

## 166th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives UNEP

### Statement by Colombia on Agenda Item 5 Report of the Executive Director to the 166th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the floor, and to the Executive Director, Ms. Inger Andersen, for the presentation and the comprehensive report on the first quarter of the year. This report highlights the extensive work undertaken by UNEP across regions and thematic areas of the work program. I would like to particularly address two items exposed in the report, given their relevance to Colombia:

1-Under the section “1. Significant developments,” “A. Global developments,” it is noted that during the ECOSOC<sup>1</sup> Partnership Forum, UNEP co-led an action segment on SDG16 to increase understanding, engagement, and commitment on a multi-stakeholder partnership approach on the rule of law and justice, including environmental justice, which summary will feed into the preparatory documents for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

For Colombia, the issue of environmental justice, as a key element of an environmental rule of law, is of critical importance.

In the report presented by the Executive Director, under item “D. Foundational subprogrammes,” point “ii. Environmental Governance,” reference is made to the Asia-Pacific regional seminar on environmental rule of law, where the conclusions and recommendations of UNEP's 2023 report on this subject, were presented<sup>2</sup>.

It was noted that this report was presented yesterday (June 12), by UNEP's Latin America and the Caribbean Office, with participation from UNEP's legal division. I was invited to this event to make a presentation on the links between environmental and racial justice, which have significant intersections, as outlined in the UNEP report on “Environmental Rule of Law.” Our country called for continued exploration and deepening of the links between environmental and racial justice in UNEP's Programme of Work and Medium-Term Strategy.

It was also highlighted that, at the recent Montevideo Programme for Environmental Law meeting held in Nairobi (June 3-5), the relationship between environmental and racial justice was selected as one of the emerging topics for this program's work. In this regard, I would like to ask:

-Once the presentations on the Environmental Rule of Law report are completed across UNEP's regional offices, is a general online meeting planned, to discuss the findings and identify possible avenues for collaboration and next steps, among all regions?

-How is the interaction with the implementation of the Montevideo Programme being considered in this matter?

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<sup>1</sup> Economic and Social Council -ECOSOC-

<sup>2</sup> UNEP, Environmental Rule of Law: Tracking Progress and Charting Future Directions” (2023).

2-Secondly, Colombia would like to emphasize the importance of the issue addressed under item “C. Towards a pollution-free planet,” regarding the treatment of asbestos contaminants. In Colombia, activities related to the use, production, commercialisation and distribution of asbestos were banned by law in 2019, with the ban coming into force on 1 January 2021. This law was promoted by a group of asbestos victims whose health has been affected by exposure to this material, with some even losing their lives. The law therefore aims to protect life, health and the environment. therefore, the law aims to preserve the lives, health, and environment of workers and others exposed to asbestos.

The law mandates the formulation of a public policy on the replacement of installed asbestos, a task currently underway with the participation of various entities from different sectors (health, labor, and environment), as well as the creation of the National Commission for Asbestos Replacement to oversee the effective implementation of the law. In these processes, Colombia is guided, among others, by UNEP's document “Options for addressing asbestos contaminants in products and the environment” and a broad portfolio of scientific and other materials.

However, collaboration on this issue is a priority for the country, as studies by the relevant ministries report that there are tons of installed asbestos in Colombia that cannot be replaced healthily due to the high cost of replacement. Much of this asbestos is located in remote and low socio-economic areas, which is a matter of great concern.

