



Distr.: General
31 December 2018

English only



United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme

**144th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives
to the United Nations Environment Programme**
Nairobi, 8 January 2019
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Conference Room 1

Agenda Item 8: Briefing on South-South Cooperation

Response from the Secretariat: Questions received in writing from the Delegation of the United States of America addressing Agenda Item 4 entitled “Briefing from the Secretariat on the Interim Secretariat for China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Centre” at the Sub-committee meeting on 4 October 2018

- **Para 26 of the background note and China’s note posted under this agenda item say “other interested parties” and “UNEA MS” are welcome to participate. If that is the case, all member states should be able to receive monthly briefings and we would kindly request invitations to the monthly briefings.**
 - The Secretariat is committed to provide regular updates to brief and consult Member States on new developments with regard to the China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Center as soon as new relevant information emerges. This will take place primarily during the Committee meetings and/or subcommittee meetings, as well as through dedicated briefings for the African Diplomatic Corps and, upon request, other Member States constituencies in Nairobi. The latest briefing to the latter took place on Friday 7 December in the UN compound in Nairobi.
 - In doing so, the Secretariat will take into account the strong call from many Member States to improve the information-sharing under this work stream, while also seeking further guidance from the main parties concerned – China and the African Member States

- with regard to the form and level of engagement expected from other countries during the establishment of the Center and beyond.
- **We note that the interim secretariat is a temporary measure and expected to cease operations by February 17, 2019. If any of the parties participating in this interim secretariat believe that the secretariat needs to be extended beyond February 2019, we expect UNEP will consult Member States well in advance of February. In addition we also expect this topic to be discussed at UNEA-4, per paragraph 27 of this item’s background document.**
 - The Secretariat is fully committed to consulting with Member States in advance should the need for an extension of the interim secretariat arise.
 - A full progress update will be provided by the Secretariat to Member States in writing in January 2019, outlining proposed next steps. The matter will be on the agenda for the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives on 8 January 2019.
 - A Progress Report will be submitted to the fourth UN Environment Assembly, whereby Member States will have the opportunity to consider this matter further, and, if necessary, take formal decision.
 - Further information will be made available upon request.
- **The United States is concerned that UNEP did not notify or consult with Member States prior to signing the Letter of Intent. In fact, we found out about these commitments six months later, and not from UNEP. If UNEP is making significant commitments like this in secret, it should not be surprised when Member States react with suspicion and concern.**
 - The Government of China, the Government of Kenya and the United Nations Environment Programme signed the Letter of Intent on 5 December 2017, in conjunction with the third session of the UN Environment Assembly in the presence of several African Member States.
 - The Secretariat acknowledges that more efforts could and should have been undertaken to inform and consult with other Member States before as well as after the signing of the Letter of Intent.
 - The Secretariat commits to improve transparency and information-sharing to Member States on this initiative.
- **The scope and cost of this commitment should have been determined before the commitment was made. What will the scope and cost be? Will there be any UNEP**

contributions other than the in kind contributions related to the interim secretariat, which we understand are limited to office space and a percentage of time from three staff?

- The scope of the costs borne by the Secretariat of the UN Environment Programme for the Interim Secretariat of the Centre are expected to be limited to providing office space, furniture, equipment and cost recovery for staff time for the Interim Secretariat during a time period limited to 6-months commencing from the launch of the Interim Secretariat.
- The total cost for the 6 month period is estimated to amount to US \$ 15,100 (office space, furniture, equipment and launching ceremony).
- So far, the Interim Secretariat staff cost (subject to the actual working months) is estimated to:
 - D1 (10%) US \$1164/month
 - P4 (25%) US \$2072/month
 - P3 (25%) US \$1722/month
- It is anticipated that all costs related to the interim Secretariat will be covered by extra budgetary resources from the China Trust Fund. However, this understanding has yet to be confirmed and formalized with the Government of China, and modalities have yet to be finalized.
- Should there be a request from Member States to extend the 6 month time period, the Committee of Permanent Representatives will be duly informed and consulted on the matter.
- **We remain concerned about the appropriateness of UNEP's involvement in what is essentially a bilateral agreement between China and Kenya.**
 - The initiative to establish a China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Center originates from the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which comprises over 50 African countries and China.
 - The UN Environment Programme is mandated to promote South-South Cooperation under the Bali Strategic Plan, adopted at the 23rd Session of the Governing Council in February 2005.
 - In line with the mandate provided by Member States in the Bali Strategic Plan, the role of the Secretariat is supporting and facilitating the initial phase of the process of establishing the Centre.

- **Why is it appropriate for UNEP to “mobilize funding and other resources from international institutions, partners, business, public and private sectors” for a center that seems intended to promote the transfer of one Member State’s technology and investment?**
 - The Secretariat does not intend to mobilize funding and other resources from international institutions, partners, business, public and private sectors for the Centre. According to the Letter of Intent, the role of the UN Environment Programme is limited to:
 - providing office space and supporting facilities for the Centre during its inception phase to kick-off initial operations;
 - providing “in kind contribution” for the initial operation of the Centre; and
 - appointing, in close consultation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection of China, a Director of the Centre who will be responsible for management and operation of the Centre.
 - Moreover, the tentative objectives to be further refined by China and African Member States are:
 - a forum for environmental policy interaction and dialogue
 - a clearing house for information exchange and technical co-operation in sustainable business development and innovative technology.
 - a platform for capacity development in support of environmental policy and best practice to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
 - a catalyst for joint environmental programmes and project development and implementation.
 - a platform for mobilization of funds for environmental projects and programmes that will contribute towards Africa’s development priorities.
- **The Vision document, which UNEP has not provided to Member States, states the center will benefit African countries with investment and technology from countries other than China, but it is unclear that there will be any role for other countries. The name alone, which we understand will not be changed, does not suggest that it is open to the involvement of others.**
 - Two key strategic documents are currently foreseen to guide the establishment of the Center. These are:
 - a **Concept Note**, outlining the overall objectives and principles for the initiative, and,

- a **Proposal Document** including more concrete proposals for its establishment.
- Both documents are still in an early stage of drafting. Following consultations and agreement with the African countries and with China, they will be shared with the Committee of Permanent Representatives.
- China and some African countries have in their statements made at the Subcommittee meeting on 4 October 2018 indicated that they welcome the involvement of other countries in the establishment of the Centre.
- The nature of this involvement will become clearer once the Centre's governance structure and operating modalities have been developed, based on further guidance from the African countries and China, and in consultation with other Member States, as appropriate.
- **According to the Briefing Note distributed prior to this meeting, “The Centre will strengthen cooperation between China and African countries in the field of environment,” and the center will be directed and steered by African countries and China. This underlines the bilateral nature of the project.**
 - As the Center intends to potentially serve over 50 African countries as well as China and is open to involvement of other interested parties, the understanding of the Secretariat is the initiative is multilateral in the framework of South-South Cooperation.
 - To what extent parties beyond China and African countries will become involved in the decision-making structure of the Center is yet to be determined, and will require further consultations both with the African countries and China, as well as other interested parties.
 - The role of the Secretariat is to facilitate this consultative process with all relevant parties involved.
- **How will the center provide “knowledge and capacity to countries along the [Belt and Road];” whose knowledge will be provided?**
 - The precise focus areas of the China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Centre are yet to be determined by the key parties (African countries and China). At present, the Centre does not have any formal link to the Greening the Belt and Road Initiative.
 - Knowledge and capacity provided through the Centre will be determined by the Africa Group and China.

- **Who will comprise the “expert panel of scientific advisors?” How will this panel be established?**
 - As stated above, the governance arrangements for the Center are not in place yet, including with regard to any possible panel of scientific advisors.
- **Is there really need for another forum to identify best practices to achieve SDGs?**
 - All current global, regional and national initiatives must be implemented with the aim to support achievement of SDGs. Both African and Chinese leadership have recognized the need to strengthen collaboration in the field of the environment under the framework of South-South Cooperation, including at Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2015, whereby the political leaders of African countries and China agreed to take the initiative to establish a China-Africa Environmental Cooperation Center. The initiative was confirmed and further elaborated at the FOCAC meeting in September 2018. It is in this context that the Center is associated with the SDGs.
- **We see UNEP requested that staff time devoted to the interim Secretariat be covered by the China trust fund. Is there an agreement on this?**
 - The Interim Secretariat has not undertaken any operational activities. Discussion are underway with the government of China to confirm that the costs of the Interim Secretariat can be covered by extra-budgetary resources from the China Trust Fund.