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

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**Annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives  
to the United Nations Environment Programme**

**Tenth meeting**

Nairobi, 20 – 24 November 2023

10:00 – 13:00 and 15:00 – 18:00 (GMT+3)

Conference Rooms 1 and 2 (in person)

and Microsoft Teams (online)

### **Agenda item 4: UNEA sessions and related consequences for UNEP's Medium-Term Strategies and Programmes of Work and Budget**

This background document 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 prepared by the Secretariat to guide the discussion at the annual subcommittee meeting of the CPR, under agenda item 4 (b) (UNEA sessions and related consequences for UNEP's Medium-Term Strategies and Programmes of Work and Budget).

The document outlines three options and a comparison of these options for consideration and guidance by members of the CPR, taking into account the views expressed by Member States at the [subcommittee meeting of the CPR held on 18 July 2023](#).

## 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 sessions which envisaged biennial meetings in odd-numbered years. Global circumstances resulted in two separate sessions of UNEA 5 and thus forced a change to the cycle to even-numbered years. [UNEA decision 5/4](#) on the date and venue of UNEA-6 decided that it will take place from 26 February to 1 March 2024 at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi. Decision 5/4 further urged the Assembly to keep in mind the cycle of UNEA sessions, the recommended time between UNEA sessions, and the need to approve the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) and the Programme of Work (PoW) and budget in 2025.

The decision to convene UNEA-6 in 2024 has consequences for the scheduling of future UNEA sessions (e.g., regarding 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-numbered year. In accordance with rule 204.2 of ST/SGB/2015/4, *Supplement to the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations*, due consideration will be given to ensuring UNEP Executive Director's submission of the Fund programme budget proposals to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for review and subsequently convey the Advisory Committee comments to UNEA.

#### 2. Relevant rules, decisions and other considerations for the UNEA cycle

The UNEP Governing Council, in operative paragraph 11 of its decision 27/2 entitled, "Implementation of paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Rio+20 "The Future We Want" 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 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 provides that “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.”*

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.

Additionally, the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) assesses the effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and impact of UN operational activities for development.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 75/233, paragraph 65, *urged “the entities of the United Nations development system, consistent with their mandates, to align their next integrated budgets with the present resolution and in that context to further improve the functioning and effectiveness of the structured dialogues on how to fund the development results agreed in the strategic plans including through the implementation of the Funding Compact commitments.*

The request to align the strategic plans with the comprehensive policy review is addressed to all organizations of the United Nations system, funds and programmes as well as specialized agencies. It is part of an overall effort to improve coherence in the actions and functioning of the United Nations development system, based on guidance given by Member States. Considering the general themes and approaches outlined in the QCPR, it seeks to bolster consistency among different United Nations organizations’ strategies and strategic plans.

The current QCPR covers 2021-2024, with the next one covering 2025-2028. The new QCPR will be adopted at the end of 2024, and its monitoring framework adopted in 2025, allowing guidance from the QCPR for 2025-2028 to be integrated into the development of UNEP’s MTS for 2026-2029 and PoW and Budget for the 2026-2027 biennium.

### **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 facilitate a discussion among Member States regarding the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) cycle, this document outlines three distinct options concerning the scheduling of future UNEA sessions following UNEA-6. Furthermore, it elucidates the resulting ramifications vis-à-vis programme planning and budgeting for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the broader harmonization within the United Nations Development System (UNDS).

**Option 1: UNEA-7 is convened in February 2026, with approval of a new MTS/POW & Budget in 2025.** Adjusting UNEA to even-numbered years, maintaining the current cycle with three sub-options for approving in 2025 a new MTS for 2026-2029 and PoW and Budget for 2026-2027.

Under this option, UNEA-6 in February 2024 would decide to change the UNEA cycle to even-numbered years, thereby scheduling UNEA-7 to be held in 2026 and UNEA-8 in 2028, etc. As the existing MTS for the 2022-2025 will have expired, UNEA-6 would concurrently task the Secretariat with formulating a new MTS for the 2026-2029 period, as well as a PoW and Budget for the 2026-2027 period. The approval of these strategic documents would be through one of the three sub-options outlined below:

- a) A 1-2 day UNEA special session convened in-person and online (i.e., hybrid) in 2025, exclusively to approve the new MTS, PoW and Budget.
- b) A 1-2 day UNEA special session convened fully online in 2025, exclusively to approve the new MTS, PoW and Budget.
- c) An approval process for the new MTS, PoW and Budget conducted through a silence procedure in 2025, under the auspices of the UNEA President.

**Option 2: UNEA-7 is convened in February 2026 and extending the current MTS/POW & Budget.** Adjusting UNEA to even-numbered years, maintaining the current cycle and extend the current MTS and PoW and Budget for one additional year.

Like option 1, UNEA-6 in February 2024 would decide to change the UNEA cycle to even-numbered years, thereby scheduling UNEA-7 to be held in 2026 and UNEA-8 in 2028, etc. However, with this option, UNEA-6 taking place in February 2024 would decide to extend the implementation period of the existing MTS for the 2022-2025 period as well as the PoW/Budget for the 2022-2025 period for an additional year, thereby extending both to the end of 2026.

This extension would follow the precedent of UNEA decision 5/4, which already extended the 2022-2023 PoW/Budget by two years to the end of 2025. UNEA-7 would then convene in February 2026, subsequently approving the new MTS for the 2027-2030 period and

PoW/Budget for the 2027-2028 period, thus returning to a normal periodicity of two biennial POWs and Budgets. This however would change the current alignment of UNEP's planning cycle with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR).

**Option 3: UNEA-7 is convened in late 2025.** Returning to an odd-numbered year cycle with approval of the new MTS for the 2026-2029 period and the PoW/Budget for the 2026-2027.

Under this third option, UNEA-6 in February 2024, would decide to convene UNEA-7 in late 2025, possibly in December 2025. This decision aligns with [UNEA resolution 2/22](#), signifying a return to an odd-numbered year cycle for UNEA regular sessions, with UNEA-7 in 2025, UNEA-8 in 2027, and UNEA-9 in 2029. This would also allow for the approval of the new MTS for the 2026-2029 period and PoW/Budget for the 2026-2027 period, prior to the expiration of the current strategic, programmatic and financial frameworks. This option also better aligns with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), enabling the incorporation of guidance from the QCPR for 2025-2028 into the MTS development, with adoption in 2025 and implementation commencement in 2026.

#### **4. Analysis of the three options**

The ensuing analysis encapsulates the pros and cons of the three options. See also the summary in the appended table in Annex 1.

**Option 1: UNEA-7 is convened in February 2026, with approval of a new MTS/POW & Budget in 2025.** The transition from odd to even-numbered years, without concurrent adjustments to the MTS cycle, could introduce an approximate hiatus of two and a half years between MTS formulation and implementation. To mitigate this temporal discrepancy, inspired by decision 5/4, approval of the 2026-2029 MTS and the 2026-2027 PoW/Budget would be expedited via either a 1–2-day UNEA special session (held in-person and online or fully online) or a silence procedure in 2025. However, the convening of a special session in 2025 would bear additional unbudgeted financial implications, ranging from a conservative estimate of approximately US\$100,000 for a silence procedure to US\$1,100,000 for a hybrid meeting, and US\$355,000 for a fully online meeting. Consequently, this would necessitate periodic UNEA special sessions every two years, exclusively dedicated to MTS/PoW/Budget approval or require approval of an MTS/POW/Budget more two years in advance of its implementation.

If a UNEA special session is convened, then in accordance with Governing Council decision 27/2, the annual sub-committee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives would need to be held in 2025 for a duration of five days to comprehensively examine and endorse the MTS, PoW and budget before these documents are approved by the UNEA at its special session.

**Option 2: UNEA-7 is convened in February 2026 and extending the current MTS/POW & Budget.** With this option, the transition from odd to even-numbered years for UNEA meetings would not alter the temporal gap between MTS formulation and implementation due to the extension of the MTS to 2026. This extension would be executed by pro-rating the existing results

framework and budget, predicated on the assumption that the MTS, its strategic objectives, and Theories of Change remain relevant for an additional year to the end of 2026. Notably, this course of action follows the precedent set by UNEA 5.2, which extended the 2022-2023 PoW/Budget until 2024-2025. However, this approach has two main disadvantages as it changes the current alignment to the QCPR (see references above) and is incompatible with the Umoja budget period structure.

The UN Secretariat's budgeting process, under which UNEP falls, is structured to manage budgetary periods beginning with even years (e.g., 2024-2025, 2026-2027). The ERP system, Umoja, used by all Funds and Programmes under the Secretariat, is designed to carryover unspent funds at the end of the first year of the biennium. If a change is made to biennium period to begin with an odd year (e.g., 2025-2026), carryovers would not be automatic, and budgets would need to be manually closed and reissued on an annual basis. This would also cause UNEP budgeting to be out of sync with other UN Secretariat entities.

**Option 3: UNEA-7 is convened in late 2025.** Under this option, UNEA meetings would revert to an odd-numbered year cycle, thereby enabling the approval of a new MTS prior to the expiration of the current one. This decision complies with the mandates of UNEA resolution 2/22 and provides for UNEA-7 to be convened in late 2025, UNEA-8 in late 2027, and UNEA-9 in late 2029. This approach maintains the shortest practical timeframe between the agreement on MTS/PoW and Budget and their implementation, thereby facilitating timely responsiveness to emerging concerns identified by Member States. Additionally, this option most clearly aligns with the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR), enabling the incorporation of guidance from the QCPR for 2025-2028 into the MTS development, with adoption in 2025 and commencing implementation in 2026.

**Annex: Overview of pros and cons of options 1, 2 and 3**

Option	UNEA timing	Cycle	UNEA-6 /UNEA-7 necessary decisions	Pros	Cons	Budget Implications
1	<p><b>UNEA-6 in Feb 2024</b></p> <p><b>Special session or silence procedure in 2025</b></p> <p><b>UNEA-7 in Feb 2026</b></p>	<p><i>Even years</i></p>	<p>UNEA-6 in 2024 decides that a <i>special session is convened in 2025 or decides that a silence procedure mechanism is utilized in 2025</i> 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>	<p>Aligns and maintains the PoW and budget with the MTS in a four-year cycle.</p> <p>Presidency and bureau: Both UNEA-6 and UNEA-7 will have a two-year cycle.</p>	<p>UNEA moves to even numbered year cycle.*</p> <p>Additional workload and budget required for a special session to approve the MTS/PoW and Budget.</p> <p>UNEA-8 in 2028 would have to approve the 2030-2033 MTS and the PoW and budget – almost two years in advance of its implementation.</p> <p>Silent procedure limits debate among MS on the MTS, the PoW and the budget.</p> <p>If the silence procedure is broken, further consultation would be needed which will delay decision and incur additional costs.</p>	<p>Additional budget needed for holding a special session:</p> <p>US\$ 100,000 for a decision through silence procedure<sup>1</sup></p> <p>US\$ 1,100,000 for a hybrid meeting</p> <p>US\$ 355,000 fully online</p>

<sup>1</sup> This is an approximate cost for documentation, editing and translation which would be applicable in all scenarios.

Option	UNEA timing	Cycle	UNEA-6 /UNEA-7 necessary decisions	Pros	Cons	Budget Implications
2	<p><b>UNEA-6 in Feb 2024</b></p> <p><b>UNEA-7 in Feb 2026</b></p>	<p><i>Even years</i></p>	<p>UNEA-6 in 2024 decides to extend MTS and PoW and Budget one year (to 2026)</p> <p>UNEP-7 in 2026 to approve MTS 2027-2030 and PoW and Budget 2027-28</p>	<p>Reduces time gap between PoW formulation and implementation.</p> <p>Presidency and bureau: Both UNEA-6 and UNEA-7 will have a two-year cycle.</p>	<p>UNEA moves to even numbered year cycle*</p> <p>UNEP cannot implement significant changes to the MTS, PoW and Budget before 2027.</p> <p>Incompatible with the Umoja budget period structure, leading to, <i>inter alia</i>, additional administrative costs for manual inputs for a different budget cycle.</p>	<p>No additional costs required for the regular session of UNEA</p>
3	<p><b>UNEA-6 in Feb 2024</b></p> <p><b>UNEA-7 end of 2025</b></p>	<p><i>Odd Years</i></p>	<p>UNEA-6 in 2024 decides to hold UNEA-7 at the end of 2025 (November)</p> <p>UNEA-7 at end of 2025 to approve MTS 2026-2029 and PoW and Budget 2026-27.</p>	<p>Complies with UNEA resolution 2/22.</p> <p>Aligns and maintains the four-year cycle for the MTS and two-year cycle for the PoW and Budget.</p> <p>Ensures alignment with QCPR.</p>	<p>UNEA-7 President and Bureau would be for 22 months vs two full years (24 months).*</p> <p>Scheduling to avoid the UNFCCC annual CoP.</p> <p>UN Habitat Assembly held in the same year.</p>	<p>No additional costs required for the regular session of UNEA</p>



Option	UNEA timing	Cycle	UNEA-6 /UNEA-7 necessary decisions	Pros	Cons	Budget Implications
				<p>Avoids extending the current MTS/POW/Budget for one additional year.</p> <p>Enables the secretariat/MS to make desired changes to its work earlier than 2027.</p> <p>MTS/POW/Budget would be approved just 1-2 months before its implementation, making it timelier and more relevant.</p>		

\* 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.