

Speech to eleventh Annual subcommittee

(13 minutes)

Web title: Shaping an agile and responsive UNEP

Your excellency, Mr. Firas Khouri, Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, Ambassadors and colleagues.

Welcome to the Eleventh Annual Subcommittee meeting of the [Committee of Permanent Representatives \(CPR\)](#).

The timing of this Annual Subcommittee meeting is something of a departure. Normally we hold these late in the year, but holding it earlier allows better alignment with UNEP's programme performance report.

This means, however, that only nine months have elapsed since the last Annual Subcommittee meeting. During these nine months, the CPR has worked extensively. And, of course, UNEA-6 took place. So, given our regular meetings and consultations, I am not going to spend so much time today reviewing developments since the last Annual Subcommittee meeting.

You are aware of all the developments and what they mean: COP28 and its decisions; the resolutions of UNEA-6; the advancing plastic pollution instrument negotiations; the launch of the Kunming Biodiversity Fund; a World Environment Day that delivered a big boost to the ecosystem restoration agenda; and much more. All significant developments to be sure.

Instead, I want to spend my time today looking forward. The reason for this is simple. We are already halfway through 2024 and speeding towards 2030, a year that is in fact a deadline: for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; for the huge cuts in greenhouse gas emissions needed to get in line with a 1.5°C or 2°C temperature trajectory; for the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

And yet, as you know, we aren't on track to deliver on these agendas by 2030. The three environmental planetary crises – climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste – are intensifying. UNEP is, in fact, issuing yet another warning in this regard, in the shape of the Global Foresight Report, which is to be released next week in New York and on which our Chief Scientist will provide a briefing during this week. What this report tells us is that global crises are amplifying, accelerating and synchronizing. It points to eight critical shifts and eighteen signals of change that the world needs to track and prepare for. Among them are

the continuing degradation of the environment. Competition for natural resources, critical minerals and metals specifically. Inequality, declining trust, and misinformation. The environmental consequences of conflict.

Time is not on our side.

This means that UNEP's next medium-term strategy, from 2026-2029, must be more impactful than ever. UNEP's next programme of work, from 2026-2027, must be stronger than ever. UNEP's next budget must be bigger and more flexible than ever. And the next UN Environment Assembly must be more focused and strategic than ever.

These are all issues that you will begin to consider this week. And they are all issues that we can look at through the lens of Strategic Foresight, which points to how human ingenuity and stronger multilateralism can deliver solutions across the three environmental crises.

Excellencies,

Looking forward, we will need a new social contract that engages and embraces a broader and more diverse range of stakeholders, including indigenous people and youth.

UNEP has already been focusing on engaging many different stakeholders and listening to all voices. Through the intergovernmental negotiating committee on an instrument to end plastic pollution and the working group on the science-policy panel on chemicals, pollution and waste – which met again last month. Through regional forums of ministers of the environment and environment authorities, which help to guide UNEP's priorities. Through the Youth Forum at UNEA-6, which fed the voices of young people into decision-making.

And we have, of course, been making big strides on internal diversity and geographical representation. These efforts include our Youth Talent Pipeline, which last year recruited 12 young professionals from all around the world to work on nature-based solutions, green buildings, minerals and metals, geospatial information systems and more. We have launched the next phase of this pipeline for another 12 young professionals.

But we must do more, for it is only through diversity and representation that we can shape interventions that work for everyone and deliver true justice and equity.

Looking forward, more agile and adaptive governance will be crucial.

We need governance and multilateralism that responds faster to emerging challenges. That is not afraid to change tack quickly when interventions aren't working or are not working fast enough. That isn't afraid of innovation and experimentation.

This, of course, is of relevance to the next UNEA. As I have said before, UNEA is a young body that is still evolving. You can shape the UNEA of the future by creating a UNEA *for* the future. This is something we have discussed and will continue to discuss through the lessons learned process from UNEA-6. So, I ask you to work together and to contemplate deeply how to make UNEA-7 more focused. Nimbler. More demand- and future-responsive. And to contemplate how the critical resolutions that will be passed can be better-funded and more implementable – for rapid and lasting impact.

The multilateral system also needs to be more nimble, proactive and interconnected. United Nations 2.0 must embrace a forward-thinking culture, cutting-edge skills and a truly united approach. UNEP is doing its part through stronger engagement with UN country teams, providing scientific expertise for environmental action. And by coordinating on the environment, including through the Environment Management Group – a topic on your agenda this week. The Summit of the Future can nudge the UN into a more responsive and united global force for good.

Looking forward, the world will need strong science and knowledge, delivered in a timely and accessible manner to inform decision-making.

This is, of course, right up UNEP's alley. The Emissions and Adaptation Gap reports will inform crucial negotiations at the climate COP later this year. We are custodians of key SDG indicators – including on water quality, integrated water resources management and changes to freshwater ecosystems, which will form part of the upcoming SDG6 indicator report. The GEO-7 process is ongoing. Despite some temporary setbacks, we are confident that negotiations will result in a science-policy panel on chemicals, pollution and waste early next year.

We are working hard on uplifting the World Environment Situation Room and our digital presence, and on enhancing data information and knowledge to support decision making. A Digital Accelerator Lab is now online as well as physically, in the main lobby. This is a space where we showcase the power of digital and data to achieve environmental goals, from prototypes to the latest reports. I encourage you all to step by for more insight and information on the design and on plans for the future.

On the data front, we are of course to finalize the Global Environmental Data Strategy by UNEA-7. The strategy will aim at improving the quality, interoperability, governance access and affordability of environmental datasets.

But digital progress does not necessarily equate with environmental progress. The environmental risks posed by digital technologies cannot simply be ignored. So, UNEP is launching an initiative to quantify and measure the environmental impact of AI. I invite you to participate in tomorrow's side event on the topic.

Essentially, the question that I pose to you, as you look forward, is how to shape UNEP's work, including through impactful UNEA decisions, so that this science and data gets into the right hands in a faster, more meaningful and more-impactful way. And so that science and data is focused on solutions and implementation that will address the environmental crises and deliver a better future for everyone.

Excellencies,

Let me close with a big thank you again for all your work, particularly for a successful UNEA-6. And particularly to the record number of Member States who made a financial contribution to the assembly. While there is still some way to go before UNEA-7, I ask you to start considering what contributions you can make so that we can deliver even more impact the next time around.

The clock is ticking. The next UNEA and cycle of UNEP's work will be crucial in the race against time. But we can succeed by being more forward-looking and agile. By identifying emerging risks and shaping strategies. And by strengthening the spirit of togetherness and multilateralism that makes the environmental space a true beacon of hope in a divided world.

Thank you.