

OEWG 3 Science-policy panel – ED closing remarks

As delivered

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

I'm going to try to be very expedited, but also try to see if I can help make some suggestions for how you may be able to move forward.

First, however, let me give a big thanks to the government of Switzerland for hosting us here in this beautiful place, and for being a generous friend of UNEP, as well as for having been part of the very early sponsorship of this resolution and continued friend of the process.

Also, my deep thanks to all delegates here present for all that you have done. I held a number of separate meetings this morning to listen to distinguished delegates that are here. I have also highlighted we see this work as an important stepping stone for UNEP and the UN to deal with that environmental wave that is not yet on our shores, but we'll be hitting our shores in the future. And that obviously includes dealing with elements pertaining to pollution, waste and chemicals.

Now, this is where your work comes in. In 1988 the world decided to establish the IPCC. In 2010 the world decided to establish IPBES. And in 2022, this panel. So, there is much to do and learn from in terms of precedence. You are not working from scratch and I have a feeling that you feel that you are, but there's a lot of precedence already established and you do not need to establish everything at this point.

A slim, sharp foundational document is all that you need. There is no more time, so I would like to make some precise suggestions and I put them humbly to you, based on what you have before you, but also thinking about how we might be able to slim this down foundational document down.

Allow me first to address the very heavily bracketed operating principles. I have of course read the text in Section B of the draft document. I take note of the many brackets in the text and urge you to consider reverting to the UNEA Resolution which clearly highlights the following key factors, and I quote:

- (a) Is able to deliver outputs that are policy relevant without being policy prescriptive;
- (b) Is interdisciplinary, ensuring contributions from experts with a broad range of disciplinary expertise; including inclusive participation, including indigenous peoples; and has geographical, regional and gender balance;
- (c) Has procedures that seek to ensure that the work of the panel is transparent and impartial and that it can produce reports and assessments that are credible and scientifically robust;
- (d) Undertakes work that is complementary to and does not duplicate the work of the 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;
- (e) Coordinates, as appropriate, with others.

That delegates is the language that you need. It is already agreed and I suggest you lift it, take it, drop it in the text and move on.

Second, on the membership of the Science Policy Panel. Allow me next to address the issue of membership and engagement in the Science Policy Panel. Here I wish to note the universal membership of UNEA and of the United Nations. I therefore strongly suggest that membership should not be based on an “opt in” basis, as that will weaken this body that you have under negotiation, but rather that a more all-embracing approach is taken whereby Membership is automatically open to U.N. member states and members of U.N. specialized agencies. You can take this language and you can consider this issue resolved.

Third, allow me to address the matter of names. Plenary versus governing body. In this context, I suggest that we clarify issues and – once more – lean on precedents, which, in the IPCC context, we speak of the “IPCC plenary” as being the governing body. When the IPCC meets in session, it is a “plenary session”. A plenary session is therefore the meeting of the governing body. Therefore, I urge that you adopt similar nomenclature and get rid of those brackets. It can be done by the stroke of a pen in the next hour.

Forth, on the issue of subsidiary bodies other than the Bureau. Here I suggest that you eliminate the reference to specific subsidiary bodies. But that you allow for the plenary to establish subsidiary bodies. Of course, in line with the rules of procedure. If you do that, I would like to remind you that is exactly what IPBES did. They did not design everything upfront. They allowed the process the time that it needed to identify its subsidiary body and I think that it would be very helpful if you did likewise, allowing for the plenary to establish that which will be subsidiary bodies and leaving it at that. You can agree to this tonight.

Fifth, on the issue of secretariat. Here, of course, I have to say that we at UNEP have been privileged to serve as secretariat to this process and I will be very honest and say that we expect to continue to serve as such. That is a presumption I make uninhibited here. We recognize that there are scientific skills and expertise that we do not have. For example, the human health expertise. It is on this background that we propose – that in providing the secretariat services – we would like to draw on the expertise and competences of other UN agencies that have required expertise, WHO for human health but others for other expertise as required.

Six, when it comes to financial arrangements, I suggest that you do not over burden yourselves with the fine designs of the financial arrangements because that can be done subsequently. We at UNEP have broad experience with how to fund international and multilateral processes. We advise, and I advise, member states that you base such funding on a simple voluntary Trust Fund. In this regard, I therefore suggest that you may wish to reduce the text right back from the complexity that it currently holds. After all, UNEP has mobilised resources for countless other processes, MEAs and engagement over 52 years, as well as for the current process. We view a UNEP managed trust fund as the simplest and most effective financial arrangement without too much complexity.

Seven, with respect to strategic partnerships, I would like to remind you all that IPBES only addressed this issue in its third session, allowing therefore a degree of discussion and reflection before it rushed into decisions. It did so based on very heavy consideration, a good annex and a series of deliberations. And not something that was rushed. Accordingly, therefore, they took a decision at its third session only. That decision was a carefully negotiated annex

which outlines stakeholder engagement. And it is this spirit that I suggest that the current Open Ended Working Group holds off on those details in the strategic partnership and leaves this for further deliberation to those who will actually hold that responsibility, which is the first, second, third, etc plenary meeting.

Eighth. Regarding the conflict of interest. A very important topic and one you have been seized with. But again, I remind you that IPCC conflict of interest, as well as that of IPBES, came after the panel's establishment and I suggest strongly that you do likewise.

So, you have touched a lot of these issues and good for you that you have done so, but at this time we are running out the clock. I therefore suggest strongly that you focus on the foundational document, that you will cut it back to its necessary essence and you leave to subsequent sessions that which will take more time and in so doing you are just but following the precedence of other panels and other processes that have gone before you.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear delegates, we need this panel approved tonight.

In terms of the foundational text, there is no more time. The Summit of the Future will happen on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, and I wish to stand there at that time and say that you have future proofed the issue pertaining to chemical, waste and pollution. That you have created a panel that will work in the spirit of IPCC and IPBES – IPBES that has now worked for well over 10 years, IPCC for 36 years. That you will have addressed that triple planetary crisis, including the crisis of pollution and waste. And that you have established, as you were asked to do by the United Nations Environment Assembly, and as I am expected to report at the General Assembly Summit of the Future, you will have established this panel, it will have been gavelled tonight and that will mean therefore that you can send the consolidated document - the foundational document - to the first intergovernmental conference.

That is your task in the coming three and a half hours and I'm absolutely certain that it can be done.

Thank you.