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United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme

**Annual subcommittee meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives
to the United Nations Environment Programme**

Seventh meeting

Nairobi, 12-16 October 2020

Online meeting

1.00 pm – 6.00 pm (GMT+3)

Agenda Item 7: Implementation of UNEA resolution 4/23

This note serves as background document for Agenda Item 7: Implementation of UNEA resolution 4/23. It provides background information and progresses concerning paragraphs 4-9 of UNEA resolution UNEP/EA.4/23, entitled “Keeping the World Environment under Review: Enhancing United Nations Environment Programme’s Science-Policy Interface and Endorsement of the Global Environment Outlook”.

On this basis, the meeting is invited, in particular, to consider and provide guidance on the implementation of UNEA resolution 4/23.

I. Background

The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), at its 4th session, adopted resolution UNEP/EA.4/Res. 23, entitled “Keeping the World Environment under Review: Enhancing United Nations Environment Programme’s Science-Policy Interface and Endorsement of the Global Environment Outlook”. The relevant requests for the Executive Director (Operative Paragraphs or OPs) in the resolution read as follows:

***OP3** Requests the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to continue to provide information from existing and ongoing assessments to guide future policy debates at the United Nations Environment Assembly;*

***OP4** Also requests the Executive Director to assure the promotion of environmental monitoring and assessment by, and the primacy of a strong science-policy interface within, the United Nations Environment Programme by fostering collaboration with Member States, business and experts, the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements, other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, scientific panels and other key partners, such as the United Nations Statistics Division, the United Nations regional commissions and the Group on Earth Observations;*

***OP5** Further requests the Executive Director to further develop and prioritize a long-term data strategy within the programme of work and budget, in consultation with Governments, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements, and international and regional scientific bodies, with particular attention to regular regional and global analysis of the state of and trends in environmental parameters as a basis for, inter alia, the future Global Environment Outlook process, in support of the following:*

- a) The identification of comparable methods for data collection and analysis and the promotion of their harmonization, taking into account existing standards, including those of the United Nations Statistical Commission System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, in coordination with other parts of the United Nations system and other relevant scientific institutions, building on international environmental data and statistical standards;*
- b) The improvement of platforms that provide a repository function, to allow open access to up-to-date, quality-assured, credible and relevant data, including geospatial data, statistics, indicators and data analysis on the environment, including the work of the Global Resource Information Database (GRID) centres;*
- c) The provision of tools and policy advice for integrated approaches to support evidence-based decision-making;*
- d) The acceleration of efforts to assist Member States in developing their national environmental data management capacities and their environmental monitoring systems with regard to air and water quality, deforestation, marine litter and environmental security, and their ability to use data analysis to support evidence-based decision-making; The designations used and the presentation of the material in the summary for*

policymakers do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations Environment Programme concerning the legal status of any country, territory or city or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. For general guidance on matters relating to the use of maps in publications, please see www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/english/htmain.htm.

- e) The coordination of efforts with the Group on Earth Observations to fully utilize Earth observations;*
- f) The encouragement of citizen science and its potential contribution as a complementary resource to fill data gaps;*
- g) The underpinning of common country analyses with robust environmental data and statistics, in line with Sustainable Development Goal indicators, by United Nations resident coordinator offices, and the integration of national environmental data management, geospatial information management and statistical capacity into United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks;*

OP6 *Requests the Executive Director, in accordance with the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme to keep the world environmental situation under review, to prioritize in the programme of work and budget the preparation of an options document on the future of the Global Environment Outlook process, in broad consultation with Member States, stakeholders and the custodians of other global environmental assessment processes, focusing on the scope and objectives of the Global Environment Outlook process. The consultations for and preparation of the options document will be overseen and managed by a steering committee, to be established under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Assembly and pursuant to the terms of reference and the nomination process set out in the annex to the present resolution. Members of the steering committee may be nominated by Member States or members of the United Nations specialized agencies and will be approved by the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The options document should address the role of the Global Environment Outlook process in regularly preparing independent analyses of the state of and trends in the global environmental situation. The scope and objectives of the Global Environment Outlook process should be informed by the United Nations Environment Programme Guidelines for Conducting Integrated Environmental Assessments. The options document is to be submitted by the steering committee to the Environment Assembly for consideration at its fifth session, to inform a decision on the future form and function of the Global Environment Outlook;*

OP7 *Also requests the Executive Director to prepare a proposal for science-policy input on the global environment, in consultation with Member States and making use of contributions from relevant stakeholders, in commemoration of the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme, in line with the recommendation of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972;*

OP9 *Reiterates its request to the Executive Director to strengthen the policy relevance of the Global Environment Outlook process by measuring progress towards the achievement of internationally agreed environmental goals, to inform relevant global processes and meetings;*

OP10 Requests the Executive Director to continue to promote greater coherence and coordination of global assessments undertaken within the United Nations system and in cooperation with relevant international bodies and the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements;

II. Progress on relevant operative paragraphs of UNEP/EA.4/Res.23

OP4: Capacity Building - At least four countries in Africa are relying on data generated through the assessment processes in national planning. Planning processes have also begun in Benin and Botswana to culminate in the awarding of consultancy contracts for the development of shared national environmental data and information management systems/platforms for mainstreaming of Rio (and other MEAs) conventions and SDG indicator management, monitoring and reporting. Amongst other benefits, this will involve the development and publication of national environmental indicator frameworks (in synergy with SDGs); inter-ministerial and inter-agency agreements / MoUs on data sharing protocols, policies and other coordination mechanisms for sustainable development. The regional report on lessons learned on sharing and using data in support of reporting and assessment processes in the Asia Pacific has been finalized. The report is partly based on the outcomes of other activities implemented in the region as part of the project, including the country reports, as well as on the responses to a questionnaire shared with country representatives and with a number of experts with relevant expertise. The report was expected to be launched in March 2020 to support the further development of the knowledge base of reporting and assessment. Still, due to the situation arising from COVID-19, the launch has been postponed.

OP4: World Water Quality Alliance (WWQA) - Promotion of environmental monitoring, assessment and a strong science policy-interface has been addressed in the context of the water quality challenge (see also UNEP/EA.3/Res.10) by establishing and convening the transdisciplinary World Water Quality Alliance (WWQA) covering 50+ partners in the fields of water quality science, technology innovation, governance and diplomacy (UN-Water Members and Partners, civil society, public and private sector entities, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, the World Economic Forum etc.). The WWQA provides evidence-based assessments, such as a new global water quality assessment, combining earth observation, modelling and on the ground data, and engages in co-design and partner dialogue for scalable solutions and innovation aimed to be operationalized in countries. UNEP's Global Environment Monitoring System for Freshwater (GEMS/Water) Programme is one key cornerstone in the Alliance and also the operational arm in SDG 6 water quality monitoring. The WWQA has received financial support from the Swiss Confederation for an initial 4-year period and receives in-kind support from other partners.

OP5: World Environment Situation Room (WESR) - The WESR is promoting the use of the latest standards for data exchange, such as OGC for geospatial data and APIs for data transfer of statistics, geospatial data and publications. For geospatial data, UNEP is chairing the UN Geospatial Network, a network of about 30 UN agencies working with geospatial information, intending to standardize and harmonize data sharing. WESR is also promoting comparable methods for data collection and analysis and developing a Global Environment Data Strategy. UNEP's GEMS/Water programme is

collaborating with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and Member States, in consultation with the EC (DG ENV), on a regional pilot to foster alignment of reporting on state and trends to enable the use of EEA data for the SDG 6 water quality indicator and monitoring. The common objective is to mainstream water quality issues and solutions in an end-to-end value chain from data to action at scale as a collective effort of all societal actors. This may serve as a model for future collaboration with other regional and global partners and is currently under exploration with the African Ministers' Council on Water (AMCOW).

OP5b: UNEP is improving its data platforms and integrating them so that these can be accessed via a single-entry point. This is accessible via the homepage of the UNEP website (unep.org) under "Science & Data" as well as under "Resources". This new way of integrating data, information and knowledge includes a repository function for data and publications. It allows open access to up to date, and some in near-real-time data. Data quality is ensured by UNEP experts who are involved in selecting the content. This platform includes geospatial data, statistics, indicators and data analysis on the environment. These developments are in close collaboration with the UNEP GRID-Centres, for example, UNEP/GRID-Geneva has a coordinating role and is also developing new dashboards, to support the Common Country Analyses (CCA), assessments, SDGs reporting, thematic platforms (e.g. climate change, pollution, mountains, risk). Other data centres are also involved, such as GRID-Arendal (for ocean data), GRID-Warsaw (for digitalization of data from the GEO-6 report), GRID-Sioux-Falls on change detection, and other collaborators such as e.g. UNEP/WCMC on biodiversity. All of these can be accessed either via the unep.org webpage or directly through <https://wesi.unep.org>.

OP5d: UNEP is assisting 15 member States in developing their national environmental data management. Additionally, the GEMS Air programme released the world's largest real-time platform for air quality, complemented with a mobile application in collaboration with partners for monitoring air quality world-wide (PM2.5) in real-time. See <https://wesi.unep.org/airvisual>. UNEP is developing an international platform to support air quality management for developing countries that will be hosted under the UN cloud infrastructure (release planned for Q4/2020) and will be piloted in 2021 with five countries in Africa. A new GEMS/Air strategy aligns with the overall GEMS programme which leverages partnerships, emphasizes scaling and investment to transform the air quality monitoring landscape, particularly for developing countries. To that end, renewed partnerships with WMO and non-state actors have materialized (e.g. C40), in addition, several private sector partnerships (e.g. Google, IQAir, Safaricom) are already contributing to implementation at various scales and air quality sectors. A dedicated application, also available through tablets and mobile phones were developed to show air quality status in a pilot city (Addis Ababa), see the application at <https://unepgrid.ch/playground/wesi-african-cities/>. On water quality, UNEP GEMS/Waterworks with currently 116 national focal points to provide access to in-situ water quality data through the GEMStat database and information system (<https://gemstat.org/>). Data are available for the period from 1965 to 2019 for about 300 parameters. The World Water Quality Assessment, through the World Water Quality Alliance, recognizes the scarcity of on-ground (in-situ) data on water quality in substantial parts of the world and is currently working on combined modelling, satellite observation and ground data approach to arrive at a global baseline of freshwater quality. This also includes testing a multi-agency approach to address bottom-up stakeholder demand-driven co-design of water quality products in three locations in Africa (Lake Victoria, Volta Basin and Cape Town – on-going).

The GEMS/Water Capacity Development programme component is assisting many countries, mainly through its various online training courses <https://www.ucc.ie/en/gemscdc/onlinecourses/>, and is currently exploring a final 3-year funding model supported by the Government of Ireland (2021-23). During the next phase, capacity development will be based on a broad consortium approach to cover a wide spectrum of demand and broaden the support basis. This is part of the WWQA-GEMS/Water collective programme, starting in 2020. Central to this project is an online diploma and technical training for multiple applications.

Data on deforestation are available via the WESR-Biodiversity [geospatial dashboard](#) as well as on statistics dashboards from the FAO Global Forest Assessment 2020 data ([here](#) and [here](#)). UNEP also included a tool for monitoring forest fires in near-real-time found [here](#) under “Fires”.

Marine litter data were included in the WESR-Pollution [dashboard](#), also a new dashboard regarding ocean data in under development by GRID-Arendal, to support the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030). UNEP has also developed tools for data integration regarding environment and security. See the following story map: Environment Security and Sustaining Peace: [Spatial Data in Focus](#). Data on environment and security can be accessed [here](#), with selected case studies (Afghanistan and Columbia).

OP5e: UNEP collaborating closely with the Group on Earth Observation, especially on the possibility to include in situ data in the WESR, as well as to include Satellite imagery products, e.g. Copernicus. In the World Water Quality Alliance collaboration with NASA is expected because GEMS/Water provides a critical mechanism for ground-truthing of satellite observations.

OP5f: The World Water Quality Alliance supporting new citizen science data and programmes where feasible. Through this process, the AfriAlliance (coordinated by IHE Delft) and the MONOCLE project (Horizon 2020) are underway. Embedding water quality information in regular assessment and monitoring is still in development. For air quality, progress is being made in alignment of technically rigorous and cheap sensor-based measuring.

OP5g: Extensive collaboration being initiated with the regional focal points of 15 countries for the development of pilot cases to help develop their Common Country Analyses. Countries including Argentina, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, the Federation of St. Christopher (St. Kitts) and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines are covered by Barbados and the OECS Office; Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Ethiopia, Egypt, Mali, Somalia, Cote d’Ivoire, Togo and Senegal. Vietnam, Laos, Mongolia; Jordan are participating in this initiative. A first data platform was designed which allowed the UN Country teams to access data for monitoring SDGs using the [SDG scorecard](#). A second platform that allows comparison between countries and access to all environmental statistics such as SDGs, MEAs and other related statistics is available [here](#).

OP6: The future of the Global Environment Outlook - In late 2019, the 36-member Steering Committee was established to oversee and manage the development of an options paper and to make recommendations to UNEA-5 on the future of the Global Environment Outlook process. The Steering Committee has moved the process forward despite many changes due to the global pandemic. Major milestones include:

- Hiring an expert consultant for the development of a background paper on the options for future GEOs.
- Conducting a first facilitated workshop with all members of the Steering Committee to compile their views and expertise on options for the future of GEO.
- Drafting a discussion document to enable the broad consultation on the future of GEO.
- Creation of an online questionnaire and platform for conducting the broad consultation
- Planning of the final workshop of the Steering Committee to develop the recommended options for consideration by Member States at UNEA-5.

All elements of the work plan are on track to deliver the expected outcome at UNEA-5

OP7: A new Synthesis Report of Major Global Assessments - Transforming our World (working title). This report will provide a synthetic analysis of the key messages from science, emerging from major global environmental assessments published in recent years. (preparations ongoing, delivery by UNEA-5). The report is being developed with the contribution of over 40 prominent authors and advisors from the Adhoc Global Assessment Dialogue community led by Ivar Baste (lead author) and Sir Bob Watson (lead advisor). The synthesis report is expected to be launched before UNEA-5, thus contributing to Member States' discussions and deliberations in the preparation of the UNEP@50 commemorations in 2022. This new synthesis report, UNEP's GEO-6 and all the scientific assessments are also providing the scientific basis and underlying rationale for the opening sections of the new UNEP MTS 2022-2025 (in preparation); The Review of 50 years of action at the Science-Policy Interface, and an outlook into the future (working title) – initial preparations ongoing, with an update on progress to be provided for Member States and stakeholders at UNEA-5 in February 2021, and delivery by mid-2022 in time for the UNEP@50 commemoration events. UNEP's Science Division will develop this publication in close collaboration with the Law Division, and working closely with other UNEP offices, UNEP divisions, Regional Offices and MEA Secretariats, in consultation with Member States and stakeholders. UNEP has initially invited the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), and a Kenyan leading Academic Institution (e.g. the University of Nairobi - to be confirmed), to help jointly develop this publication. This approach follows guidance received from the Joint Bureaux Session of the UN Environment Assembly Bureau (UNEA) and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) held in early June 2020. Accordingly, the partner organizations agreed to develop this publication, with a tentative plan and initial outline to be presented at UNEA-5, in February 2021, and with the publication to be finalized in early 2022 to be launched during the UNEP@50 commemoration events in mid-2022.

OP9: The measuring progress towards Internationally Agreed Environmental Goals - In March 2019, UNEP published the report 'Measuring Progress Towards achieving the environmental dimension of the SDGs'. The publication provides a summary of global and regional progress toward achieving global environmental targets using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Indicator Framework as a basis. Additionally, the report captures linkages with socio-economic development which are useful for better contextualizing the environmental information and for understanding the nexus between environment, people and economy. Of 93 environment-related SDGs, there are 20 (22%) for which good progress has been made over the last 15 years and if this progress continues, then it is likely that these SDGs will be met. For 78% of the environment-related SDG Indicators, there is either not sufficient data to assess progress or it is unlikely that the target will be met without up-scaling action. The publication identifies knowledge/information gaps in terms of assessing progress

toward the environmental dimension of the SDGs. As of March 2019, less than 40% of the 93 environmental indicators of the SDGs can be used to assess global progress. A major constraint in terms of monitoring the environmental dimension of development is a lack of national capacity on environment statistics.

OP10: Progress made on establishing the Ad-hoc Global Assessments Dialogue (AGAD) - The AGAD was first convened by the UNEP Chief Scientist in 2018 and was coordinated by the UNEP GEO team in the Science Division. The AGAD is an informal process that brings together the Heads of Secretariats and the Co-chairs of major global environmental assessments supported by the UN and its Member States, leveraging inputs from thousands of scientific authors and stakeholders. The process is technical in scope, in recognition of the separate and independent governance systems, mandates and work plans in place for each of the significant global assessments involved.

The AGAD aims at increasing synergies, coherence and consistency across major global environmental assessments covering most Internationally Agreed Environmental Goals. The environmental dimension of the Agenda 2030 and related topics and themes are discussed within the AGAD, such as land, water, air, oceans, climate change, biodiversity, ecosystem services, resources' use and circularity, chemicals and pollution, waste management, and sustainable development, among others. Its primary focus to date has been on joining efforts on communications and outreach, and on improving synergy on standard methodologies. One recent example of the results stemming from the AGAD process is the first UNEP Global Assessment Synthesis Report, referenced under OP7. The AGAD process and the Synthesis Report are supported by UNEP core resources and staff, and by an ad-hoc grant provided by the European Union in 2020.

III. Annexes

Annex 1: UNEP/EA.4/Res. 23 Keeping the world environment under review: Enhancing the United Nations Environment Programme science-policy interface and endorsement of the Global Environment Outlook ([available here](#))

Annex 2: List of Resolutions and Decisions: First to Fourth Sessions of the UN Environment Assembly ([available here](#))