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**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
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Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

**International environmental policy and
governance issues**

**Update on the preparation of the report “Actions on air
quality”**

Note by the Executive Director

Introduction

1. At its third session, held from 4–6 December 2017, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme adopted resolution 3/8 on preventing and reducing air pollution to improve air quality globally. The resolution encouraged Member States to take action across sectors to reduce all forms of air pollution while pursuing synergies and co-benefits and the sharing of existing knowledge at all levels. It further reinforced resolution 1/7, adopted by the Environment Assembly at its first session, by strengthening the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on air quality. Resolution 3/8 requested the Executive Director of UNEP to continue to support countries, in particular developing countries, in putting in place affordable air quality networks that would raise awareness among citizens about pollution levels and their impact on human health and the environment, and to produce regional assessments of capacity needs based on input from communities of practice; develop air pollution action plans; and provide a platform for cooperation and information-sharing between interested member States and relevant organizations working to reduce air pollution, such as the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and other organizations. In paragraph 7 (j), the Executive Director was requested to “undertake an assessment of progress being made by member States to adopt and implement key actions that can significantly improve air quality in time for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and thereafter, synchronized with the Global Environment Outlook cycle”.

2. The present document provides an update on progress in the development of the assessment, as mandated by paragraph 7 (j) of resolution 3/8.

* 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.

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*** The present document is being issued without formal editing.

I. Progress on the assessment

3. UNEA resolution 1/7 requested the Executive Director “to submit and present a report on the information provided by Governments pursuant to paragraph 4 of the present resolution and to provide an update on progress made in implementing the present resolution to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its second session”. From the analysis of data provided by governments and other publicly available materials on air quality, the report took stock of Member States’ progress around ten key policy actions with significant air quality co-benefits. These ten policy actions were organized into six categories; 1) indoor air pollution, 2) vehicle emissions, 3) public and non-motorized transport, 4) industrial emissions, 5) open burning of waste, and 6) national air quality standards and regulations. The report also identified crosscutting challenges which prevent effective action on air quality: ineffective implementation and enforcement of existing policies and regulations; limited cooperation between national and city administration; the universal need for monitoring and assessment; and the importance of behavioral change and public participation through awareness and stakeholder involvement. The “[Actions on Air Quality](#)” report was launched at the second session of UNEA.

4. Significant progress has been made on air quality action at global, regional, national and subnational levels since the 2016 report on “Actions on Air Quality”. In the first half of 2020, UNEP reached out to Member States in order to capture this progress in an updated global report. A [survey](#) was designed for the report and Member States were invited to respond. The survey to Member States was launched in July 2020 and posted on the UNEP website. UNEP received 97 responses to the survey which corresponds to a 50% response rate. In order to adequately capture progress, additional research is being considered, relying on a variety of global metrics and sources, that supplement the survey data and that are paving the way to build on these results in subsequent updates.

5. The structure of the report follows the contents of the Member States survey for 2020, supplemented by additional research and analysis of publicly available, peer reviewed, data. The survey was structured in two main parts allowing as much as possible comparison with, and progression from, the 2016 report. The survey first inquired about the country’s framework with regard to air quality as well as ambient air quality standards, air quality monitoring and air quality management. The survey considered air quality actions across industry, transport, solid waste management, residential air pollution and agriculture. A menu of measures implemented in the last five years was also provided to the respondent in order to measure progress and assess its impact.

6. In addition to the global “Actions on Air Quality” report, UNEP has been working with regional offices and partners in the development of regional reports on air quality. These reports will complement the global analysis and provide key sources and trends in emissions of air pollutants as well as key trends in policy formulation and implementation. They will measure progress towards improved air quality across a number of key sectors such as e.g. industry, transport, waste management, household air pollution and agriculture. The regional reports will also review national air quality standards and legislation, the status of monitoring and assessment and provide an analysis of lessons learnt and examples of policy uptake. Finally, country/city specific case studies will also be profiled to showcase examples of progress.

7. The development of the “Actions on Air Quality” report is led by the Pollution and Health Unit in the Chemicals and Health Branch of the Economy Division, with inputs from a coordinating team from across UNEP and its regional offices. The Actions on Air Quality report will also be peer-reviewed by renowned international experts and institutions on air quality.

8. Synergies were sought with global initiatives and partners bringing together different areas of work on the topic, such as the ongoing Climate and Clean Air Coalition Integrated Assessment of Air Pollution and Climate Change in Africa. Another example is the global assessment of air pollution legislation led by UNEP’s Law Division to analyze legislation relating to air quality standards and provide guidance to enable effective utilization of laws and regulations to address air pollution. This work will also contribute to the “Implementation Plan on Pollution Towards a Pollution-Free Planet” which was welcomed by the UNEA resolution 4/21.

II. Next steps

9. The “Actions on Air Quality” executive summary will be ready in time for the 5th session of UNEA while the full report and regional reports will be completed by the second quarter of 2021. They will be available here: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/air/what-we-do/taking-stock-global-efforts/actions-air-quality-report-update>.

10. These reports will provide an assessment of progress being made by member States to adopt and implement key actions that can significantly improve air quality, as mandated by paragraph 7 (j) of UNEA 3/8 resolution. As mandated by the same paragraph, regular updates are to be undertaken, following the same methodology and approach.
 11. The reports will also inform the identification of gaps and action needed and thus inform where accelerated efforts towards improved air quality, including in the context of UNEP Medium-Term Strategy for the period 2022–2025 can be best applied.
 12. Finally, they will represent a call for more ambitious worldwide action by all stakeholders and for sharing knowledge across and within different regions and support UNEP in setting up a global knowledge platform.
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