

**Note on “Communicating in a More Straightforward and Impactful Way”**

The Secretariat is pleased to present a note from the Executive Director entitled “Communicating in a more straightforward and impactful way”, in support of a draft decision “Improving communication on the environment” submitted by the Secretariat. This note addresses rationale and suggested course of actions for using the “UN Environment” for the UN Environment Programme. As annexes of this note, a draft decision and practices and precedents are included for Member States further information.

## Rationale

In my Note of 3 August 2017, I set out the rationale for using the short form “UN Environment” for the United Nations Environment Programme instead of the acronym “UNEP”. At the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on 31 August 2017, Member States asked that I clarify the process ahead.

Let me reiterate the limited nature of the proposal. We are not seeking to change the official name of the United Nations Environment Programme as decided upon in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972. Rather, this is about communicating in a more straightforward and efficient way. This implies using simple, plain, and acronym free language to ensure that the message and activities of the United Nations Environment Programme can easily be understood and reach everyone across the globe.

The proposal is about replacing the short form of the name of our Programme, the acronym “UNEP” with “UN Environment”. This is being done without prejudice to the name, present mandate, aims and purposes of the United Nations Environment Programme as set out in resolution 2997 (XXVII).

During my consultations over the past few months, it has become evident that the vast majority of Member States fully support a better way of communicating.

I have heard many great ideas from government representatives and other partners on other measures that could help us in this regard. This includes communicating in more languages, starting with the six official languages of the United Nations, making better use of other tools including publications, social media and celebrities, and looking into best practices from other organizations. Indeed, many at the United Nations now use short forms in speeches, oral presentations, visual communication tools, social media, etc. Acronyms are not used by our Secretary-General, António Guterres, for exactly the same reasons.

## Suggested Course of Action

I am now approaching the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the Environment Assembly with a request to consider adopting a decision that will strengthen our ability to communicate in a more straightforward and impactful way .

In so doing, I am confirming that the use “UN Environment” relates exclusively to the short form of our name and involves no change to the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme. Any cost related to this change can be absorbed within our existing budget.

This decision will not affect the official documentation from the Secretariat, including resolutions, official reports and all documentation pertaining to the Governing Bodies of the Programme, which will continue to be published as they are now (under the full name of the Programme). Furthermore, the letterhead of the Programme to be used in all official communications will reflect the official name of the Programme.

The measures that I propose are legally within the authority of our Governing Body which oversees and provides policy guidance to our Programme as set under operative paragraph 2 of UN General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) and in line with the Rio+20 Outcome Document endorsed by General Assembly resolution 66/288 of 27 July 2012 and the resolutions pertinent to its implementation.

I would therefore like to propose that the open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives considers for possible adoption by the Environment Assembly a short procedural decision framed around the need of communicating on the environment in a more straightforward and impactful way.

In accordance with our mandate, such decision, once adopted by the Environment Assembly, will then be considered by the United Nations General Assembly as part of the report of the third session of the Environment

Assembly. The main elements of such decision are attached herewith in Annex 1. Further information on practice and precedents is included in Annex 2.

## **Annex 1**

### ***Improving communication on the environment***

The Environment Assembly may wish to adopt a resolution along the following lines:

#### **Preamble**

- Recalling United Nations General Assembly resolution 2997(XXVII) of 15 December 1972 entitled “Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental cooperation”;
- Recalling United Nations General Assembly 66/288 of December 2012 entitled “The future we want”;
- Recalling United Nations General Assembly 67/213 of December 2012 entitled “Report of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme on its twelfth special session and on the implementation of section IV.C, entitled "Environmental pillar in the context of sustainable development”;
- Recalling Governing Council decision 27/2 of 22 February 2013 entitled “Implementation of paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development”

#### **Operative**

1. Reaffirms the mandate and official designation of the United Nations Environment Programme as set out in General Assembly resolutions 2997(XXVII) of 15 December 1972;
2. Takes note with appreciation of the efforts by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to increase the efficiency of the Programme by, inter alia, communicating in a **more direct/simpler** manner and increasing awareness of the activities of the Programme;
3. Takes note of the use of the term 'UN Environment' by the United Nations Environment Programme.
4. Authorizes the use of the term “UN Environment” as short form for the United Nations Environment Programme; it being understood that such use is intended for outreach purposes, and in no way changes the official designation, present mandate, aims and purposes of the United Nations Environment Programme or the role and functions of its governing body; and invites the General Assembly **to endorse/to grant final approval of** this decision as part of its consideration of the Report of the United Nations Environment Assembly on its Third Session
5. Also requests the Executive Director to increase the availability, particularly in the six official languages of the United Nations, of publications and information of the Programme and its Governing Body in line with the Rules of Procedure of the Environment Assembly;
6. Requests the Executive Director to report to the Assembly, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, on the implementation of this resolution.

## Annex 2

### Practice and precedents

There has never been a decision taken by a United Nations body expressly authorizing the use of the acronym “UNEP” and it is not used in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) or in the “The future we want”, the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) which reaffirmed and strengthened the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, as formally adopted by General Assembly resolution 66/288 of 27 July 2012.

This acronym was first used in the Report of the Executive Director to the first session of the Governing Council of 2 April 1973 entitled “Action Plan for the Human Environment: Programme Development and Priorities (UNEP/GC/5) and used in the Report of the Governing Council on the work of its first session of 12-22 June 1973 (A/9025). Then, as a practice, it was used in the subsequent reports of the Governing Council, Governing Council decisions, and decisions of the United Nations Environment Assembly.

In cases where decisions have been taken on terminology for our Programme, they have been taken by our Governing Body before being considered by the General Assembly. Thus, our Governing Body adopted a decision recommending a change to its own name. By Decision 27/2 entitled “Implementation of paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development” (UNEP/GC.27/17 of 12 March 2013), the Governing Council, proposed a resolution to change the designation of the Governing Council to the “United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme.” Subsequently, the General Assembly adopted resolution 67/251 of 13 March 2013, based upon that proposal entitled “Change of the designation of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme”. In this case, a General Assembly resolution was necessary as General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) expressly uses the term, “Governing Council”.

As far as practices and precedents within the United Nations are concerned, I would recall that there are precedents for using short forms as opposed to acronyms. The General Assembly itself has taken decisions to use short forms for two United Nations Funds and Programmes. By resolution 56/206 of 26 December 2001, the General Assembly decided “to transform the Commission on Human Settlements and its secretariat, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), including the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation, with effect from 1 January 2002, into the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, to be known as UN-Habitat”. Similarly, by resolution 64/289 of 2 July 2010 the General Assembly in operative paragraph 49 decided to establish “the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to be known as UN-Women, by consolidating and transferring to the Entity the existing mandates and functions of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat, as well as those of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, to function as a secretariat and also to carry out operational activities at the country level.”

A General Assembly resolution was needed in these two cases, because there was either a change in mandate to an existing Programme (UN Habitat) or the establishment of a new Programme (UN Women). As explained above, we are neither seeking to change the official name or the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, only its short form that has never been decided upon by the General Assembly. Rather, we are focusing like many other UN funds, programmes and specialised agencies on using more impactful language in speeches, oral presentations, visual communication tools or social media.