States, who had been tasked with facilitating the preparations of UNEP@50 within the Committee.

74. The Chair asked all the regional groups to submit as soon as possible their nominations to the Bureau of the Environment Assembly at its sixth session, in order to facilitate the preparations for UNEP@50, and encouraged the secretariat to continue to implement the strategic plan for UNEP@50.

Agenda item 6

Preparations for the eighth annual subcommittee meeting

75. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the draft provisional agenda (UNEP/ASC.8/1), annotations thereto (UNEP/ASC.8/1/Add.1), and proposed structure and list of documents for the eighth annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent

Representatives to UNEP, which had prepared by the secretariat in close consultation with the Chair and the Bureau of the Committee. The secretariat had also prepared the document entitled “Possible key areas of importance for consideration at the resumed session of UNEA-5” (UNEP/CPR/155/5), in preparation for the eighth annual subcommittee meeting.

76. The representative of the secretariat said that the proposed structure had been approved by the Bureau and would enable the subcommittee to fulfil its dual role of reviewing the programme performance of UNEP and launching the preparations for the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly. In preparing the document, the secretariat had considered the possibility that the subcommittee meeting would convene in a hybrid format, with both online and in-person participation, or be held in person, subject to the outcome of the ongoing discussions between the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the regional groups regarding the possible reopening of the Nairobi compound. Regardless of format, the duration of the meeting would be five days and space would be provided for informal, in-depth consultations on the outcomes of the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly, and would result in a chair’s summary that would reflect the positions of Member States on the various agenda items discussed. With regard to the documents for the meeting, the Executive Director would make them available to Member States in advance of the meeting, and no later than 4 October 2021. He invited the Committee to endorse the proposed structure to enable the secretariat to finalize the preparations for the meeting.

77. In the ensuing discussion, all those who took the floor thanked the secretariat for the oral briefing and the documents presented. One representative said that document UNEP/CPR/155/5 formed a sound basis for discussion by the Committee on the format of the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly, and that of the preparatory process within the Committee on the substantive outcomes of the session.

78. Many representatives expressed the hope that the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly and its preparatory meetings would be held in person, but acknowledged that, in the light of developments related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it seemed more and more likely that a hybrid format would be used. Many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that, should a hybrid format be required, a process or set of criteria should be developed to ensure that all representatives had equal opportunity to participate in the negotiations, and to give all delegations the ability to decide the composition of their own delegations, including who should attend each meeting in person.

79. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the current meeting did not qualify as a hybrid meeting, given that only Bureau members, the chairs of regional groups and the representative of the host country had been given the opportunity to attend in person. He suggested that all delegations should be accorded equal treatment in that regard.

80. On the proposed agenda and structure of the eighth annual subcommittee meeting, many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that additional time should be allocated to the programme performance review of the UNEP programme of work for the biennium 2020–2021 to enable the subcommittee to fulfil its oversight role. Another representative, also speaking on behalf of a group of countries, suggested that, in order for the subcommittee to fulfil its oversight role, the agenda must provide for interactive dialogue between Member States and the secretariat, and all meeting documents needed to be made available to Member States by 4 October 2021 to enable consultation with capitals on the substantive and technical matters discussed therein.

81. Many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, requested that, in accordance with paragraph 4 of Environment Assembly decision 5/3, on the adjournment and resumption of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, the subcommittee was to consider the Executive Director’s reports on progress achieved in the implementation of resolutions of the Environment Assembly. One representative, stressing that those reports provided valuable information on implementation gaps on which the Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session might need to follow up, proposed that the secretariat combine the highlights of the Executive Director’s reports with its report on programme performance, and that time be allocated during the annual subcommittee meeting for consideration of possible new or follow-up resolutions on specific topics arising from the combined reports.

82. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the allocation of time, in the proposed structure of the eighth annual subcommittee meeting, for informal discussion of any issues remaining open by working groups. Another representative requested the secretariat to elaborate on what was envisioned for the informal working groups planned for the annual subcommittee meeting, and how the logistics of such groups would unfold, especially if the meeting took place in a hybrid format.

83. Many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, suggested that there was a need to be ambitious, but also realistic, about what could be accomplished at the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly, given the time constraints and the challenges associated with its format. They encouraged Member States to exercise restraint in the number of draft resolutions they put forward for consideration at the session, stressing that a higher number of outcomes did not necessarily reflect a higher level of ambition, and to give priority to pressing issues that could move the environmental agenda forward, such as marine litter and plastic pollution.

84. Another representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that she was open to discussing proposals for draft resolutions or draft decisions related to the theme of the fifth Environment Assembly session, “Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”, or which followed up on reports presented during the first part of the fifth session, provided that they were streamlined and could generate support, and that the total number of draft resolutions or draft decisions remained manageable. She suggested that further discussion was needed on how best to organize the preparations for the session, in particular with regard to draft resolutions, and urged Member States to abide by the deadline of 20 December 2021 for the submission of draft resolutions.

85. Drawing attention to the note by the secretariat entitled “Possible key areas of importance for consideration at the resumed session of UNEA- 5” (UNEP/CPR/155/5), one representative said that it failed to include several draft resolutions that were being negotiated by Member States, and which related to the mandate of the Environment Assembly. He asked the secretariat to prepare a full inventory of the draft resolutions put forward by Member States for consideration by the Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session.

86. Two representatives, each speaking on behalf of a group of countries, emphasized the need to make wise and efficient use of the time available in the lead-up to the resumed fifth session, and to ensure the prompt preparation and negotiation of all the resolutions and decisions to be adopted at the session. One of the representatives expressed confidence that, through a transparent and inclusive process, consensus would be forged on all decisions and resolutions to ensure a successful resumed fifth session.

87. With regard to other key outcomes of the resumed fifth session, many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed support for the adoption of a ministerial declaration that set the global environmental agenda and helped to maintain political momentum on the environmental dimension of sustainable development as well as the need to address as one the planetary challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The representative speaking on behalf of a group of countries said that the Environment Assembly should also produce strong messages and inputs, based on its experience and expertise, to the international meeting on Stockholm+50. She said that the meeting was expected to raise awareness on the threats that environmental challenges to sustainable development, and contribute to the transition that was needed in social and economic systems to stop the environmental decline that was eroding progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

88. The representative of major groups and stakeholders drew attention to the summary report of the international consultation of major groups and stakeholders, held online from 7 to 9 September 2021 in preparation for the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly, which outlined key recommendations for the session. She invited representatives to review the report, which she had shared through the online chat for the current meeting.

89. Responding to comments, the representative of the secretariat cautioned against being too prescriptive with regard to how much time was allocated to some of the items on the agenda of the eighth annual subcommittee meeting, suggesting that it was critical to let the Bureau organize the schedule of the meeting in order to ensure the best use of the available time, as had been done in the past. With regard to the proposed plenary or informal working group sessions, they were an innovation in the structure that, in the context of a hybrid format, would enable Member States to have in-depth discussions on key areas of importance and on any draft resolutions tabled by Member States, of which currently there were only two. The secretariat was in no way suggesting that many resolutions should be adopted at the resumed fifth session, but simply wished to make Member States aware of the fact that they would need to consider mandates from the fourth session of the Assembly, which they could either discuss at the resumed fifth session or defer to the sixth session. Lastly, nothing precluded discussion on existing resolutions under agenda item 4, and the secretariat would make the necessary changes to the annotations to the agenda to make that point clear.

90. Another representative of the secretariat drew attention to sub-item 4 (i) of the annotations to the agenda (UNEP/ASC.8/1/Add.1), under which Member States were invited to consider areas of

importance, based on the mandates derived from previous Environment Assembly sessions and the working documents of the fifth session. Given that there were some 25 such documents and that they had already been presented to Member States at the first part of the fifth session, in the interests of time the secretariat was preparing a document that would summarize the recommendations set out in the reports to enable Member States to decide whether and what follow-up action was required at the resumed fifth session. The note by the secretariat on possible key areas of importance (UNEP/CPR/155/5) included all the mandates from the fourth session of the Environment Assembly. Member States needed to decide whether to address those mandates at the resumed fifth session, or defer them to the sixth. Lastly, with regard to requests that ample time be given during the eighth annual subcommittee meeting to the review of programme performance, the secretariat was in the hands of the Bureau as to how time would be organized, but was prepared discuss any subprogramme with Member States, either in plenary or in smaller groups.

91. Following the discussion, the Chair said that she would further review the draft agenda, structure and documentation for the eighth annual subcommittee meeting and other aspects of the preparations in consultation with the Bureau and the secretariat. She would also consult with the secretariat and the representatives of the United Nations Office at Nairobi to ensure that all representatives would be afforded equal opportunity to attend and actively participate in the meeting, either in person or online. Lastly, she encouraged Member States to table or announce, either during or in advance of the eighth annual subcommittee meeting, any initiatives related to draft resolutions for consideration by the Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session.

Agenda item 7

Report of the subcommittee

92. The Committee took note of the document entitled “Chair’s report of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives” (UNEP/CPR/155/6).

Agenda item 8

Other matters

93. No other matters were raised.

Agenda item 9

Closure of the meeting

94. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, expressed her appreciation to Mr. Jorge Laguna-Celis, who was attending his last Committee meeting, for his leadership and commitment as Secretary of Governing Bodies, UNEP. She welcomed Mr. Ulf Bjornholm, Deputy Secretary of Governing Bodies, as Secretary ad interim of Governing Bodies.

95. The meeting was declared closed at 4.10 p.m. on Tuesday, 28 September 2021.