

Meeting of the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly
1 July 2022
14:00 – 16:00 (GMT+3)
Online meeting

Agenda item 5: Consideration of the process to define the theme for UNEA-6

This note, entitled “Guidance on the theme for the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly”, serves as a background document for consideration under agenda item 5 – Consideration of the process to define the theme for UNEA-6. The Bureau may wish to agree on the guiding principles, basic criteria and the timeline. As per past practice, the Bureau may wish to request the Secretariat to provide an options paper on the theme.

Guidance on the theme for the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

I. Introduction

The United Nations Environment Assembly - the leading global authority on the environment - is the largest international gathering of Ministers responsible for the Environment, with the authority to take decisions on important issues that impact policies and actions by Governments and other key stakeholders. Within the context of the three dimensions of sustainable development, the Assembly can contribute to highlighting the relevance of the environment dimension as a prerequisite for making progress within the social and economic dimensions.

The Secretary-General in his report on “Our Common Agenda” stated that now is the time to re-embrace global solidarity and find new ways to work together for the common good ... it must include urgent and bold steps to address the triple crisis of climate disruption, biodiversity loss and pollution destroying our planet”. Addressing risks to our planet needs to be part of every decision, every policy, every investment and every budget.

The UN Environment Assembly can identify strategic and necessary decisions and actions. It is a unique international platform where trade-offs and opportunities are discussed based on the most credible science available, and where important decisions on further steps are made. However, to be a truly transformational platform, countries need to build an ambitious and clear framework for the discussions around which they can build a strong momentum to act.

The next session of the Environment Assembly will take place at a unique moment in time. The Secretary-General plans to hold the Summit of the Future in 2023 and convene leaders ahead of the first global stocktaking in 2023 as well as invite leaders from civil society, the private sector and young people to the leaders meeting ahead of the first global stocktaking in 2023.

2023 will also see the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 30 years since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on human rights. In this regard, the Secretary-General has indicated that the right to a healthy environment warrants deeper discussion.

The United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development”, 2018–2028, will be held in March 2023 and the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the global stocktaking, is scheduled for November 2023.

2023 will be a critical year for the United Nations Environment Programme to showcase its authority in the normative space whilst delivering system-wide guidance on the triple planetary crisis that speaks to the whole UN system on the ground.

II. Mandates

Decision 5/4 on the provisional agenda, date and venue of the sixth session of the Environment Assembly:

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), in its decision 5/4 of its resumed fifth session entitled “Provisional agenda, date and venue of the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly”:

- a. Decided that the **sixth session** will be held in **Nairobi from 26 February to 1 March 2024**.
- b. **Requested the Bureau of UNEA**, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR), **to define a theme for the sixth session** of the Environment Assembly no later than **twelve months in advance of the sixth session**.

Final outcome of the Consensual Process for Review by the Committee of Permanent Representatives

In the final outcome of the Consensual Process for Review by the CPR, it was decided that:

- a. Under the guidance of the UNEA Bureau and the Secretariat, ensure that the **UNEA theme provides a framework for political debate at the high-level segment as well as for official UNEA events**, including UNEA side events the Major Group and Stakeholder Forum, and the Sustainable Innovation Expo and the Science Policy Business Forum, and that **it informs Member States in their preparation of draft UNEA resolutions**, while fully respecting Member States’ right to table draft resolutions on any subject in accordance with the UNEA Rules of Procedures.
- b. Under guidance of the UNEA Bureau and with the support from the Secretariat, and taking into account inputs from Major Groups and Stakeholders, **strengthen the science-policy interface at UNEA** by:
 - o **Facilitating science-based decision making**, where relevant **through** dedicated briefings and **consultations on the theme of UNEA** and/or proposed resolutions, as appropriate.
- c. The **Bureau shall** in consultation with members of regional groups **prepare for the sessions of UNEA**, including **by providing guidance on the selection of an overarching theme**.
- d. In accordance with the UNEA Rules of Procedures and established practices including as outlined in the UNEP Stakeholder Engagement Handbook, **strengthen the participation of and meaningful involvement of representatives of Major Groups and Stakeholders** at UNEA and its preparatory process, **including in the context of selecting the UNEA theme**, for example by offering Secretariat trainings and briefings on UNEA for stakeholders, including through virtual meetings.

III. Proposed guiding principles

The Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly, comprised of ten ministers or high-level decision-makers representing all five regions, has the unique responsibility of deciding on the main theme that will advance the work of the Environment Assembly.

The choice of theme is important, as it contributes to the framing, authority, relevance and effectiveness of the UN Environment Assembly. Therefore, in making their decision, the Bureau may wish to consider the following basic principles which had guided the discussion on the theme for the fifth session:

- First, by identifying a theme that contributes to the implementation of commitments included in the 2030 Agenda, the Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs), and relevant resolutions and declarations adopted by previous sessions of the Assembly.
- Secondly, by ensuring broad, inclusive and transparent consultations with all relevant stakeholders, including the Committee of Permanent Representatives and representatives of civil society and other Major Groups such as the scientific and academic community and the private sector.
- Thirdly, by closely linking the theme to an ambitious ministerial outcome document and to a limited number of draft resolutions which contribute to a balanced and mutually reinforcing set of agreements that helps Member States and all relevant stakeholders prioritize their actions.

IV. Basic criteria for defining a theme

Lessons learned from past UN Environment Assemblies point to the importance of timely identification of politically appealing and strategic themes. To facilitate the process, the following basic set of criteria have proven useful, namely, that the theme should:

- Be agreed in a timely manner. For the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly, in accordance with the mandate provided in the UN Environment Assembly decision 5/4, the theme has to be agreed by February 2023.
- Be based on a sound knowledge basis.
- Provide a clear focus and common thread while being broad and inclusive (for example, pollution was a common thread at the third UN Environment Assembly or Actions for Nature for the fifth session).
- Contribute to addressing the root causes of environmental problems, such as loss of biological diversity on the one hand, or pollution on the other, and for which the science is increasingly alarming.
- Result in science-based, actionable, and solution-oriented outcomes that promote integrated solutions and addresses more than one Sustainable Development Goal.
- Ensure alignment with the UN Environment Assembly's mandate and capacity, as well as consistency and complementarity with the themes of previous sessions of the UN Environment Assembly, particularly, in respect of facilitating implementation of actions agreed.

- Be relevant for the United Nations as a whole taking into account the indispensable role of the UN Environment Assembly within the United Nations system as the environmental intergovernmental decision-making body with universal membership.
- Be easily communicable and understood by a broader audience and contribute to the integration of environmental protection into social and economic considerations.

V. Proposed timeline for consultations

The Bureau may wish to consider the proposed timeline for consultations on the theme:

July 2022

- Preliminary discussion in the Bureau

September/October 2022

- Joint meeting of the UNEA and CPR Bureaus to consider options for a theme
- Consultations with the regional and political groups through the UNEA and CPR Bureau members
- Consultations with the stakeholders
- Consultations on the options during the 9th annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

November 2022

- Additional consultations during the CPR subcommittee meetings, as needed.
- Additional consultations with the regional and political groups through the UNEA and CPR Bureau members, as needed

December 2022

- UNEA Bureau meeting

February-Late January 2023

- **Joint Retreat of the UNEA and CPR Bureaus** for a final decision by the UNEA Bureau on the theme

VI. Additional background information

Themes of the previous sessions of UNEA:

- 1st [2014] "Sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda, including sustainable consumption and production", and "Illegal trade in wildlife"
- 2nd [2016] "Delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"
- 3rd [2017] "Towards a pollution-free planet"
- 4th [2019] "Innovative Solutions for Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production"

- 5th [2021 and 2022] "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals"

Themes of UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50

- UNEP@50 - "Strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"
- Stockholm+50 - "Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity"

Themes of the high-level political form on sustainable development:

- 2019 "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality".
 - HLPF, held under the auspices of the GA, 74th session of the GA, adopted a political declaration entitled "Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development"
- 2020 "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".
- 2021 "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development".
- 2022 "Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".
- 2023 "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels" focusing on Goals 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17

Seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly [September 2022 to September 2023]

The President-elect of the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly has indicated that the focus of his presidency will be "Solutions through Solidarity, Sustainability and Science".