



**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY**

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**SOUTH AFRICA'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO UNEP**

**DURING THE 154<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF**

**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES**

**FOR THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME**

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**NAIROBI**

*Check against delivery*

### **AGENDA ITEM 3: Report by the Executive Director**

Thank you Mr Chair for giving me the floor

Mr Chair,

Allow me to join others in thanking and congratulating you for your leadership as the Chair of the UNEP CPR. You have ensured that our discussions remain participatory, inclusive and transparent; despite the situation of COVID 19 pandemic that has presented unprecedented challenges in our discussions. We wish you all the best in your future endeavours. My appreciation is also expressed to the members of your Bureau for their contribution and guidance.

As we welcome the Executive Director back to Nairobi, we wish to thank her for her opening statement and the quarterly report presented on the implementation of the Programme of Work. We also wish to recognise the presence of the Deputy Executive Director.

My delegation appreciates the well-structured report by the Executive Director which also demonstrates support by the programme to different member States in assisting them to achieve sustainable development and the eradication of poverty, a course we are forever asking for. Recalling the common appreciation that as the international community we need to dramatically scale-up our efforts, raise our level of ambition, and support developing countries with the means to practically realise a sustainable environment. If we do not address these challenges in a sustainable way, it will drive up food prices, contributing to food insecurity in poor households and basically affecting the broader economy.

Mr Chair,

Understanding the cascading effect of interacting with the environment in an unsustainable way is vital as it impacts on every aspect of our lives, from the food we eat, to the water we drink, to where we live. It affects human health, economic activity, human settlement and migration – and from our national point of view, has a direct impact in addressing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Key to the recovery from these challenges before us is our Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan that we launched in October last year,

which has several measures to drive business and job creation in green industries. In line with the Africa Green Stimulus Programme, this plan will only be achieved through collaboration across society, with government, labour, business, civil society and communities all working together towards a just transition. In this regard, we call for the Executive Director's support in the implementation of the Africa Green Stimulus Programme.

Mr Chair,

Marine litter remains a national concern of ours due to its persistence and impact on the ocean, wildlife and potentially, humans. As part of the Presidency's Employment Stimulus Initiative, the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and the Environment is expanding the Source-to-Sea Programme into 16 coastal districts with the target of creating a minimum of 1 600 work opportunities. South Africa has been supporting the campaign and the fight against marine litter through a range of different options at national, regional and international levels. Sound management of natural resources provides the economic case for environmental management and sustainable development and thereby eradicating poverty.

In this regard, my delegation wishes to get more details on the preparations ahead of the Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution and how this process will link up to the work of the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Expert Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics (AHEG) as per decision at UNEA-4, and the overall preparations for UNEA-5 part two in this regard. This will assist as we prepare for the Annual Subcommittee meeting this year.

**I thank you!**

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**AGENDA ITEM 4: Consideration of the cycle of term of office of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.**

My delegation wishes to align its intervention with the one delivered by the Group of 77 and China and the African Group respectively.

Mr Chair,

We have already agreed as this collective that there is one UNEA-5 with part one having being concluded and purely focused on administrative, programmatic and procedural issues while the second part will delve on substantive issues, which we have again agreed cannot be negotiated via virtual means. We have also as this collective, highlighted the importance of the CPR Bureau in not only providing oversight on the decisions of UN Environment Assembly but in the preparations for the Assembly, including through the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives. As delegations we further spent a great amount of time during the discussions on the CPR-based review process on the roles and responsibilities of the two Bureaus.

In this regard, my delegation wishes to express its support for option B of the secretariat paper which will see the current bureau under the present composition being re-elected until June 2022, in order to finalise the work on UNEA-5. It may be recalled that the spirit of the discussions at UNEA-5 part one on this matter was based on the fact that we are dealing with the exceptional situations necessitated by COVID 19 pandemic and therefore it is only natural for exceptional solutions to prevail. We have also heard that this proposal is in line with the Rules of Procedure.

Furthermore, it has been noted that the principle of rotation, including for UNEA-5, could not take effect because of COVID 19 pandemic leading to the decision to adjourn and resume in 2022. It is my delegation's plea to not limit the possibility of maintaining the principle of equitable geographical representation as we continue to implement this decision.

Mr Chair,

Our support for a two-stage approach to the session of UNEA-5 did not come with a compromise that Africa will serve a shortened term at UNEA-6. Hence the African

Group has always called for information on how to, based on the decision to adjourn and resume UNEA-5, ensure that the Group is effective and strives during its tenure by serving in the most desirable way.

Cognizant that the current overlap is not due to natural rotation of the regional groups but rather as a result of unprecedented circumstances, we cannot use the rationale from previous scenarios for this discussion. However, in order to avoid such an overlap in future, we encourage a discussion in the CPR-based review process to share the background on what has happened before and come up with common understanding and decision. Should member States decide to align the cycles of the two Bureaus, then a clear and effective process would have been followed. This is without prejudice to the existing rotation and would allow us time to analyse the pattern in which we want regional rotation to be considered.

Mr Chair,

The nomination letter addressed to UN regional groups to nominate members to the new Bureau circulated by the secretariat and the deadline attached to it was unfortunately not issued in a timely manner given the debate on the ground and the decision by UNEA-5 part one. The UN Environment Assembly “as the master of its own proceedings” gave a green light to the CPR to consider the cycle of term of office of the Bureau, and the intergovernmental process should be allowed to take its course and decide on the matter under consideration.

We have also taken note of the background document prepared by the secretariat for this meeting. We appreciate the clarification given on the role of the region in nominating its representative and highlights on how the region remains important for continuity. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that as a collective we can based on policy consideration, elect the current Bureau to finalise the work of UNEA-5.

Lastly Mr Chair,

My delegation takes note with appreciation that the background document also addresses Africa’s long-standing question regarding the term for UNEA-6. In this regard, we look forward to further discussions and engagements on the best suitable approach for the Bureau for UNEA-6 given the reports to be considered under

ECOSOC and UNGA. The secretariat could further clarify if the conditions that led to UNEA cycles to be held in odd years are relevant today?

We stand ready to work with the WEOG chair in 2022 as we deliberate in ensuring that no region's term is compromised as we stay on the fight against COVID-19 pandemic, and as we strive to build back better.

**I thank you!**

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**Agenda item 6: Assessment and lessons learned from the online session of the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly**

We wish to align our intervention with the statement delivered on behalf of the African Group.

My delegation wishes express its appreciation to the President of UNEA-5, Norway, for its leadership in preparing for and hosting UNEA-5 part one in February 2021. We remain committed in supporting the Presidency as we prepare for UNEA-5 part two and UNEP@50. The session did deliver in exchanging information and understanding of each other's positions on various thematic areas as we discussed and adopted decisions based on administrative, budgetary and procedural matters.

Mr Chair,

We wish to align with the sentiments expressed stating the importance of the sessions of the UN Environment Assembly and to underscore that the principles of equal opportunity, effective and inclusive participation should be upheld as we prepare for UNEA-5 part two under the current UNEA-5 and UNEP CPR Bureaux.

Allow us to share our views on the format of the meetings we have agreed to hold in person. These include UNEA-5.2 and the meeting on the UNGA 73/333 process. While we are committed to coming up with and supporting some of the innovative ways to conduct our work, we would strongly discourage a fully virtual meeting of UNEA or UNGA 73/333 process as this would undermine the very principles outlined earlier and would open possibilities for weakened outcomes. This will also go against

the AMCEN decision of not having virtual negotiations. We believe that hybrid meetings also pose similar challenges as at the end of the day half of the delegation would be expected to interact and negotiate online. An even or equal playing field should always be maintained as we continue to conduct our business through virtual means in order to ensure meaningful participation owing to the digital gap that currently exists.

My delegation looks forward to an update on the UNGA 73/333 by the co-facilitators as well as comments by member States on the draft building blocks of the Political Declaration. An exchange we are anticipating will take place in conjunction with the proposal to link this process to the commemorations of UNEP.

Related to this discussion is of course the commemoration of the creation of UNEP through a special session in 2022. We believe that the commemoration is imperative as the event has a huge potential to reinforce the UN Headquarter in Nairobi, the global South and Africa. My delegation places importance on discussions towards strengthening UNEP to enable it to carry its functions as the leading global environment authority.

**I thank you!**