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**Committee of Permanent Representatives
to the United Nations Environment Programme
167th meeting**
Nairobi, 12 September 2024

Draft minutes of the 166th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme, held on 13 June 2024

Agenda item 1

Opening of the meeting by the Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

1. The meeting was opened at 10.10 a.m. on Thursday, 13 June 2024 by Firas Khouri, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Jordan to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP.
2. The Committee observed a minute of silence in memory of Klaus Töpfer, former Executive Director of UNEP and former Minister of Environment of Germany.
3. The meeting was attended by 63 participants representing 51 members and 3 observer missions.

Agenda item 2

Adoption of the provisional agenda of the 166th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

4. The agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/166/1/Rev.1).

Agenda item 3

Adoption of the draft minutes of the 164th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

5. The Committee adopted the minutes of its 164th meeting, held on 25 January 2024, on the basis of the draft minutes of the meeting (UNEP/CPR/165/2).

Agenda item 4

Adoption of the draft minutes of the 165th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

6. The Committee adopted the minutes of its 165th meeting, held on 25 January 2024, on the basis of the draft minutes of the meeting (UNEP/CPR/166/2).

Agenda item 5

Report of the Executive Director to the 166th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

7. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the document entitled “Quarterly Report to the 166th Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives: January–March 2024”.
8. In her oral briefing, the Executive Director of UNEP, Inger Andersen, paid tribute to the late former Executive Director of UNEP, Klaus Töpfer, saying that he had been a passionate, strong voice for the environment who had understood the power, beauty and fragility of nature and the need to protect it. She had personally benefitted from the advice of Mr. Töpfer when she had begun her tenure as Executive Director and she highlighted some of the achievements of UNEP under his leadership, which included the adoption of several multilateral environmental agreements, critical action on pollutants and progress on climate change. She expressed her condolences to his family and informed participants that books of condolences were available to be signed at the UNEP headquarters and online.
9. The Executive Director also extended her condolences to the families of those who had lost their lives in the recent floods in Brazil and Kenya, and in the unprecedented heatwave in India. Noting that those extreme weather events had followed a full calendar year in which each month was the hottest on record and that the World Meteorological Organization had said that there was an 80 per cent chance that the annual average global temperature would exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for at least one of the next five years, she said that action and ambition must be increased on the three planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification, and pollution in order to protect the most vulnerable populations. Member States and UNEP, working together, needed to fulfil the commitments they had made.
10. At the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, held in Nairobi from 26 February to 1 March, Member States had adopted 15 resolutions on pressing environmental challenges that focused, in particular, on issues that affected the vulnerable in society. The Executive Director underlined the broad scope of the issues addressed by the resolutions, which included the extraction and management of minerals and waste, environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict, air quality, highly hazardous pesticides, and strengthening ocean governance. A united push on the three planetary crises had been delivered by highlighting the complementarity of various multilateral environmental agreements. The ministerial declaration had affirmed the commitment of Member States to effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral action to take on those environmental challenges, and the President of the Environment Assembly would present the outcomes of the sixth session to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in July 2024.
11. The Executive Director highlighted some UNEP activities since the conclusion of the sixth session. The fourth session of the intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, had taken place in Ottawa from 23 to 29 April 2024. The advanced draft text of the international legally binding instrument and the agreement on intersessional work had created a clear path from Ottawa to the achievement of an ambitious agreement at the fifth session in Busan, Korea, which was scheduled to be held from 25 November to 1 December 2024. Strong leadership would be needed to finalize the agreement, and she called on Member States to demonstrate high-level commitment, including through ministerial representation at the fifth session.
12. Turning to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, she recalled that the Government of China and UNEP had launched the Kunming Biodiversity Fund in May 2024 to provide extra resources to support the Framework, and she thanked China for its ongoing commitment to protecting biodiversity. Without implementation, the Framework was only an exercise on paper. In that regard, UNEP had been proud to host the meetings of two subsidiary bodies of the Convention on Biological Diversity, specifically, the twenty-sixth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice and the fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation, in Nairobi in May. Significant progress had been made at the meetings, but many areas still needed addressing in advance of the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held in Cali, Colombia, from 21 October to 1 November 2024.
13. At the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, held in Saint John’s from 27 to 30 May, UNEP had pledged to contribute knowledge, tools and platforms to the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States, which she encouraged the international

community to support to help small island developing States to withstand the effects of climate change.

14. She had recently returned from Saudi Arabia, which had hosted World Environment Day 2024 on 5 June 2024 under the theme of land restoration, building drought resilience and combating desertification. Thanking Saudi Arabia for its efforts, she said that participation and outreach had been unprecedented, with 3,900 events held around the world, and 22,000 articles published in nearly 6,000 media outlets in 148 countries. The figures showed the widespread desire for involvement and for change, as well as support for the land restoration agenda, the benefits of which were manifold: by boosting livelihoods, reducing poverty and building resilience to extreme weather land restoration helped to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals; by increasing carbon storage it contributed to the goals of the Paris Agreement; and by helping prevent species extinction it aided progress on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. For all those reasons, it was vital to support the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, including the commitment to restore 1 billion hectares of degraded land. In that regard, she drew attention to the importance of United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 6/14 on strengthening international efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, promote land conservation and sustainable land management, contribute to land degradation neutrality, and enhance drought resilience.

15. Land restoration could also be the golden thread that linked the three Rio conventions (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa), the conferences of the parties of all of which would convene in 2024. UNEP was supporting efforts to connect the three multilateral environmental agreements and Member States could help to weave the threads together by connecting their climate change pledges, biodiversity strategies and action plans to land degradation neutrality commitments under the Convention to Combat Desertification.

16. Looking forward, the third session of the ad hoc open-ended working group on a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution would take place in Geneva in June 2024. The completion of that process would mean that all three science-policy panels required to combat the three environmental crises had been established, with the new panel joining the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. She asked members of the Committee to urge delegates to the ad hoc open-ended working group to work to finalize proposals, thereby ensuring that science guided the work on Environment Assembly resolutions, the Global Framework on Chemicals – For a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste, and other international agreements.

17. At the annual meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in New York in July 2024, UNEP would launch a global foresight report on planetary health and human well-being. Noting that Member States had already provided feedback on the outline through surveys, she said that the secretariat would welcome the opportunity to brief the Committee further once the report was finalized, including through a UNEP-led special event that would take place in the margins of the eleventh annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, to be held from 8 to 12 July 2024.

18. The sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, to be held in Riyadh from 2 to 13 December 2024, would provide an important opportunity to increase action on issues related to land. At the event, UNEP would co-lead “Land day” with the United Nations Development Programme, which would focus on nature-based solutions, strengthening drought resilience, land restoration and pastoralism. UNEP would also lead “Peoples day”, which would focus on supporting young people and Indigenous Peoples to participate fully in addressing the challenges that most affected them, as well as on cities and how sustainable consumption and the reduction and management of pollution and waste could help deliver the aims of the Convention. With support from the Global Environment Facility, in over 100 projects UNEP was also supporting parties to the Convention to meet their desertification reporting requirements.

19. Thanking the Committee for its work on the lessons learned from the sixth session of the Environment Assembly, she said that she looked forward to receiving further guidance on the theme of the next session, which should be focused and strategic. The eleventh annual subcommittee meeting would provide another opportunity to discuss the theme of the next session, along with the latest versions of the UNEP draft medium-term strategy and programme of work.

20. Thanking participants for their efforts over the past year, she asked them to continue supporting UNEP in a spirit of inclusive multilateralism, in order to strengthen the environmental

foundation of societies and economies and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

21. In the ensuing discussion, several representatives expressed condolences for the death of Mr. Töpfer and paid tribute to his work as a leading advocate for the environment. Several participants said that important multilateral environmental agreements had been adopted during his tenure, such as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

22. One representative said that recent natural disasters challenged the views of anyone who denied the environmental threats the world was facing. Climate financing was key to the transitions needed and, to deliver concrete results, the flow and provision of resources must be accelerated, particularly to developing countries, in accordance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Another representative expressed the hope that the loss and damage fund, the operationalization of which had been agreed by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at its twenty-eighth session, would be functioning soon.

23. Many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, thanked the Executive Director for the quarterly report, which had provided a useful overview of the activities of UNEP during the reporting period.

24. Turning to the financial situation of UNEP, several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, thanked the Executive Director and the secretariat for the information provided. Noting the significant gap between the annual budget for 2024 and the income during the reporting period, one representative expressed the hope that income would flow swiftly into the Environment Fund, the earmarked funds and the global funds, in order to ensure the implementation of the programme of work for 2024. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, commended the secretariat for its work to make UNEP funding more sustainable, and urged it to continue. Several representatives pledged to continue supporting UNEP financially and encouraged other Member States to do so. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, asked for additional information to be included in forthcoming quarterly reports, including on the allocation of earmarked resources and in-kind contributions made by Member States. One representative asked for greater detail on expenses related to the travel of professional staff, as an area in which expenditure might be significantly reduced, both at UNEP and elsewhere in the United Nations system.

25. One representative requested more information on the implementation of the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on delegation of authority, and asked why UNEP had not implemented all the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors on the financial statements of UNEP for the year ended 31 December 2023. One representative said that the annual subcommittee meeting would provide an important opportunity to discuss the medium-term strategy of UNEP. It would be important to learn the lessons of past processes and to engage Member States in that regard as early as possible.

26. Several representatives welcomed specific reports produced by UNEP. One representative said that the *Food Waste Index Report 2024* would complement the tools developed by other United Nations entities in the fight against food loss and waste, which accounted for one third of all food produced. Another representative commented on the report *Used Heavy-Duty Vehicles and the Environment: A Global Overview of Used Heavy-Duty Vehicles: Flow, Scale and Regulation*, noting that it would be useful to know the findings and outcomes of the report, particularly any recommendations relating to developing countries. Another representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the publication of the *Global Resources Outlook 2024* and the *Global Waste Management Outlook 2024*, which drew attention to critical environmental issues. One representative asked when Member States would be able to comment on the full draft of the global foresight report, which was due to be launched at the annual meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in July. Since many of the areas identified in the outline of the report and the background documents made available to date lay beyond the mandate of UNEP, the representative asked how the issues were prioritized in preparation for drafting the report, while respecting the autonomy of other intergovernmental organizations and processes working in similar areas and avoiding duplication of effort. One representative acknowledged the work conducted by UNEP to support Malawi in developing its national environmental outlook, and asked the Executive Director how that work had linked to the capacity-building conducted under the Global Environment Outlook process.

27. A number of representatives commented on the sixth session of the Environment Assembly, highlighting its importance to global environmental governance. Several representatives expressed their agreement with the Executive Director that the significant participation and extensive coverage in the global media and on social media were signs of success. One representative said that it reflected growing global interest in environmental issues, while several representatives commended the adoption of 15 resolutions and 2 decisions. One representative said that the success of the event should not be measured by the number of resolutions adopted, but by the fact that UNEP had been granted the mandate it needed to do its work. A number of representatives highlighted specific resolutions as particularly important. The vital work ahead, said one representative, was to ensure that the resolutions were adequately implemented. One representative thanked the secretariat for the informal consultations on the lessons learned from the sixth session and called for agenda conflicts and simultaneous meetings to be avoided at future sessions.

28. On the matter of the gender and geographical balance of UNEP staff, several representatives commended the secretariat for its efforts and for the progress made, noting that greater diversity would benefit all. One representative welcomed the efforts to achieve gender parity in the Professional categories and above. Several representatives commended the work done by UNEP to incorporate gender mainstreaming, which, they said, should be applied to all programmes. One representative asked why gender mainstreaming was presented in the report of the Executive Director as a considerable challenge, given that UNEP had done so much work in that area, while another representative asked for updated information on the development of the revised gender policy, and when it would be available for discussion by the Committee.

29. On the geographical balance of UNEP staff, one representative noted that despite a small improvement, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean remained underrepresented, accounting for only 9 per cent of staff and 10 per cent of the Professional and above categories. Further targeted talent outreach activities should be conducted, but should not be limited to young people. Several representatives suggested that, as well as the regional figures, the report should contain information on the composition of staff on a country-by-country basis. Such information would help Member States to understand whether UNEP was meeting United Nations Secretariat targets in that regard. One representative asked for information on the recruitment by UNEP of staff from marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities. Several representatives commended UNEP for the progress on recruitment made through the Young Talent Pipeline.

30. Turning to the recent activity of UNEP highlighted in the report of the Executive Director, several representatives thanked UNEP for its support for the negotiations of the intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. One representative said that the international legally binding instrument should include a clear time frame target and the ambition to achieve zero additional pollution by 2040. Rather than uniform global restrictions on plastic production, ambitious action should be prioritized on single-use plastics, environmentally friendly product design, reuse and recycling, and proper waste management. National action plans must also be developed, reported and reviewed regularly. Constructive discussions and intersessional work were needed prior to the vital fifth session in Busan, Republic of Korea.

31. The importance of regional initiatives was raised by several representatives, and a number of representatives thanked UNEP for its support to the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, while one representative drew attention to the Environmental Alliance of America, which was being supported by UNEP to promote regional eco-labelling. Another representative requested that UNEP continue prioritizing on-the-ground regional initiatives.

32. A number of representatives commented on the environmental impacts of conflict. One representative thanked the Executive Director for the information on UNEP work in the Gaza Strip and looked forward to the publication of the full report. The contribution by UNEP could help ensure the environmental impact of the conflict was assessed, and UNEP had an important duty to support Member States by responding to their requests for assistance following conflict and natural disasters. One representative commended UNEP for its work in co-implementing a project on breaking the climate-conflict cycle in Somalia, which had combined natural resources management with peacebuilding and nature-based solutions to foster long-term sustainability. He said that the project should be expanded to encompass other parts of Africa that were affected by conflict. Another representative requested assistance from UNEP to help prevent environmental damage from the ongoing attacks on ships in the Gulf of Aden, which had led to the spillage of materials that were harmful to the environment, such as chemicals and fuel.

33. One representative underlined the important role UNEP played in strengthening the science-policy interface, while another representative highlighted the work of UNEP within the Quadripartite alliance on One Health, particularly with regard to accelerating the implementation of the *One Health Joint Plan of Action, 2022–2026: Working together for the health of humans, animals, plants and the environment*, in which its expertise had had a positive impact. One representative expressed gratitude for the support UNEP had provided to the Buildings and Climate Global Forum, held in Paris on 7 and 8 March 2024, which had focused on accelerating work on decarbonization and climate change resilience in the construction sector.

34. Several representatives thanked UNEP for its valuable work on environmental crime and accountability, in particular on crimes facilitated by information and communication technology, noting that capacity-building was needed in that area. One representative commended UNEP for co-organizing a high-level dialogue to address crimes that affected the environment in Kenya. Several representatives underlined the importance of addressing environmental and racial justice, the significant intersections between which had been outlined in the UNEP report *Environmental Rule of Law: Tracking Progress and Charting Future Directions*. One representative asked whether plans were in place, once the regional presentations of that report had concluded, for a general online meeting to discuss the findings of the report and identify possible avenues for collaboration. Calling for the matter to be included in the UNEP programme of work and medium-term strategy, one representative noted that the relationship between racial and environmental justice had been recognized at the second meeting of national focal points to the Fifth Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Programme V), held in Nairobi from 2 to 4 June, and asked for information on the implementation of Montevideo Programme V in that regard. One representative said that, although a law banning activities with asbestos had been in place for several years in his country, large quantities of the material could not be safely removed due to the cost. Collaboration on the issue was therefore of vital importance.

35. Several representatives underscored the importance of broad participation in the activities of UNEP and the consultations on and planning of those activities. In that regard, the expansion of the number of organizations accredited to UNEP was welcomed, although one representative noted that the proportion of organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean remained low. Noting that civil society participation was vital to enrich proposed actions and promote social consensus on environmental issues, one representative encouraged delegates to participate in the first meeting of the group of friends for greater participation of civil society, which would take place in early July, while another representative urged UNEP to continue advocating for increased involvement of young people, including through the Youth Environment Assembly, as youth perspectives were needed on environmental legislation.

36. The Executive Director expressed her appreciation for the comments and questions.

37. She said that a briefing on the global foresight report was planned to take place on the sidelines of the eleventh annual subcommittee meeting, prior to the report being issued. The information that representatives had received to date did not give a clear picture of what would be included in the report, she said, and UNEP was fully conscious of its mandate and would limit itself to actions of environmental relevance.

38. On the Young Talent Pipeline, she thanked representatives for their comments, and said that UNEP was conscious of the areas in which the balance of staffing should be improved, including among Afro-descendant communities in Latin America and the Caribbean and North America. Acknowledging the need to also increase the recruitment of persons with disabilities, she said that the accessibility of the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi to persons with disabilities needed to be improved, and she asked Member States to help ensure that financial resources were made available for such modifications. She acknowledged the logic of providing staff numbers listed by country in future reports. Geographical representation figures could be unclear, as they were often based on regular budget posts, which, in the case of UNEP, accounted for only 3 per cent of staff; UNEP preferred to look at the full spectrum, which showed that UNEP staff came from 131 countries. Recalling that the second iteration of the Young Talent Pipeline would soon be rolled out, which was not the only way in which the organization recruited staff, she urged representatives to help publicize UNEP employment opportunities in their home countries.

39. With regard to the audit on the delegation of authority and the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, she confirmed that they had been given serious consideration, but said that UNEP was entitled to reject such recommendations. In some cases rejection had been merely for procedural reasons and she gave the example of a recommendation to amend the current programme of work, which was impossible after its approval. On the matter of travel expenses, she pointed out that

the figures included sponsored travel to meetings under the 17 multilateral environmental agreements supported by UNEP. On the revised gender policy, she said that she would respond in greater detail in due course. She clarified that gender mainstreaming had been described as an ongoing challenge because it was an issue that required continual attention, as was the case with racism, and could not be reduced to merely counting participation numbers. She confirmed that the incidences of sexual abuse and harassment were minimal in the organization, but that UNEP continued to consider it a very serious matter. The secretariat was determined to strengthen UNEP in accordance with Environment Assembly resolution 6/6.

40. She thanked representatives for drawing attention to a number of the reports produced by UNEP. On environmental rule of law and justice, she said that discussions on that important matter were under way at the regional level, and consideration was being given to the best way to incorporate it into the Montevideo Programme V process. She would welcome the inclusion of the matter in the next medium-term strategy, as environmental racism was a priority issue that she was glad to see was gaining traction. On used vehicles, she recalled that UNEP had programmes in place on electric mobility or used vehicles, or both, in 73 countries and had worked with both exporters and importers to address the quality both of used vehicles exported, particularly from Europe and Asia, and of those imported, to ensure that they met at least Euro 4/IV or equivalent vehicle emissions standards. Many unsafe and dirty vehicles were still being exported, but UNEP would continue to work on harmonized standards, cleaner and soot-free buses and green freight strategies, including with major ports. Consumers in exporting countries should bear in mind that when they switched to an electric vehicle, their old vehicle might remain on the roads elsewhere for another 20 years, making emissions standards vital.

41. She said that the report on the environmental impact of the conflict in Gaza would be published shortly, and confirmed that UNEP habitually responded to Member State requests for assessments of environmental damage from conflict, and had produced over 25 such reports. On UNEP work on climate and conflict in Somalia, she said that the country was entering a new reality, and that UNEP would participate in the transition towards a relationship with the United Nations that had a development, rather than humanitarian, focus. While capacity was limited, she confirmed that UNEP intended to expand its presence in Yemen and agreed that it was important to give priority to on-the-ground activities in various regional programmes.

42. She said that the problem of asbestos had been known for decades, and yet production had continued in some countries. UNEP was not able to fund incineration, but the international community should be able to agree on ceasing production of asbestos and dealing with its toxic legacy, at a minimum. She agreed that strengthening the science-policy interface was vital, and noted that it was an area that occupied a great deal of the work of the Chief Scientist of UNEP and the organization in general. UNEP produced over 100 publications each year in a range of areas, and their influence on programmatic areas, environmental policy reform and environmental law clearly showed the uptake pathway. She concluded by saying that loss and damage was an area that UNEP would continue to support as it was critical to ensuring climate action.

Agenda item 6

Assessment of and lessons learned from the sixth session of the Environment Assembly

43. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the document entitled “The sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly Assessment and Lessons Learned: Emerging Key Recommendations”, which was available on the web page of the 166th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The subcommittee had, at its meeting of 6 June, agreed that the informal exchanges between delegations on the lessons learned from the sixth session should continue, with a view to reaching consensus on key recommendations for finalization at the eleventh annual subcommittee meeting, to be held from 8 to 12 July 2024, for further consideration by the Committee at its 167th meeting, in September 2024. Further informal exchanges had taken place on Monday, 10 June 2024. The Chair invited the co-facilitators, Joaquin Salzberg (Argentina) and Gudi Alkemade (Kingdom of the Netherlands), to update the Committee on those discussions.

44. In her oral briefing, Ms. Alkemade said that the document prepared by the secretariat had provided a good basis for the discussions, which had addressed, among other issues, the potential improvements that could be made for future sessions of the Environment Assembly. She said that the co-facilitators were optimistic that the discussions would result in a revised version of the recommendations that could be presented to the subcommittee at its eleventh annual meeting.

Agenda item 7

Preparations for the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification

45. Introducing the item, the Executive Director reiterated that UNEP provided support to the Convention to Combat Desertification, as well as to reporting under the instrument, through over 100 projects.

46. Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary of the Convention to Combat Desertification, delivered a statement via video link on preparations for the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. In his presentation, he congratulated the Executive Director on the successful celebration of World Environment Day, which, like the upcoming sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, had been hosted by Saudi Arabia. The leadership role played by Saudi Arabia on issues related to land degradation and drought had been evidenced by its support for Environment Assembly resolution 6/14, which he thanked Member States for approving. Expectations for the sixteenth session were high, as reflected by the participation of high-level representatives of the Government of Saudi Arabia in its organization. Noting that the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention was approaching, he said that the specially designed, state-of-the-art venue would include both green and blue zones, and events at the session would include a leaders' summit and a ministerial segment.

47. While he was reluctant to anticipate the outcomes of the session, the indications were that expectations were high on drought, which had affected 100 countries in the past two years, encompassing 1 in 4 of the world's people, and had caused immense social, economic and environmental impacts, including fires, disrupted navigation, including in the Panama Canal, and weakened food security. Ambitious outcomes were also expected on land degradation, which was vital, as every year 100 million hectares of fertile land were being lost in this manner. In order to achieve target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which aimed, by 2030, to combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world, at least 1.5 billion hectares of land needed to be restored by that date. Some 900 million hectares had been pledged for restoration by parties, meaning that further efforts were needed. Decisions were expected on sand and dust storms, which affected 150 countries; on women's land rights, as only 15 per cent of the world's agricultural land was currently registered to women, and in some regions of the world, such as the Middle East and North Africa, only 4 per cent of women had land registered in their name; and on decent, green, land-based jobs for young people. The action agenda for the session would centre on land, people and resilience, and thematic days would be organized on land; agri-food systems; governance; peoples; science, technology and innovation; resilience; and finance. UNEP, along with other United Nations entities, would play a key role in facilitating the thematic days.

48. Regional preparatory meetings would be organized in preparation for the sixteenth session, including ministerial consultations in Latin America and the Caribbean and a special session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, while a meeting for the region of Asia and the Pacific was likely to take place in October. A ministerial event was also planned during the high-level segment of the seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly. In closing, Mr. Thiaw stressed the vital importance of solidarity and strengthened multilateralism in addressing environmental challenges. The solutions existed to land loss, scarcity and drought, but they could not be tackled in isolation.

49. A representative of the UNEP Ecosystems Division gave an oral briefing on how the preparations for the sixteenth session related to the programme of work of UNEP. As well as working closely with the secretariat of the Convention, she said that UNEP was collaborating with the parties to the Convention on monitoring and analysis to improve their decision-making in relation to the instrument. That work included analysing the progress of parties towards land degradation neutrality targets, and ensuring that such analyses were available for the sixteenth session, so that parties were able to make better and more informed decisions. In particular, UNEP had sought to draw on experience from other areas of work, applying practical lessons and experience from its work to advance the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the work on restoration done with the support of the Global Environment Facility and the work under the other Rio conventions. As well as creating synergies across conventions through the Bern process, lessons were being applied from the meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in areas such as peace with nature and conflict resolution, as UNEP engaged with many of the same solutions, narratives and stakeholders in the implementation of its programme of work. Through its regional offices, UNEP was highlighting the importance of drought resilience, land degradation neutrality and other issues of relevance to the sixteenth session.

50. The representative of Saudi Arabia thanked the secretariat for including the upcoming sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties on the agenda of the current meeting. He said that the priorities for the sixteenth session were to support global efforts on land degradation by setting a long-term vision for land restoration; to build resilience against drought, sand and dust storms; to develop a global observatory on drought; to link land restoration to livelihoods by promoting sustainable agriculture and resilient agri-food systems; to increase investment by involving the private sector, including by supporting innovation, institutions and young scientists; and to facilitate partnerships and the sharing of knowledge and experience on land rights at the global level by involving all segments of society. His country was engaged in an extensive process of raising awareness about the sixteenth session, and a media engagement plan had already been launched.

51. In the ensuing discussion, one representative asked for more detail on proactive drought management policy. Several representatives welcomed efforts to engage various stakeholders, particularly through the gender caucus, and it was suggested that youth capacity-building activities be organized in advance of the sixteenth session, in order to endow young people with the knowledge and skills required to participate fully. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, asked the secretariat to explain how it envisaged cooperation when implementing Environment Assembly resolution 6/14 relating to desertification.

52. Thanking representatives for their comments, Mr. Thiaw stressed the importance of the implementation of resolution 6/14, noting that the Convention secretariat was working closely with UNEP in that regard. The inclusion, for the first time, of a “Peoples day” at the sixteenth session showed the recognition of the important role of particular groups, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Capacity-building programmes for negotiations were in place for young people and relevant events would be held at the sixteenth session. Each session of the Conference of the Parties would now include a gender caucus and a gender action plan had been developed under the Convention, thanks to generous financial support provided by Canada. Gender issues were of supreme importance to the restoration of degraded land around the world and, of all gender gaps, that relating to land was among the most severe.

53. The representative of UNEP said that work was under way to ensure that resolution 6/14 was woven fully into the UNEP programme of work. In that process, science and evidence were vital to guide action and policy and UNEP intended to continue drawing on related activities in the UNEP portfolio, including the tools and guidelines emerging in the frameworks of other multilateral environmental agreements.

54. The Executive Director thanked Mr. Thiaw for the briefing.

Agenda item 8

Consideration of relevant evaluation reports and audits

55. In the absence of new evaluation reports or audits for consideration by the Committee, the Chair closed the item.

Agenda item 9

Report of the subcommittee

56. The Committee of Permanent Representatives endorsed the document entitled “Draft report of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives” (UNEP/CPR/166/7/Rev.1) and adopted the draft decision set out therein. Decision 166/1 on the recommendations of the Committee of Permanent Representatives is set out in the annex to the present document.

Agenda item 9

Other matters

57. The Chair invited representatives to raise other matters for consideration.

58. One representative requested that future briefings on the meetings or sessions of conferences of the parties to multilateral environmental agreements, such as the briefing given under agenda item 7 on preparations for the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, be included in the agendas of the subcommittee meetings rather than those of the quarterly meetings of the Committee, in the spirit of adhering to the implementation of paragraph 41 (j) of the Chair’s summary of the ninth annual subcommittee meeting (UNEP/CPR/ASC/9/7/Rev.2).

59. A representative of the secretariat, recalling that the Committee had endorsed the outcome of paragraph 41 (j) of the Chair's summary of the ninth annual subcommittee meeting at its resumed 162nd meeting on 31 October 2023, confirmed that the secretariat would keep that mandate in mind.

60. The Co-Chair of the working group on nitrogen convened by the Executive Director provided an update on the work of that group, noting that although progress had been made, much work remained to be done. Thanking Member States for nominating 95 focal points to the working group, he said that the high level of engagement had facilitated discussions, and he encouraged Member States that not yet done so to nominate focal points and thereby play an active role in global efforts to ensure the sustainable management of nitrogen.

Agenda item 10

Closing of the meeting

61. Following a brief statement by the Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, the meeting was declared closed at 4 p.m. on Thursday, 13 June 2024.

Annex

Decision adopted by the Committee of Permanent Representatives at its 166th meeting, on 13 June 2024

Decision 166/1: Recommendations of the Committee of Permanent Representatives at its 166th meeting

The Committee of Permanent Representatives

1. *Requests* the secretariat to complement each presentation on the outcomes of the meetings or sessions of conferences of the parties to multilateral environmental agreements with information on how such outcomes relate to the implementation of the programme of work of the United Nations Environment Programme;
 2. *Encourages* the Chair and the Bureau of the Committee, with the support of the secretariat, to develop further guidance on how to prepare future contributions of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, taking into account any recommendations arising from the process of learning lessons from the sixth session of the Environment Assembly;
 3. *Requests* the secretariat to provide regular updates to the Committee on the development of a global environmental data strategy and on the World Environment Situation Room;
 4. *Also requests* the secretariat to further update the Committee on the global foresight report on planetary health and human well-being.
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