



Committee of Permanent Representatives 7th Annual Subcommittee Meeting

15 October 2020

Remarks by Brazil on item 5(iii) Preparations for UNEA-5

as delivered by Mr. Patrick Luna,
Deputy Permanent Representative of Brazil to UNEP

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the floor. As we move towards the discussions on the preparations of UNEA-5, Brazil notes that a general understanding has been reached, within the UNEA Bureau at its meeting held on October 8, that the next session of the Assembly would be held in two segments, as proposed by the Presidency.

While we understand the reasons that motivated the “two-step approach”, Brazil wishes to recall that this was not our preferred alternative, nor that of several other member States. Many of us preferred a postponement of UNEA-5 to 2022, allowing it to be both held and prepared in a fully presential manner. The delegations that favored that course of action have compromised and exercised flexibility in going along with a “two-step approach”, on the understanding that their objections to the preparation of substantive outcomes in virtual meetings would be fully taken on board.

Mr. Chairman,

The fact that the CPR has so far been able to conduct some of its work through virtual platforms should not lead us into the assumption that this is the “new normal” of multilateral diplomacy. It is not. So far, the online CPR meetings have been allowing the continuity of work in a non-ideal format, and recent practice has shown us that, due to the exceptional circumstances we are living, such meetings are acceptable for briefings accompanied by brief interactions, but not for in-depth substantive consultations.

As many delegations and regional groups have been stressing, there are inherent limitations to multilateral diplomacy being undertaken in virtual settings. The digital divide is one of them, and even in this 7th Annual Subcommittee Meeting we have witnessed participants located in different corners of the world having difficulties, or failing altogether, to join our deliberations. Virtual meetings have a severe impact on transparency and inclusivity, and do not allow for all delegations to participate actively and on equal footing, a cornerstone of multilateralism. And, quite frankly, it also inhibits delegations in the exercise of finding the necessary compromises and common ground, something necessary to forge consensus on delicate issues.

In short, the pandemic has shown us that line-by-line still requires face-to-face.

This is why Brazil holds firmly that, if UNEA-5 is to have a first segment to be prepared and held in virtual or hybrid formats, no substantive outcomes can be envisaged. This is not because we don't want them. We do. It's simply because right now we lack the conditions to produce them in an open, inclusive and transparent manner. In a virtual segment of the Assembly, Brazil is open to consider preparing and adopting strictly essential administrative decisions to allow UNEP to continue its work until a resumed presential segment of UNEA.

At this stage, I also wish to recall that distinguishing outcomes by their title – that is, resolution or decision – is not sufficient to determine if they are substantive, administrative or procedural. More often than not, negotiated outcomes contains paragraphs of each of these natures – as is the case, for instance, of Decision 4/2. Again, Brazil considers that only essential administrative language can be considered for the first segment of UNEA-5 and we hope that the membership can agree to that sooner rather than later.

We understand that the consideration of a ministerial declaration, for all the reasons outlined above, should be considered at the resumed session in 2022. We do not believe that current limitations allow for this substantive document to be consensually prepared or adopted at a first segment of UNEA-5. Brazil also wishes to highlight that the ministerial outcome usually bears some sort of correlation with at least some of the resolutions adopted at the Assembly, so it would not make sense to even engage in conversations on a ministerial declaration until the conditions to negotiate resolutions are set. Brazil also considers it inadequate to suggest that, alternatively, the first segment of UNEA-5 could count with a Chair's Summary. In UN practice, these documents are usually issued at the end of a session, and the proposal is not to conclude UNEA-5 in February 2021, but rather to decide to reconvene at a later date.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Secretariat for, soon after the UNEA Bureau meeting, preparing a note for the consideration of the 7th Annual Subcommittee Meeting. I wish to draw attention to the structure of the process to prepare the outcomes for the first segment of UNEA-5. Brazil considers that, given their reduced quantity and administrative nature, they could well be prepared in the realm of the envisaged weekly CPR Subcommittee meetings, without the need to create any additional structure.

Mr. Chairman,

When the “two-step approach” was presented to delegations, the first segment of UNEA-5, to be held virtually, was expected to take only one day, maybe two, preserving the bulk of the five-day period mandated by UNEA-4 reserved to the in-person segment expected for early 2022. We were therefore surprised to see that the proposed structure for the first segment of UNEA-5 spans through three days.

If the rationale for exceptionally allowing UNEA-5 to have part of its session in a virtual format in the original dates is to keep political momentum and allow for the adoption of a minimalistic set time-sensitive administrative decisions, then a much shorter period would probably be sufficient, and would preserve more time for in-person deliberations, which are far more fruitful and will be able to forge consensus towards the ambitious outcomes that the environmental dimension of sustainable development needs and that we will strive to achieve in the reconvened UNEA5.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
