

**AFRICAN GROUP STATEMENT DELIVERED BY
H.E. BEYENE RUSSOM
AMBASSADOR OF THE STATE OF ERITREA
DURING THE OPENING SESSION OF THE
FIFTH OPEN-ENDED COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVES**

15 FEBRUARY 2021

NAIROBI

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**The Executive Director of UNEP,
The Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group.

Mr. Chairperson, let me take this opportunity to commend the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, under your leadership, for the tremendous work undertaken during the inter-sessional period for the preparations of the online meeting of the Fifth Open Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives and the Fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly.

This work has been undertaken over the last year under very unusual and difficult circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We are facing a global crisis unlike any other in our history, which has affected our environment and economies, and has caused human suffering and deaths, and disrupted our normal day to day activities. Consequently, we have been forced to convene this important meeting virtually.

While some ground work has been covered in preparation for UNEA-5, we recognise that we can only do so much under the prevailing circumstances and there remains a lot to be done in the run-up to the resumed UNEA-5 in 2022. Your leadership and engagement has been instrumental in enabling the CPR to navigate through these challenging times. I wish to express the commitment of the African Group in supporting you and your team, and ensuring successful deliberations during the online meetings of OECPR-5 and UNEA-5.

Mr. Chairperson,

The African Ministers of Environment held the 8th Special Session of AMCEN virtually on 4 December 2020 under the theme “Enhancing environmental action for effective post-Covid-19 recovery in Africa”. The Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to continue efforts to conserve, protect and enhance the resilience of Africa’s environment and natural resources as part of their determined efforts in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

They agreed to implement an African green stimulus programme, which aims to contribute to both the post-Covid-19 recovery plan for Africa and other response and recovery programmes in a more environmentally sustainable, resilient and low-emission developmental pathway. For it to be successful, the green stimulus programme will require commitment, support and political will from member States, individuals, institutions, the private sector and civil society, as well as finance, technology and capacity from bilateral and multilateral partners.

The African Ministers of Environment through AMCEN will continue to provide political leadership towards the implementation of the programme as an integral part of Africa’s socio-economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and enhance resilience in the face of future crises, while remaining cognizant of challenges and commitments made before this pandemic.

Mr. Chairperson,

The African Group wishes to take this opportunity to register its support for the revised and streamlined agenda and structure of this Fifth Open-

Ended CPR which will consider, among other issues, the revised three draft decisions focusing on urgent budgetary, administrative and procedural issues, as already agreed upon by consensus. While recognising this, the African Group wishes to recall its long-standing position of no virtual negotiations. This is also said recalling the impeccable balance we have had to reach in ensuring that the work of UNEP - of this UN Headquarter – and its support to member States in achieving sustainable development, is unremitting and the agenda for environment is continued.

With that said, the African Group welcomes the draft UNEP Mid-Term Strategy for the period 2022-2025, Programme of Work and Budget for the period 2022-2023 and the related appropriations for the Environment Fund, and looks forward to further discussions on the same during this Open-Ended CPR. In this regard, the Group wishes to make a strong call against the use of terminologies that are undefined and not internationally agreed in the MTS to avoid “legitimizing” terms that have not been agreed upon through the appropriate/competent intergovernmental multilateral fora.

The Group wishes to emphasize the need for a more coordinated and coherent regional delivery of the Programme of Work with the view of improving the effectiveness of UNEP’s support to countries in the region. This is also in the context of previous requests by the Group on strengthening of UNEP’s regional presence in Africa, in accordance with paragraph 88 of the *Future we Want*. We believe such strengthening will continue to promote an efficient and effective delivery of UNEP’s mandate in the region.

Mr. Chairperson,

Regarding the draft decision on the adjournment and resumption of UNEA-5, the Group wishes to maintain the procedural nature of this draft throughout the online discussions and discourages addressing matters of substantive through this decision. Furthermore, the Group would like to highlight the need to use direct language from UNGA 73/333 when referring to the process, particularly as it refers to the role of UNEA on the matter. This resolution should mindfully remain a procedural one in honour of this intergovernmental process.

In addition, the Group calls for thematic areas to be highlighted when referring to existing mandates from previous UNEA sessions as opposed to listing adopted resolutions as the listing may be far-reaching, considering that the decision should remain short and concise. This will also ensure that our discussions remain focused on achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty.

Mr. Chairperson,

The African Group acknowledges the importance of commemorating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of UNEP, which is headquartered in Nairobi, the global South and Africa. The Group echoes its earlier statements indicating its readiness to work collaboratively with the President of UNEA-5 and the in-coming President of UNEA-6 in the preparations towards a successful commemoration. The Group would like to see a substantive and successful commemoration of the 50th anniversary of UNEP which will help reinforce the centrality of UNEP in the global environmental agenda and as the global environmental authority.

The Group believes that it is imperative for the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives to play a significant role in this process. The Group welcomes the proposal to use the inter-sessional period to give prominence to the commemoration including through the High Level Political Forum, Conference of Parties of Multilateral Environment Agreements and other relevant meetings. While doing so, we recognize the need for clear, concise and substantive messages to be shared on the commemoration throughout these relevant meetings.

Mr. Chairperson,

The African Group reaffirms its position of accommodating messages to be released during the online UNEA-5 session, mainly serving a purpose of highlighting that the Assembly recognizes the importance of maintaining high-level discussions on the environment, despite all the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and based on the theme of UNEA-5. We therefore remain ready to engage constructively in the deliberations of this online Open-Ended CPR.

Finally, Mr. Chairperson,

I wish to once again, express our unequivocal support towards cooperating with Member States, regional groups and your team in ensuring a successful Open-Ended CPR 5.1.

I thank you for your attention.