



**United Nations Environment Programme  
Committee of Permanent Representatives  
154<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

20 May 2021

**Remarks by Brazil on item 6  
Assessment and lessons learned from the online session  
of the fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly**

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

Mr. Chairman,

Brazil would like to thank the Secretariat for presenting its own assessment and lessons learned from the online segment of UNEA-5. We also thank the Secretariat for having shared a report compiling the inputs from the Secretariat of other UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies regarding the convening of online meetings. Brazil trusts that a discussion within the CPR on this issue is both relevant and timely, so that delegations have an occasion to share their own views.

Mr. Chairman,

Brazil agrees with the general assessment that UNEA-5.1 and OECPR-5.1 were successfully organized. At the same time, we cannot lose sight of the fact that success in these extraordinary circumstances stems largely from the collective decision, by Member States, to defer the negotiation of all substantive outcomes to the in-person segment, and to prepare for UNEA-5.1 solely the administrative and budgetary decisions that required urgent attention. In short, it was above all our consensual expectation in terms of outcomes that paved the way for the success of UNEA5.1.

The Secretariat's document contains, in its Annex 1, an interesting (and non-exhaustive) list of challenges and opportunities for online meetings. From a Brazilian vantage point,

many of these challenges would have deserved much more prominence in the main text, where they seem to be overlooked or minimized. As a result, the main text seems overly optimistic.

Multilingualism, for example, seems to be one of the most evident casualties of online meetings. Technical difficulties oftentimes forced delegations who would otherwise take the floor in Plenary in other UN languages, to choose English, as we have seen many times even in today's meeting. In the UN, genuine multilingualism is not a luxury that we can give up once it becomes too difficult to implement, it is a necessary work tool. As recognized by the General Assembly, it protects and preserves diversity, while promoting unity in understanding.

Mr. Chairman,

Political willingness to negotiate is obviously crucial for the success of any multilateral meeting. But even when it is present, it will not translate into ambitious outcomes if delegations do not feel that they are participating on equal footing. Brazil, like the UN Secretary-General, the UN Deputy Secretary-General and the UN General Assembly, does not refer to the digital divide in inverted commas or qualify it as "so-called". We regard the digital divide as a real issue - and one that, as we also saw in UNEA5.1, affects much more significantly the developing world. Another important divide, even if unavoidable, are time zones: some delegations had to constantly work either too early in the morning or too late in the night.

The lessons we learned from the preparation of the administrative and budgetary decisions for UNEA5.1 is that, for a line-by-line conversation, online settings are less efficient and less effective. It should be noted that the OECPR had to convene for an extra day to be able to finalize the preparation of three administrative decisions, only two of which triggered debates. Neither can we turn a blind eye to the fact that, in online settings, delegations lack the space to exchange and test ideas informally but collectively, and more often than not such a space is necessary to foster ambitious negotiating outcomes. Our consultations regarding the cycle of terms of office of the CPR Bureau provide a current example of this limitation.

Mr. Chairman,

Our assessment of the online segment is more ambivalent than that presented by the Secretariat. While it provided an occasion for Environment Ministers to discuss how to build back better, we also witnessed reduced interactivity and minimal multilingualism. While financial costs and environmental footprint were reduced, the dispersion in time-zones and the asymmetry in access to high-speed internet challenged inclusivity. While it allowed for the adoption of urgent administrative and budgetary texts, it highlighted the limitations of online platforms for fostering ambitious negotiated outcomes.

In short, Mr. Chairman, online meetings are an exceptional tool that we exceptionally agreed to apply during exceptional circumstances. While it will bring about change in the

way we conduct our business, it will not become the "new normal" of multilateral diplomacy.

Thank you.