

Joint Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly
and the Committee of Permanent Representatives
10 May, 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. (GMT+3)
Online

Agenda item 3: UNEA sessions and related consequences for UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategies and Programmes of Work and Budget.

This note, entitled “*Options for the timing of future UNEA sessions and related consequences for UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategies and Programmes of Work and Budget*”, has been developed by the Secretariat for the consideration and possible guidance by the Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives, under agenda item 3 [UNEA sessions and related consequences for UNEP’s Medium-Term Strategies and Programmes of Work and Budget] at the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the UN Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

The note outlines two options and a comparison of these options for consideration and guidance by members of the UNEA and CPR Bureaux.

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT ASSEMBLY (UNEA) MEETING CYCLE

Options for the timing of future UNEA sessions and related consequences for UNEP's Medium-Term Strategies and Programmes of Work and Budget.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the original schedule of UNEA meetings, which envisaged biannual meetings in odd numbered years. [UNEA decision 5/4](#) on the date and venue of UNEA 6, therefore, considered the options for future meetings proposed by the Secretariat. Ultimately, UNEA decision 5/4 decided that UNEA 6 will take place from 26 February – 1 March 2024 at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi. Decision 5/4 further urged the Assembly to keep in mind the cycle of UNEA meetings, the recommended time between UNEAs, and the need to approve the Medium-Term Strategy and the PoW and budget in 2025.

The decision to convene UNEA-6 in 2024 has consequences for the scheduling of future UNEA sessions (e.g., with regard to UNEA resolution 2/22 calling for an odd-year cycle and on the 2-year period between sessions). This also has implications for the approval of future UNEP Programmes of Work and Medium-Term Strategies as these are currently based on approval on an odd-year cycle for implementation starting in an even year.

2. Relevant rules and decisions for consideration of the UNEA cycle

Governing Council in its decision 27/2 entitled, "Implementation of 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development" in operative paragraph 11 decided, "to establish a sub-committee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives that will meet annually for a period of 5 days to review, with the support of the secretariat, the Medium Term Strategy and Programme of Work and budget, in a manner coherent with the budgetary cycle of the United Nations, to be endorsed by the Committee of Permanent Representatives and for the governing body's approval, and to oversee their implementation and accountability by the Secretariat."

[UNEA decision 5/4](#) - Provisional agenda, date and venue of the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly:

3. *Also decides* that the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly will be held in Nairobi from 26 February to 1 March 2024;

4. *Urges* the Environment Assembly at its sixth session, when considering the date and venue of its seventh session, to keep in mind its resolution 2/22, on the review of the cycle of the Environment Assembly and rule 1 of its rules of procedure concerning the recommended time between sessions of the Environment Assembly, and the need to approve the medium-term strategy for the period 2026–2029 and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2026–2027 in 2025;

13. *Also decided* to extend the programme of work for the period 2022–2023 by two years, to the end of 2025, with the budget and targets being pro-rated accordingly.

[UNEA resolution 2/22](#) - Review of the cycle of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme:

1. *Decides* to hold its regular sessions in odd-numbered years commencing with its third session in 2017

[UNEA Rules of Procedure Rule 1](#): “The United Nations Environment Assembly shall normally hold one regular session every two years.”

Rule 2 provides that the date of the opening of the session shall be “*fixed by the United Nations Environment Assembly at its previous session in such a way, if practicable, as to enable the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly to consider the report of the United Nations Environment Assembly in the same year.*”

3. Options for the timing of future UNEA sessions after UNEA 6 and related consequences for the approval of future UNEP Medium-Term Strategies and Programmes of Work and Budget.

To allow for an informed discussion among Member States on the UNEA cycle, this note outlines two options for the timing of future meetings of UNEA after UNEA 6. It explains the consequences regarding programme planning and budgeting for UNEP.

Option 1: UNEA 6 in February 2024 takes a decision to change the UNEA cycle to even years such that UNEA 7 would be held in 2026 and UNEA 8 in 2028, etc. UNEA 6 would further decide to request the Secretariat to prepare a new MTS for the period 2026-29 and POW and Budget for the period 2026-27 in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives for approval by UNEA through one of the three sub-options below:

- a) 1-2 day *hybrid* UNEA special session in 2025 with the *sole purpose of taking a decision to approve the new MTS and POW and Budget; OR*
- b) 1-2 day *fully online* UNEA special session in 2025 with the *sole purpose of taking a decision to approve the new MTS and POW and Budget; OR*
- c) a decision of UNEA *to approve the new MTS and POW and Budget* adopted through a silence procedure in 2025 under the leadership of the UNEA President.

Option 2: UNEA 6 in February 2024 would take a decision to extend the implementation period of the current MTS for the period 2022-25¹ and POW and Budget for the period 2022-25 for one more year to 2026. UNEA decision 5/4 already took the decision to extend the POW and Budget for two years. This decision would simply call for one more year of that same POW and Budget as well as extending the MTS by one year (five years total). UNEA 7 would then take place in February 2026 and *inter alia*, approve the new MTS for the period 2027-30 and POW and Budget for the period 2027-28, putting us squarely back

¹ The POW and Budget 2022-23 was extended to 2025 at UNEA 5.2 through decision 5/4.

onto a four-year cycle for the MTS and a two-year cycle for the POW and Budget. Through such a decision, UNEA 6 would also change the UNEA meeting cycle to even years, such that UNEA 7 would be held in 2026 and UNEA 8 in 2028, etc.

4. Analysis of the two options

Option 1: Changing from odd to even years (without a requisite change in the MTS cycle) could imply an approximate time gap of two and half years between the time of the formulation of the MTS and its implementation. To avoid this gap and as guided by decision 5/4², the approval of the 2026-2029 MTS and the 2026-2027 PoW and Budget could take place through organizing a 1-2 day UNEA special session (in-person/hybrid or fully online) or through a silence procedure in 2025.

Should a special session be convened, pursuant to Governing Council decision 27/2, the sub-committee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (annual subcommittee) would have to meet in person in 2025 for a period of five days to review and endorse the Medium-Term Strategy and Programme of Work and budget prior to its approval by the UNEA special session.

Convening of a special session in 2025 would, however, have considerable additional and unbudgeted financial implications, approximately from \$US250, 000 for a decision through silence procedure³ to \$US865, 000 for a hybrid meeting, with a slightly lower implication for a fully in-person meeting.⁴ This would, in turn however, require UNEA special sessions every two years with the sole purpose of approving the MTS/POW/Budget, and therefore does not provide a long-term solution.

Option 2: Under this option, UNEA meetings would change from odd to even years, but would not change the time gap between the formulation of the MTS and its implementation due to the extension of the MTS to 2026. The implications of this option can be seen in the pros and cons listed in annex 1 of extending of the MTS/PoW/Budget by one additional year to 2026. The extension of the MTS and PoW would be done by pro-rating the existing results framework and budget, assuming that the MTS and its strategic objectives and Theories of Change remain relevant to guide UNEP's programmatic work for one additional year (NB: just as UNEA 5.2 already decided on extending the 2022-2023 POW/Budget until 2024-2025). This option would also maintain the tightest timeframe possible between agreement on the MTS/POW and Budget and its implementation. This shorter timeframe enables these strategic documents to address emerging issues identified by Member States in a timely fashion going forward.

² From UNEA decision 5/4: OP 4: *Urges (...)* the need to approve the medium-term strategy for the period 2026–2029 and the programme of work and budget for the biennium 2026–2027 **in 2025**

³ This is an approximate cost for documentation editing and translation which would be applicable in all scenarios.

⁴ The approximate cost factors in conference services cost such as interpretation, editing and translation of pre-session, in-session and post-session documents, and online platform; communication; travel support to delegates from developing countries; and other costs such as registration and information technology.

Annex: Overview of pros and cons of options 1 and 2

Option	UNEA timing	Cycle	UNEA 6 /UNEA 7 necessary decisions	Pros	Cons
1	<p>UNEA 6 in Feb 2024</p> <p>Special session/silence procedure in 2025</p> <p>UNEA 7 in Feb 2026</p>	Even years	<p>UNEA 6 in 2024 decides that a <i>special session is convened in 2025 or decides that a silence procedure</i> mechanism is utilized in 2025 to approve 2026-29 MTS and 2026-27 PoW and Budget</p> <p>UNEA 7 in 2026 to approve PoW and Budget 2028-29</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Aligns and maintains the PoW and budget with the MTS in a four-year cycle. •Presidency and bureau: Both UNEA 6 and UNEA 7 will have a two-year cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •UNEA moves to even year cycle* •Additional workload and budget required for a special session. •UNEA 8 in 2028 would have to approve the 2030-2033 MTS and POW and budget – almost two years in advance of its implementation. • In the event that the silence procedure is broken further consultation would be needed which will delay and incur additional cost.
2	<p>UNEA 6 in Feb 2024</p> <p>UNEA 7 in Feb 2026</p>	Even years	<p>UNEA 6 in 2024 decides to extend MTS and PoW and Budget to 2026</p> <p>UNEP 7 in 2026 to approve MTS 2027-2030 and PoW and Budget 2027-28</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reduces time gap between PoW formulation and implementation •Presidency and bureau: Both UNEA 6 and UNEA 7 will have a two-year cycle • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •UNEA moves to even year cycle* •UNEP cannot implement significant changes to the MTS, PoW and Budget before 2027. •

* NB: UNEA rules of procedure call for one regular session every two years. UNEA resolution 2/22 called for regular sessions in odd-numbered years.