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Meeting of the Bureau of the Ad hoc open-ended working group on a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution  
Tuesday, 25 April 2023  
16:00 – 18:00 (EAT; GMT + 3)  
Online meeting

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**Agenda item 4: Engagement of civil society and academia in the OEWG meetings and process.**

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**Background document: The engagement and accreditation of universities and their experts with UNEP within the context of UNEA and other intergovernmental processes**

**A. Introduction**

1. This note has been developed at the request of the bureau of the ad hoc open-ended working group on a science-policy panel on chemicals, waste and to prevent pollution (“OEWG”). It concerns the engagement and accreditation of universities and other academic institutions as well as their experts within the context of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and its subsidiary bodies.

**A. Current rules and practices for the accreditation of non-governmental organizations within the United Nations**

2. The accreditation of non-governmental organizations within the United Nations is governed in the main by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 1996/31 that addresses the consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Operative paragraph 5 of that resolution provides that, “Consultative relationships may be established with international, regional, subregional and national organizations, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles and criteria established under the present resolution. The Committee, in considering applications for consultative status, should ensure, to the extent possible, participation of non-governmental organizations from all regions, and particularly from developing countries, in order to help achieve a just, balanced, effective and genuine involvement of non-governmental organizations from all regions and areas of the world. The Committee shall also pay particular attention to non-governmental organizations that have special expertise or experience upon which the Council may wish to draw.” Pursuant to ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, ECOSOC upon recommendation of the Committee of non-governmental organizations has granted consultative status to, inter alia, specific universities, associations of universities and an association of university presidents.
3. Further, pursuant to operative paragraph 12 of that resolution, “the organization shall have a representative structure and possess appropriate mechanisms of accountability to its members, who shall exercise effective control over its policies and actions through the exercise of voting rights or other appropriate democratic and transparent decision-making processes. Any such organization that is not established by a governmental entity or intergovernmental agreement shall be considered a non-governmental organization for the purpose of these arrangements, including organizations that accept members designated by governmental authorities, provided that such membership does not interfere with the free expression of views of the organization.”
4. In addition, the General Assembly of the United Nations has expressly recommended the participation of universities and academic institutions in United Nations bodies. For example, General Assembly resolution 75/320 on the “scope, modalities, format and organization of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action”, in operative paragraph 10 requests, “the President of the General Assembly to draw up a list of representatives of other relevant non-

governmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and the private sector who may participate in the high-level meeting, including its round tables, taking into account the principles of transparency and equitable geographical representation, with due regard for gender parity, to submit the proposed list to Member States for their consideration on a non-objection basis and to bring the list to the attention of the Assembly for a final decision by the Assembly on participation in the high-level meeting.”

5. Currently, there is no definition within the United Nations of what constitutes a “university” or “academic institution”. However, the United Nations does have the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) which is an initiative that engages institutions of higher education with the United Nations in supporting and contributing to the realization of the Organization's purposes.<sup>1</sup>

**B. Current rules and practices for stakeholder participation at UNEA and its subsidiary bodies, including for universities and academic institutions**

6. General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) on the institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation, which is UNEP’s founding mandate, invited in Section IV operative paragraph 5 “non-governmental organizations that have an interest in the field of the environment to lend their full support and collaboration to the United Nations with a view to achieving the largest possible degree of co-operation and co-ordination”.
7. Furthermore, in accordance with paragraph 1 of rule 70 of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) rules of procedure, “International non-governmental organizations having an interest in the field of the environment, referred to in section IV, paragraph 5, of General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII), may designate representatives to sit as observers at public meetings of the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary organs, if any.....Upon the invitation of the President or Chairperson, as the case may be, and subject to the approval of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of the subsidiary organ concerned, international non-governmental organizations may make oral statements on matters within the scope of their activities.” In accordance with paragraph 2 of rule 70, “written statements provided by international non-governmental organizations referred to in paragraph 1 above, related to items on the agenda of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of its subsidiary organs, shall be circulated by the secretariat to members of the United Nations Environment Assembly or of the subsidiary organ concerned in the quantities and in the languages in which the statements were made available to the secretariat for distribution.”
8. Accordingly, accreditation is the main procedural mechanism that allows stakeholder representatives, especially Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), to formally engage in United Nations processes as observers. The accreditation procedure applied by UNEP for Major Groups and Stakeholders is outlined in detail on the UNEP website and in section 3 of the Stakeholder Engagement Handbook.
9. The engagement of the nine Major Groups within UNEP is supported by the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, which is composed of two elected members per major group and two elected Regional Facilitators per region. UNEP has developed specific policies and guidance for engaging and partnering with relevant major groups and stakeholders, especially in the context of UNEA, including guidelines for participation of major groups and stakeholders in policy design at UNEP, which specifically address cooperation between UNEP and major groups and stakeholders. This practice was endorsed by the Governing Council of UNEP in [decision SSVII.5 of 2002](#), which states in its preamble: “*for the purpose of this decision, civil society encompasses Major Groups, that are farmers, women, scientific and technological community, children and youth, indigenous people and*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/page/about-unai>

*their communities, workers and trade unions, business and industry, local authorities and non-governmental organizations.*

10. Regarding the participation of individual experts, according to established practice, UNEA and its subsidiary bodies may also invite individual experts to participate. In the context of subsidiary bodies to UNEA, the Chair may for example, through recommendation by the Bureau or by the secretariat, invite experts to participate in a specific session of the body, for a specific purpose or role.
11. It should be recalled that the Major Groups and Stakeholders approach applied by UNEA, and its subsidiary bodies, may not be applied in other intergovernmental processes, including those that are non-United Nations bodies. As far as the International Conference on Chemicals Management is concerned, according to its rules of procedure, “Non-governmental participant” means any accredited international non-governmental organization having activities, expertise and responsibilities consistent with the purpose and objectives of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management that has informed the secretariat in writing in accordance with rule 13 of its wish to be represented at sessions of the Conference and whose attendance is not objected to by one third or more of the governmental participants present when the Conference considers the request” (rule 2(d). Distinguished from UNEA and its subsidiary bodies which are Member-State led processes and in the light of the multi-stakeholder character of the Strategic Approach, the President shall invite four representatives of non-governmental participants and one representative of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals to participate in the discussions during the meetings of the Bureau (rule 15).
12. With regard to the OEWG, UNEA through resolution 5/8 entitled, “Science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution” decided in operative paragraph 7 that, “the ad hoc open-ended working group should include Governments and regional economic integration organizations and be open to observers from United Nations entities, relevant multilateral agreements, other international instruments and intergovernmental bodies, including those that are members of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, and **stakeholder representatives**” (Emphasis added) While the resolution refers generally to “stakeholder representatives”, the OEWG is a subsidiary body of UNEA and as such it should apply the applicable United Nations rules on accreditation of stakeholders, including with regard to universities.
13. In practice, the Chair usually invites NGO representatives to take the floor after Member States have concluded their statements, or at the end of a session. The Major Groups and Stakeholder representatives speak under the respective Major Group and Stakeholders flag. At the discretion of the Chair, non-affiliated NGOs may also be invited to speak, usually after the representatives of the Major Group and Stakeholders have taken the floor.

## Conclusion

14. Universities and independent experts can make important contributions to UNEA and its subsidiary bodies, by contributing relevant expert knowledge to intergovernmental processes. In the light of the legal framework and accreditation process described above, representatives from universities and academic institutions may attend or contribute to UNEA-related meetings, as follows:
  - a) Any university that is not established by a governmental entity or intergovernmental agreement can be considered for accreditation. This includes those academic institutions that enjoy consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
  - b) University representatives may be accredited through NGOs already accredited to ECOSOC or UNEA, such as the UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks.<sup>2</sup> A list of UNEA-accredited organizations is available [here](#).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380998>

- c) Applications are done through the UNEP accreditation portal, whereby interested Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are also requested to select the relevant Major Group and Stakeholders category to which it would associate itself.
- d) As far as the Major Group System is concerned, it is expected that universities would select the Science and Technology Major Group.
- e) Pursuant to paragraph 13 of ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, government funding of an organization does not preclude the granting of consultative status. However, caution should be exercised in the case of academic institutions/universities that are fully funded from government sources, including those that are established as a government institution/agency, even though their governance structure and operations may be separate from the government. In this connection, it should be recalled that subject to the decision of the respective government, university representatives may also participate as a part of the Member State delegation to a meeting and be a part of a government's credentials.
- f) Subject to a decision by the chair or bureau of a governing body, government-affiliated individual experts from universities or other scientific and/or expert bodies and organizations that have not applied for or do not meet the accreditation criteria may be invited in their personal capacity to UNEA-related meetings as "individual experts", on a case- by-case basis. Such experts are not considered part of the Major Groups System and are required to clearly state their status during written or oral interventions.

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