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Conference Room 1

**Contribution of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development**

**I. The High-level Political Forum and the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

**(a) Background: brief history and functional scope**

1. At Rio +20, in June 2012, world leaders decided to establish a universal high-level political forum that would replace the Commission on Sustainable Development, which was established at the 1992 Earth Summit to follow up on the implementation of Agenda 21. The core idea was to revitalize global consideration and action on global sustainable development, as well as to strengthen the integration of its economic, social and environmental dimensions.

2. Subsequently, the General Assembly adopted resolution 67/290, which defined the format and organization of the *High-level Political forum on Sustainable Development (“the Forum”)*. Among other aspects, the General Assembly decided that the Forum would convene every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly, and annually at the ministerial level under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The Forum was then born as a hybrid and innovative arrangement for UN members to provide political leadership and policy guidance and review for global sustainable development.

3. In 2015, with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Forum would be given its most visible function: the central role in overseeing the follow-up and review of the Agenda at the global level. This role includes thematic reviews of progress and the consideration of national voluntary reviews among its main components.

4. In resolution 70/299, entitled *Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level*, the General Assembly further indicated that the thematic reviews should take place on the basis of a four-year cycle. The General Assembly decided the following themes for the sessions of the Forum under the auspices of Economic and Social Council, for the remainder of the current cycle:

- For 2017: Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.
- For 2018: Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.
- For 2019: Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.

5. Additionally, the General Assembly decided that each session of the Forum under the auspices of Economic and Social Council shall discuss a specific set of Sustainable Development Goals and their

interlinkages. This in-depth consideration should take into account the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the goals and represent all dimensions of sustainable development. The following are the set of goals to be considered in-depth by the Forum for the remainder of the current cycle:

- In 2017: Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 9 and 14.
- In 2018: Goals 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15.
- In 2019: Goals 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16.

6. The upcoming session of the Forum is scheduled to be held from Monday, 10 July, to Wednesday, 19 July 2017; including a three-day ministerial meeting of the forum from Monday, 17 July, to Wednesday, 19 July 2017.

7. In addition to the thematic review under the topic *“Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”*, the 2017 session of the Forum is expected to feature more than 40 national voluntary reviews.

**(b) *Interface between the follow-up and review at the national, regional and global levels***

8. In line with UN General Assembly resolution 67/290, at the regional level, the governing bodies of the UN regional commissions have defined the regional mechanism to follow up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, its means of implementation, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

9. Regional follow-up meetings will occur every year before the Forum and the agenda will include the presentation of the annual report on regional progress, challenges and lessons learnt in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, considering among others, the national voluntary reports as well as the reports from other relevant regional forums and intergovernmental mechanisms, promoting coordination and coherence, learning and the sharing of best practices within the UN system, and with other regional and sub-regional forums and organizations.

10. The regional Forums of Ministers of Environment will inform and provide inputs on the environmental dimension to the regional follow-up mechanisms of the implementation of 2030 Agenda in the region, coordinated by the UN regional commissions. Inputs provided reflect the priorities, challenges and proposals to be considered in the regional assessment of the progress made, in particular with regards to effective integration of environmental sustainability when implementing the 2030 Agenda.

11. The regional ministerial environmental forums could transmit its contribution through the regional mechanisms already established by the UN regional commissions, to which they will contribute, among others:

- Promoting a high-level policy dialogue and action on emerging environmental issues.
- Maintaining under review the status of environment at the regional and subregional level, identifying regional trends, and consolidating and sharing best practices and lessons learned, as well as major gaps and challenges.

- Follow-up and review of progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development and the Goals, in particular the effective integration of the environmental dimension, at the regional level.
- Evaluate, with an integrated approach, the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda in the region.
- Provide political guidance on recommendations regarding the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and specific policy recommendations to advance its implementation and the accomplishment of the Goals and their targets.

12. Paragraph 79 of the 2030 Agenda encourages Member States to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels which are country-led and country-driven”. Countries report on the achievement of the Goals from their national perspectives, including a consideration of their national priorities and approaches, and outlined how they have included the Goals into national development plans and strategies. They provided information on the context in which they are implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Goals and particularly the overarching challenges they face.

**(c) Integration of the work of other intergovernmental bodies**

13. One of the main objectives of the Forum since its establishment is to contribute to the enhanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a cross-sectorial manner and at all levels. In this regard, the existing legislation acknowledges the significance of the contributions from relevant intergovernmental bodies in the social, economic and environmental fields. The Environment Assembly falls within this category.

14. More concretely, the 2030 Agenda indicates that the thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals shall be supported by reviews by the functional commissions of ECOSOC and other intergovernmental bodies. The Agenda also foresees that these bodies will engage relevant stakeholders and, where possible, feed into, and align with the cycle of the Forum. The contributions to the global review of the Agenda in this context shall not overlook the integrated nature of the goals and interlinkages between them.

15. The 2030 Agenda and other relevant legislation do not define, however, the modalities and channels for all other intergovernmental bodies to contribute to the Forum’s global review. These modalities are being developed and consolidated by practice, as part of the ongoing process of implementing the current cycle of the Forum. Section III of this document identifies some of the available channels to transmit contributions to the Forum, in particular from the perspective of the Environment Assembly.

16. As it is described in Section III, the available channels for the Environment Assembly and to contribute to the Forum are diverse and mostly specific to it. They range from regular reporting obligations to the General Assembly, to recently adopted legislation encouraging the participation of the President of the Environment Assembly in the Forum.

**(d) Integration of the work of the UN agencies, funds and programmes**

17. Through resolution 67/90, which established the modalities of work for the Forum, the General Assembly decided that the Forum’s work “shall be supported by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in close cooperation with all relevant entities of the United Nations system,

*including funds and programmes, multilateral financial and trade institutions, the secretariats of the three Rio conventions and other relevant treaty bodies and international organizations".* This means that, in principle, UN Environment is engaged in various streams of UN inter-agency work related to the preparation of the sessions of the Forum.

18. One of such streams is the strengthening of the science-policy interface. Bringing together dispersed information and assessments, enhancing evidence-based decision-making and contributing to capacity-building for data collection and analysis in developing countries, have all been commanding objectives for the Forum since its establishment, back in 2012.

19. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the inter-agency work surrounding the Forum in this science-policy area has taken a concrete shape: the preparation of the Global Sustainable Development Report. The report, which will be produced every four years, is meant to provide guidance on the state of global sustainable development from a scientific perspective. While an independent group of 15 scientists leads the preparation, the UN system provides inter-agency support through a task team. The task team is co-chaired by six entities: the UN Secretariat, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN Environment, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Bank.<sup>1</sup> Section III (d) of this document further elaborates on the technical contributions expected from UN Environment in this context.

20. Beyond the science-policy interface, the 2030 Agenda and the Forum's review work offer a significant opportunity to promote coordination across the United Nations system not only on sustainable development as whole, but also in the field of the environment in particular. Environment is a shared responsibility of the system and UN Environment, as its environmental authority and voice, has a founding mandate to help others to assume their share of the responsibility. Fostering system-wide coordination and collaboration has been integral to the mandate, work and organizational culture of UN Environment.

21. UN Environment is working through a range of coordination mechanisms and strategies in this context, in order to respond to calls for UN system-wide policy coherence in addressing environmental matters. This work happens at different levels and modes of engagement to facilitate and leverage coordinated approaches and synergies and consolidating the system's support for the delivery of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. One of such channels through which UN Environment executes its mandate to integrate environment across United Nations agendas is the collaborative work within the Environment Management Group.

22. The key to delivering across mandates and areas of expertise, including environment, is to reiterate the centrality of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to the system as a whole at the global, regional and national levels, and to provide a common theme and organizing principle across governing bodies and secretariats. Each part of the United Nations system needs to remain close to its mandate while looking to work horizontally across the system, to enhance and strengthen the results and impact. The High-level Political Forum is a prime setting for the UN system to deliver as one in support of the review of the 2030 Agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> E/HLS/2016/1 Annex to the Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2016 session of the Economic and Social Council on the annual theme "Implementing the post-2015 development agenda: moving from commitments to results" and the Ministerial declaration of the 2016 high-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, on the theme "Ensuring that no one is left behind"

## **II. Role and types of contribution by the United Nations Environment Assembly to the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development**

### ***(a) Transmission of high-level policy/political messages and policy recommendations, as appropriate, on the environmental dimension in relation to the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ways to accelerate progress***

23. The United Nations Environment Assembly (Environment Assembly) is uniquely placed, among all other intergovernmental bodies of the UN system, to interact with the Forum at the ideal institutional, political and substantive levels:

24. From the perspective of their origin, both the establishment of the Forum and the transformation of the UN Environment's Governing Council into the Environment Assembly were chartered by the outcome document of *Rio +20*<sup>2</sup>. Both bodies are main building blocks of the UN institutional framework for sustainable development. This common origin also indicates that their distinctive mandates and roles share common purposes related to the objectives of the institutional umbrella they represent. Namely, the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, their implementation and review, including of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

25. Additionally, both the Forum and the Environment Assembly are universal in their composition, which, for the most part, is an exceptional feature within the UN institutional framework for sustainable development. The ministerial level of the Environment Assembly —being the universal gathering of the world's ministers of environment—, is also equivalent to the level of the Forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council.

26. From a substantive perspective, the Environment Assembly has, among other mandates, the intergovernmental responsibility to set the global environmental agenda, provide overarching policy guidance and defining policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges, undertaking the corresponding policy review and fostering partnerships for achieving environmental goals<sup>3</sup>. The integration of the political outcomes of these functions related to the environmental dimension is essential for the realization of the comprehensive review of global sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda assigned to the Forum.

27. In this regard, one of the main potential contributions from the Environment Assembly to the Forum would be the transmission of high-level political messages and policy recommendations, as appropriate, on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ways to accelerate progress. This fact was recognized by the Environment Assembly itself in its resolution 2/5 on *Delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, in which the world's ministers of environment committed to “conveying the main messages of its sessions to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to support its function in the follow-up to and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”<sup>4</sup>.

28. Prospective ministerial declarations of the Environment Assembly gain relevance in this context, as they would articulate the possibility of high-level, concise, focused and universally agreed political

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution 66/288, “*The future we want*”, section IV “*Institutional framework for sustainable development*”.

<sup>3</sup> Decision 27/2 of the First Universal Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/GC.27/17).

<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 2 of resolution 2/5 of the Environment Assembly (UNEP/EA.2/Res.5).

messages related to the environmental dimension of sustainable development. These declarations would enhance the political value of the set of messages to be conveyed to the Forum in order to contribute to the realization of its review function of the 2030 Agenda at the global level.

**(b) *Transmission of the outcomes (resolutions and decisions) of the Environment Assembly relevant to the implementation by the UN Environment Programme of the 2030 Agenda and status of their implementation, as appropriate, including those implemented in partnership with the UN system and other stakeholders***

29. In addition to prospective political messages and ministerial declarations, the Environment Assembly may contribute to the review function of the Forum by transmitting all other outcomes relevant to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These may include not only its resolutions, but also an overview of all programmatic components of UN Environment that are essential for the implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development and the related Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

30. The Environment Assembly, through resolution 2/5 on *Delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, has requested UN Environment to “*enhance its activities, in cooperation with other United Nations entities, in support of the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national, regional and global levels, taking into account the recommendations of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*”. It would be advisable for the Environment Assembly and for UN Environment to transmit to the Forum outcomes and updates which specifically describe the fulfilment of this request.

31. Section III of this document describes the various direct channels that are being developed for the transmissions of contributions from the Environment Assembly to the Forum. Beyond those channels it is important to note that the Environment Assembly fulfils a regular reporting obligation to the UN General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council. This means that the Environment Assembly’s report is considered both by the General Assembly and by Economic and Social Council during their main sessions. While both the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council are the intergovernmental bodies under which the Forum meets, this does not necessarily means that the report, with its annex of all resolutions adopted by the Environment Assembly reaches the Forum. In this regard, it becomes advisable that the transmissions from the UN Environment Assembly to the Forum, in virtue of direct channels, refer to core and relevant elements of the reports on the sessions of the Environment Assembly.

32. It should also be noted that UN Environment makes an additional contribution to the Forum’s deliberations in its capacity as the secretariat of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns. Through resolution 71/223, adopted in December 2016, the General Assembly decided to “*designate the Economic and Social Council to receive reports from the Board and the secretariat of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns*” and affirmed “*that due consideration should continue to be given to sustainable consumption and production at the meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council*”<sup>5</sup>.

**(c) *Relevant elements of ministerial declarations from regional ministerial forums served by the UN***

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<sup>5</sup> Paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 71/223.

33. Since these Forums act as platforms for preparing and building common positions for, *inter alia*, the United Nations Environment Assembly, they have helped to promote deeper levels of cooperation within the regions. In turn, this has helped to elevate the regional voice in global processes.

34. The evolution of UN Environment into a universal body has been an important step politically. As a result and considering the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Agreement, the Regional Forums have increased in political importance within its governing council, which has already been recognised in its 27<sup>th</sup> session and underlined recently in the second session of the Environment Assembly. Their role is essential to ensure that the Environment Assembly is capable of producing outcomes that reflect regions' priorities. They provided a venue for reaching a common understanding of regional concerns and priorities before participating in global negotiation processes, where the complex political dynamics often prevent coherent outcomes.

35. The regional Forums also contribute towards the integration of global processes in both the regions and the sub-regions through strategic and implementation measures and tools, as well as partnerships with key sectors outside of the environment area.

### **III. Available channels to transmit the contribution of the Environment Assembly to the High-level Political Forum**

#### **(a) Formal inputs from intergovernmental bodies to the Forum (annual request by the President of the Economic and Social Council to the President of the Environment Assembly)**

36. For the first session of the Forum after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, in 2016, the President of the Economic and Social Council extended a first-time invitation to the presidents/chairs of relevant intergovernmental bodies to provide substantive inputs showcasing the contribution of their bodies towards the 2030 Agenda, in general, and the Goals and targets most relevant to their respective mandates, in particular.

37. With less than a month granted for the preparations of submissions that year, the President of the Environment Assembly guided the fulfilment of the request on the basis of the deliberations and outcomes of the second session of the Environment Assembly, which took place from 23 to 27 May 2016. For reference of the Subcommittee the respective submission is included in the annex of this document.

38. The practice has been revalidated for the 2017 session of the Forum. This time around, however, the request from the president of the Economic and Social Council (also included in the annex) was made in the month of October 2016. The deadline for the submission of the inputs is 28 April 2017. This would ensure sufficient time for the preparation of the contribution related to the Environment Assembly, which could also benefit from the feedback that Member States may provide at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, during the discussion of item 2 of the agenda, namely, "*Contribution of the United Nations Environment Assembly to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*".

39. The invitation for contributions is also framed within a suggested template for submissions, inspired by the report of the Secretary-General on global follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The elements of that template are:

- An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level.
- The identification of gaps, areas requiring especial attention, risks and challenges.
- Valuable lessons learned on eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity (theme of the Forum in 2017).
- Emerging issues likely to affect the realization of poverty eradication and achieving prosperity.
- Areas where political guidance by the Forum is required.
- Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in poverty eradication.

**(b) *Participation of the President of the Environment Assembly in sessions of the Forum in the context of both the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly (in virtue of the respective UN General Assembly resolution)***

40. In paragraph 3 of 71/231 on the “*Report of the UN Environment Assembly*”, the UN General Assembly included a consensual message around the relevance of the participation of the President of the Environment Assembly in the High-level Political Forum. Concretely, the General Assembly:

*3. Encourages the President of the United Nations Environment Assembly to convey the main messages agreed upon by the Environment Assembly at its sessions during the high-level political forum convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, as appropriate, taking into account the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as General Assembly resolutions 67/290 of 9 July 2013 and 70/299 of 29 July 2016;*

41. The General Assembly’s encouragement for the participation of the President of the Environment Assembly during the Forum is exceptional, in the sense that it has a specific nature and it was legislated. At the same time, it is relevant to note that there is no concrete identification around which segment of the Forum would be used for this purpose. According to relevant legislation related to the modalities of the Forum, the organization of its session under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council is the responsibility of the President of the Council. In this regard, confirmation of where the participation of the President of the Environment Assembly could take place may come at a later stage. One of such possibilities may be for the respective minister to take the floor in the general debate of the Forum, in its capacity as the President of the Environment Assembly.

**(c) *Role and contribution of Regional Sustainable Development Forums, in particular those related to the review and follow up of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda of regional ministerial environment forums and their policy recommendations***

42. The regional environment forums are well-placed to strengthen synergies and input to and from UNEA, through their regional deliberations and discussions of the regional actions to respond to global environmental challenges. The integration of the outcomes of Ministerial Forums into the Environment Assembly will help to strengthen the legitimacy, credibility and regional ownership of the outcomes of



the Environment Assembly's resolutions. This will in turn enhance the Environment Assembly's ability to influence and contribute to the work of other UN bodies, such as the Forum.

43. At the regional level, the Regional Environment forums could transmit the contribution of the Environment Assembly through the inputs and policy recommendations submitted to the regional sustainable forums, to be integrated in the reports on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as in the discussion and specific outcomes of these meetings, which will then contribute to the discussions of the High-Level Political Forum.

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