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## United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Environment Assembly of the  
United Nations Environment Programme  
Fifth session

Nairobi (online), 22–26 February 2021\*  
Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*\*

**International environmental policy and  
governance issues**

### **Action plan for the implementation of paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development**

#### **Report of the Executive Director**

#### **Introduction**

1. In paragraph 14 of its decision 4/2, entitled “Provisional agenda, date and venue of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly”, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP to submit an action plan to implement subparagraphs (a)–(h) of paragraph 88 of the Outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, “The Future We Want”, for consideration by the Environment Assembly at its fifth session, and invited the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi to contribute to the development of the plan in respect of the implementation of subparagraph (g) concerning the headquarter functions of UNEP in Nairobi.
2. The present action plan is informed by and builds on deliberations at the following subcommittee meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, held to review progress in, and identify remaining gaps in, the implementation of paragraph 88:
  - (a) *23 January 2020*: The subcommittee considered a synthesis report on progress in the implementation of paragraph 88.
  - (b) *5 March 2020*: The subcommittee discussed areas requiring further attention for the implementation of subparagraphs (a), (c), (g) and (h).
  - (c) *2 April 2020*: The subcommittee discussed areas requiring further attention for the implementation of subparagraphs (b), (d), (e) and (f).

\* In accordance with the decisions taken at the meeting of the Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly held on 8 October 2020 and at the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives held on 1 December 2020, the fifth session of the Assembly is expected to adjourn on 23 February 2021 and resume as an in-person meeting in February 2022.

\*\* UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1.

(d) *2 July 2020*: The subcommittee considered a report, based on the outcomes of the 5 March and 2 April meetings, identifying emerging elements under each subparagraph that might require additional action.

(e) *14 October 2020*: The subcommittee, at its seventh annual meeting, considered the draft action plan developed on the basis of the emerging elements report and subsequent comments received from Member States.

3. Given the aspirational nature of paragraph 88, which seeks to upgrade and strengthen UNEP and reinforce its mandate as the leading global environmental authority, the implementation of the action plan is expected to be a continuous process, with commitment by Member States to supporting and guiding the UNEP secretariat an essential ingredient. As several representatives noted at the seventh annual subcommittee meeting, elements of the plan will be mainstreamed into future UNEP medium-term strategies and programmes of work and closely monitored for impact.

4. The following sections correspond to subparagraphs (a)–(h) of paragraph 88 and present actions to be taken for their full implementation, as was discussed at the aforementioned meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

## **I. Establish universal membership in the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, as well as other measures to strengthen its governance as well as its responsiveness and accountability to Member States**

### **A. Realizing the full potential of universal membership**

1. Promote increased participation by Member States, including those without diplomatic representation in Nairobi, in the deliberations of the Committee of Permanent Representatives between Environment Assembly sessions.
2. Encourage more Member States to seek accreditation with UNEP.
3. Broaden the funding base of UNEP to include more universal non-earmarked contributions, considering that membership of the Environment Assembly entails universal core funding responsibility, and taking into account the voluntary indicative scale of contributions (VISC), referred to in Governing Council decision SS.VII/1 on international environmental governance.
4. Promote equitable geographical representation among staff in the UNEP secretariat, in particular at senior levels.

### **B. Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of United Nations Environment Programme governance**

1. Continuously improve universal access to UNEP intergovernmental meetings by enabling remote participation; enhancing and standardizing the user interface; ensuring, where appropriate, reliable interpretation; providing timely and accessible meeting documentation; and offering adequate IT support, especially for developing countries and Member States without diplomatic representation in Nairobi.
2. Develop or review, as appropriate, relevant supporting tools and manuals to ensure effective online meetings.
3. Provide comprehensive, accessible and relevant information about UNEP policymaking organs and their decisions through the websites of the Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives as well as through the Environment Assembly Monitoring and Reporting Portal, established in response to resolution 4/22 on implementing and following up on Environment Assembly resolutions.
4. Further improve the quality and timely delivery of documents and other relevant information and their accessibility, where possible, in all six United Nations official languages.

## **II. Have secure, stable, adequate and increased financial resources from the regular budget of the United Nations and voluntary contributions to fulfil its mandate**

### **A. Increasing overall funding and improving the ratio between core and earmarked funding**

1. Improve and increase communication to Member States about the strengths and comparative advantages of UNEP.
2. Increase and strengthen information sharing concerning the value of the Environment Fund, the results achieved with its funding, and how and to which activities the funds are allocated.
3. Explain the effects that insufficient core funding has on the implementation of the UNEP programme of work, in particular activities related to the science-policy interface and environmental governance, which are core mandates of UNEP.
4. Provide a more detailed analysis of earmarked funding streams and demonstrate the implications of the current ratio between core and earmarked funding.
5. Where Member States insist on earmarking funds, encourage soft earmarking by explaining its benefits and exploring options to make it more attractive; for example, funds earmarked for UNEP thematic subprogrammes could instead be counted as contributions towards a Member State's "fair share" (as represented by the VISC), and programme support costs for softly earmarked funds could be decreased.

### **B. Broadening the donor base for secure and stable financial resources**

1. Increase sharing of information about the VISC with a view to better explaining (a) how it is calculated, and (b) how it represents the fair share that each Member State is requested to contribute to the Environment Fund, acknowledging that membership in the Environment Assembly carries a universal responsibility.
2. Encourage Member States to contribute in line with the VISC to meet the approved budgets for the Environment Fund and explore options to increase the use of the VISC.
3. Continue to give greater public recognition and visibility to contributing Member States, especially the top 15 contributors to the Environment Fund and Member States that meet their fair share or provide soft/flexible funding.
4. Continue the dialogue with Member States on the funding challenges faced by UNEP and the opportunities in different forums, such as the meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

## **III. Enhance the voice of the United Nations Environment Programme and its ability to fulfil its coordination mandate within the United Nations system by strengthening its engagement in key United Nations coordination bodies and empowering it to lead efforts to formulate United Nations System-wide strategies on the environment**

### **A. Promoting enhanced linkages with the high-level political forum on sustainable development**

1. In accordance with Environment Assembly resolution 3/3 on the contributions of the Environment Assembly to the forum, improve the process of preparing substantive input to the annual meetings of the forum on the overarching environmental perspective of sustainable development, including key messages adopted through Environment Assembly resolutions.
2. Promote the active participation of the President of the Environment Assembly in the high-level political forum on sustainable development in order to convey the main messages of the Assembly to further strengthen the already existing linkages between UNEP and the

high-level political forum on sustainable development, including substantive policy interaction and political engagement at the highest level.

3. Continue to improve communication between the President of the Environment Assembly, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council to enhance consideration and uptake of the contributions of the Environment Assembly to the work of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.
4. Cooperate with the United Nations regional commissions to ensure that environmental priorities are strategically fed into and highlighted in the preparations for the regional forums on sustainable development and in other regional intergovernmental processes.

## **B. Delivering on the United Nations development system reforms**

1. Align UNEP policies, processes and procedures with the guidelines, tools and mechanisms of the United Nations development system reforms.
2. Engage in the United Nations development system reforms at the global level to support the development of guidance for common country analyses, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and regional collaborative platforms towards enhancing the environmental dimension of sustainable development and the role of UNEP.
3. Strengthen the capacity of UNEP staff to support the implementation of the UNEP medium-term strategy and the programme of work in the context of the guidelines, tools and mechanisms of the United Nations development system reforms at the global, regional and country levels.
4. Promote stronger collaboration between UNEP regional offices and regional United Nations entities, including the Regional Development Cooperation Office and the regional economic commissions, as well as relevant forums, such as the regional forums on sustainable development (which report to the high-level political forum on sustainable development).
5. Strengthen the role of UNEP in United Nations country teams and the United Nations resident coordinators system; provide expertise, knowledge and data on integrated environmental analysis for the design and development of common country analyses; and promote the inclusion of the environmental dimension in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework by fostering partnerships with United Nations entities at country and regional levels.
6. Strengthen the participation of UNEP in regional platforms and processes, such as regional collaboration platforms, opportunity- and issue-based coalitions and regional knowledge platforms, by conveying key messages from UNEP-administered multilateral environmental agreements and other scientific findings through UNEP regional offices.
7. Contribute to implementation, monitoring and reporting on the United Nations development system reforms<sup>1</sup> in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, the Environment Assembly and the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

## **C. Strengthening the role of the United Nations Environment Management Group**

1. Define and support measures in the Environment Management Group (EMG) to enhance coordination and coherence of United Nations work on the environment, through the System-wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment, to ensure concrete and collective activities as well as impact and visibility in support of integrating the environmental dimension of sustainable development, in line with Environment Assembly resolution 1/11 on coordination across the United Nations system in the field of the environment, including the Environment Management Group.

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 72/279, "Repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system", and Environment Assembly decision UNEP/EA.4/1, "Programme of work and budget for the biennium 2020–2021".

2. Identify and support measures to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the Group and its secretariat, based on the recommendations of the report “Maximizing the effectiveness of the Environment Management Group in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which was submitted to the second session of the Environment Assembly.
3. Advance the United Nations System-wide corporate environmental performance, supporting the delivery of the United Nations 2020–2030 Sustainability Strategy and its follow-up process, through upgraded reporting, coordination and technical assistance, including partnerships with sister agencies.<sup>2</sup>
4. Share information with Member States on the above-mentioned actions and how they relate to the country level.

#### **D. Enhancing cooperation among the multilateral environmental agreements and with the United Nations Environment Programme**

1. Continue to systematically involve the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements in Environment Assembly preparations, including the organization of side events, the preparation of documentation, and the provision of technical input to proposed resolutions.
2. In accordance with paragraph 89<sup>3</sup> of the outcome document, continue to identify means to promote policy coherence, cooperation and coordination between UNEP and the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements – and among those secretariats – while respecting the independent legal autonomy of the agreements and the decisions taken by the respective parties.
3. Continue to organize regular meetings between UNEP and the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements to share information, identify areas for cooperation and carry out activities that may be prioritized by UNEP and the secretariats.

### **IV. Promote a strong science-policy interface, building on existing international instruments, assessments, panels and information networks, including the Global Environment Outlook, as one of the processes aimed at bringing together information and assessment to support informed decision-making**

#### **Reinforcing the scientific basis of the United Nations Environment Programme**

1. Continue to support the timely evolution of the *Global Environment Outlook* (GEO) process and other thematic scientific assessments as the central contributions of UNEP to the environmental science-policy interface, including through the provision of environmental policy recommendations and the participation of scientists and experts in a manner that is balanced geographically and with regard to gender.
2. Facilitate the ongoing ad hoc global assessment dialogue to improve coherence and synergy among all major global environmental assessment processes, with particular focus on methodologies and communications and outreach.

<sup>2</sup> “Strategy for sustainability management in the UN System 2020–2030” (CEB/2019/3/Add.2), available at [https://unemg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/INF\\_3\\_Strategy-for-Sustainability-Management-in-the-UN-System.pdf](https://unemg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/INF_3_Strategy-for-Sustainability-Management-in-the-UN-System.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> “We recognize the significant contributions to sustainable development made by the multilateral environmental agreements. We acknowledge the work already undertaken to enhance synergies among the three conventions in the chemicals and waste cluster (Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade and Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants). We encourage parties to multilateral environmental agreements to consider further measures, in these and other clusters, as appropriate, to promote policy coherence at all relevant levels, improve efficiency, reduce unnecessary overlap and duplication and enhance coordination and cooperation among the multilateral environmental agreements, including the three Rio conventions, as well as with the United Nations system in the field.”

3. Publish the underlying data sets of UNEP assessment products as digital public goods and ensure that they are connected to the wider United Nations data cube and global data ecosystem, in line with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere with Insight, Impact and Integrity, 2020–22 and the Road Map for Digital Cooperation.
4. Work closely with Member States and the scientific community to fill the gaps in environmental data collecting, monitoring and reporting, including through the use of automated techniques using Earth observation, cloud computing and artificial intelligence.<sup>4</sup>
5. Strengthen internal capacity for early warning and foresight by allocating additional resources and reinvigorating partnerships with the existing network of UNEP collaborative centres and other technical partners.
6. Improve the availability and access to the latest scientific findings and environmental data in digital format by enhancing linkages between the UNEP World Environment Situation Room and major global environmental assessment processes, including by contributing to the development of a global environmental data strategy.
7. Enhance the interface and tailored use of the World Environment Situation Room by United Nations system entities and Member States by providing the latest global, regional and national environmental data, geospatial analyses and statistics, and interoperability standards as application programming interfaces to support, among others, the formulation of common country analyses in the framework of United Nations reform and the United Nations Development Cooperation Framework.
8. Continue to strengthen the science-policy-technology interface and GEO as important intergovernmental processes for bringing the latest environmental science and policy recommendations to the attention of decision makers, including an emphasis on digitizing the GEO process and releasing the data and analyses as digital public goods.
9. Act as a catalyst for science-informed transformative shifts that can drive progress towards the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through multi-stakeholder partnerships and the publication of audience-focused products.

## **V. Disseminate and share evidence-based environmental information, and raise public awareness on critical, as well as emerging, environmental issues**

### **A. Accelerating digital transformation for the environment**

1. Amplify and accelerate the structural transformations needed to achieve the collective climate, nature and pollution goals and monitor progress at the global level, transparently and robustly, through digital transformation, in line with the UNEP draft medium-term strategy for 2022-2025 (contained in document UNEP/EA.5/3).
2. Explore how a combination of environmental data and digital technologies can catalyse and drive forward the incentives, business models and structural changes needed to achieve the environmental targets of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
3. Strengthen the capacity of citizens and diverse stakeholders, particularly those in developing countries, to engage in the environmental dimensions of digital transformation and related policies.

<sup>4</sup> Such as those identified in the report *Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface: A Gap Analysis* (UNEP, 2017).

## **B. Developing a long-term global environmental data strategy**

1. Regularly update the Committee of Permanent Representatives (through progress reports in 2021 and 2023 and a final report in 2025) on progress in developing the global environmental data strategy<sup>5</sup> and how it fits into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. Harness environmental data, predictive analytics and digital technologies to drive transformative changes in three key pillars of the economy: financing and investments, supply chain management and consumer behaviour.
3. Develop a governance structure that unlocks the power of national, regional and global environmental monitoring data from countries, companies, civil society and international institutions.
4. Strengthen the role of UNEP as the custodian of the 26 environment-related indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals by enhancing its support of work by countries and stakeholders to collect comparable and high-quality environmental data and make it available via integrated data and knowledge platforms such as the World Environment Situation Room.
5. Promote partnerships and technological innovation through the Working Group on Big Data and Frontier Technologies of the Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment, convened in coordination with the Group on Earth Observations and the Citizen Science Global Partnership<sup>6</sup>, and its pilot projects to focusing on data integration and digital cooperation, as well as other initiatives to develop comparable international environmental data.
6. Strengthen the role of UNEP in the United Nations Geospatial Network, established by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management of the Economic and Social Council, and the Strategic Foresight Network of the High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.
7. Align the development and implementation of the global environmental data strategy with the Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere with Insight, Impact and Integrity, 2020–22; the Strategy on New Technologies; and the Road Map for Digital Cooperation.

## **C. Further improving communication on environmental issues**

1. Continue to improve communication about science, global environmental issues and organizational results as guided by Environment Assembly resolutions, the UNEP medium-term strategy and the programme of work and budget.
2. Make UNEP more visible and accessible to the public by using a wide range of multimedia tools and social media and other platforms appropriate for specific audiences, including those aimed at engaging policymakers at various levels, with an increased focus on monitoring the implementation and impact of communication.
3. Ensure that supporting social and behavioural changes and mainstreaming environmental education constitute key aspects of UNEP flagship campaigns, initiatives and partnership-building efforts directed at various stakeholder groups.
4. Create and continue to strengthen partnerships with the mainstream media to broaden audiences for UNEP messaging and data.

<sup>5</sup> At the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, in March 2019, Member States adopted a ministerial declaration entitled “Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production” (UNEP/EA.4/17) in which they committed themselves to supporting UNEP in developing a global environmental data strategy by 2025 in cooperation with other relevant United Nations bodies. The UNEP secretariat is working towards the development of this strategy, as presented to the Committee of Permanent Representatives in August 2019, as part of the comprehensive knowledge management systems for the environment.

<sup>6</sup> The Working Group convenes communities from big data, Earth observations and frontier technology twice a year to contribute to work in this area by UNEP through consultations, information sharing, partnerships and pilot projects. The UNEP Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment was the initiator and convener of the Citizen Science Global Partnership.

5. Continue to incorporate data into the UNEP website through stories and videos and the creation of easy-to-understand dashboards to make science more accessible to the public.

## **VI. Provide capacity-building to countries, as well as support, and facilitate access to technology**

### **A. Catalysing capacity-building support to countries**

1. Further mainstream the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building into the UNEP programme of work.
2. Facilitate the involvement of locally based experts in gap analysis and capacity-building delivery processes to ensure ownership and long-term sustainability.
3. Work closely with the United Nations resident coordinators system, and in partnership with other international and regional organizations, to foster a coherent response to developing countries' capacity-building needs, particularly in the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
4. Identify and collect good practices, challenges, experiences and lessons learned from work on environment-related capacity-building by other organizations so that relevant resource materials, tools and methodologies can be made available online to support triangular and South-South cooperation.
5. Support countries in their efforts to build capacity for integrating environmental sustainability in national economic policies and development plans and for implementing multilateral environmental agreements and the environmental rule of law in the context of the fifth Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo V).

### **B. Facilitating access to technology**

1. Strengthen the capacity of developing countries to identify technology needs, evaluate and prioritize options to make technology choices and acquire, operate, maintain and adapt technology to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
2. Promote institutional capacity-building in technology identification, prioritization, and adaptation to local conditions as well as in monitoring and information systems for decision-making.
3. Facilitate the links between technical assistance and financing for climate technologies, including through enhance collaboration between the Technology Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
4. Improve understanding of environmental technologies through various approaches, such as technical and technological training, training of trainer, creation of educational programmes and university curricula, development of guides and manuals and evaluation of national capacity-building programmes and institutions.

## **VII. Progressively consolidate headquarters functions in Nairobi, as well as strengthen its regional presence, in order to assist countries, upon request, in the implementation of their national environmental policies, collaborating closely with other relevant entities of the United Nations system**

### **A. Reinforcing the role of the United Nations Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi as the centre of global environmental diplomacy**

1. Build inclusive environmental multilateralism that leverages the Environment Assembly as the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, identifying bold transformative actions while focusing on solutions that speak to all.



2. Continue to strengthen UNEP and strive for continuous improvement to meet the growing demands by Member States and stakeholders in a manner that fully leverages its comparative advantages and capacities.
3. Continue to engage with the United Nations Office at Nairobi, through the General Assembly, to enable it to enhance its conference facilities and services on a par with other United Nations duty stations, and continue to share ideas with the host country on how to reinforce the role of Nairobi as the global hub for environmental conferences.

#### **B. Strengthening the regional presence of the United Nations Environment Programme**

1. Provide strategic support to regional ministerial environmental forums; interministerial forums; joint ministers' meetings; regional climate, disaster and pandemic risk forums; and regional sustainable development forums to facilitate coherence, consistency and linkages in their decisions with Environment Assembly resolutions.
2. Communicate to Member States achievements by UNEP that support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the United Nations development system reforms at the regional, subregional and national levels, including by providing updates on progress by UNEP regional and subregional offices in delivering on their respective mandates.
3. Enhance UNEP support at the regional and country levels by strengthening its engagement with United Nations country teams and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and through stronger collaboration with regional United Nations entities, including the Regional Development Cooperation Office and the regional economic commissions, as well as other relevant forums, such as the regional forums on sustainable development, opportunity- and issue-based coalitions and regional knowledge hubs.

### **VIII. Ensure the active participation of all relevant stakeholders, drawing on best practices and models from relevant multilateral institutions and exploring new mechanisms to promote transparency and the effective engagement of civil society**

#### **A. Continuously enhancing meaningful engagement with major groups and stakeholders, including children and youth**

1. Develop training and capacity-building programmes for representatives of major groups and stakeholders who are interested in UNEP and the Environment Assembly, targeting, in particular, children and youth.
2. Further strengthen the meaningful engagement of children and youth with all levels of UNEP work in line with the rules of procedure.
3. Improve the ability of UNEP to allow effective and meaningful engagement with representatives of major groups and stakeholders through tailor-made web-based platforms.
4. Encourage major groups and stakeholder organizations that meet the criteria set out in the rules of procedure to become accredited to UNEP, in accordance with applicable rules and procedures, and continue to make available to Member States the list of accredited organizations.
5. Reinforce the participation of representatives of major groups and stakeholders in relevant UNEP advisory bodies, including those that support the implementation of the UNEP medium-term strategy and the programme of work.

#### **B. Increasing opportunities and funding to support meaningful stakeholder engagement**

1. Encourage Member States to provide extrabudgetary financial resources to support meaningful engagement with major groups and stakeholders.
2. Ensure a stable and adequate allocation of financial resources from the UNEP Environment Fund towards supporting major groups and stakeholders, including those at the regional level.

**C. Leveraging the private sector's capabilities**

1. Leverage and promote engagement with the private sector to support the implementation of the UNEP medium-term strategy and the programme of work, including through enhanced collaboration on digital transformation.
  2. Strengthen the capacity of UNEP to engage transparently with business and industry at the regional and subregional levels.
  3. Increase the effectiveness of UNEP alliances, platforms and initiatives and promote the participation of small- and medium-sized enterprises in such platforms in order to contribute to the work of UNEP.
  4. Promote and facilitate active engagement by private-sector representatives in relevant Environment Assembly processes.
  5. Ensure risk recognition, risk assessment and risk mitigation, including the decision-making process regarding prospective private-sector partnerships.
  6. Catalyse shifts by the private sector towards more sustainable and environmentally positive production systems, in line with the priorities outlined in the UNEP medium-term strategy and the programme of work.
  7. Encourage UNEP private-sector partners to join the United Nations Global Compact and adhere to its Ten Principles covering human rights, labour, environmental issues and the fight against corruption.
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