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**United Nations
Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment Programme**

**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the
United Nations Environment Programme
155th meeting**
Nairobi (online), 21 September 2021

**Draft minutes of the 154th meeting of the Committee of
Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment
Programme**

Agenda item 1

Opening of the meeting

1. The meeting, which was held online, was opened at 2.05 p.m. on Thursday, 20 May 2021, by Mr. Fernando Coimbra, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Chair of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP.
2. The meeting was attended by participants representing 85 Member States, 1 observer mission and 36 UNEP-accredited organizations from among the major groups and stakeholders.
3. The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Committee: Mr. Sonam P. Wangdi, (Bhutan); Ms. Giovanna Valverde Stark (Costa Rica); Ms. Katrin Hagemann (European Union); Mr. Khalid Mohammed Ali Al Kathiri (League of Arab States); Mr. Nathan Glassey (New Zealand); Ms. Marta Dopazo (Spain); Mr. Hassan Wasswa Galiwango (Uganda); Mr. Shawqi Abdulghani Noman (Yemen).
4. He then bade farewell to the following departing members, thanking them for their contribution to the work of the Committee: Mr. Simon Mordue (European Union); Ms. Francisca Ashietey-Odunton (Ghana); Mr. Abdelmoneim Mohammed Mabrouk Ali (League of Arab States); Ms. Agnieszka Torres the Oliveira (Poland); Mr. Elías Guía López (Spain); Ms. Phibby Awere Otaala (Uganda); Ms. Asma Mubarak Amber (Yemen).

Agenda item 2

Adoption of the agenda

5. The agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/154/1).

Agenda item 3

Report of the Executive Director

6. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the report entitled “Quarterly report to the 154th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (advance unedited version), January–March 2021”, noting that it provided an update on key developments relevant to UNEP over that period.

7. In her oral briefing, the Executive Director of UNEP, Ms. Inger Andersen, thanking representatives for their determination to ensure that the Committee's important work continued despite the challenges that persisted owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, said that the current meeting was the fifth meeting of the Committee to be held online.

8. Expressing her appreciation for the fruitful informal consultations held over the previous two weeks with regional groups, she noted that such discussions served as a valuable complement to more formal discussions, including those of the Committee.

9. The pandemic had exposed the extraordinary interconnectedness of human, animal and environmental health, leading to an even greater consensus on the vital need to advance environmental governance in 2021. The global environmental crisis would not wait for humanity to get back to a "new normal". The United Nations Food Systems Summit, to be convened on the margins of the seventy-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly, would present an opportunity to launch the deep reform of food systems required to ensure that they served both people and nature. Ambitious progress would be required in 2021 in the context of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the post-2020 chemicals management agenda, despite the postponement of the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management. She welcomed the leadership shown by many countries in the lead-up to the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, also welcoming the outcomes of the Leaders' Summit on Climate, held online in April.

10. The achievement of the required progress in environmental governance would depend on the equitable global distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine and on the alacrity with which ambitions could translate to action in the post-pandemic recovery period. An analysis by country of green recovery spending, conducted jointly in March by UNEP and the Oxford University Economic Recovery Project in the context of the Global Recovery Observatory and set out in a report entitled *Are We Building Back Better? Evidence from 2020 and Pathways to Inclusive Green Recovery Spending*, had found that only 18 per cent of global economic stimulus spending could be considered green. She called on all Member States deploying pandemic recovery stimulus funding to use that lamentable but unique opportunity to invest sustainably, prioritizing planetary health and poverty reduction along with economic opportunity, and echoed the call of the Secretary-General to step up action to address debt-related challenges that would hamper the ability of developing countries to recover from the pandemic and reduce poverty and environmental degradation.

11. Turning to the first part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, she said that, in advance of the online event, UNEP had launched a publication entitled *Making Peace with Nature: A Scientific Blueprint to Tackle the Climate, Biodiversity and Pollution Emergencies*, which laid out a pathway for ambitious and coordinated action by Governments, businesses and people to restore the planet to health, while a report jointly published by UNEP and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-lived Climate Pollutants and entitled *Global Methane Assessment: Benefits and Costs of Mitigating Methane Emissions* had revealed that reducing methane emissions would be the most significant way to slow climate change over the next quarter century.

12. During the online meeting of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in February, more than 2,000 participants had logged in and many more had followed the proceedings on United Nations Web TV and other digital platforms, a clear indication of the broad global commitment to multilateral environmental governance and to the work of the Committee. The lessons that had been learned during the fifth session were promising in the context of enhancing inclusion and breaching the digital divide. The use of online or hybrid meetings was likely to continue for practical, environmental and financial reasons.

13. With regard to partnerships entered into by UNEP to support positive environmental impact, she expressed satisfaction at the launch of the Net-Zero Banking Alliance, which included banks from 23 countries managing assets worth \$30 trillion. Those financial institutions were committed to aligning lending and investment portfolios with net zero emissions by 2050, and were part of the newly created Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero, launched by the United Nations Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance and the presidency of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

14. UNEP was also supporting the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest finance (LEAF) Coalition, a public-private partnership which aimed to mobilize \$1 billion in financing to protect tropical forests. At the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the European Union had launched the Global Alliance on Circular

Economy and Resource Efficiency, which aimed to provide global impetus to initiatives related to the transition to a circular economy, resource efficiency, sustainable consumption and production patterns, and inclusive and sustainable industrialization.

15. Reiterating her satisfaction with the success of the regional group meetings that had been conducted recently, she said that such meetings were part of consistent efforts to strengthen UNEP. In that regard, she expressed her deep appreciation to the more than 40 Member States that had made their contributions to the Environment Fund. More than \$40 million in pledges had been received by 30 April, representing an encouraging increase compared with pledges made by the same date in 2020. She expressed particular satisfaction with the contributions made by “fair share” contributors, who paid according to the voluntary indicative scale of contributions, and encouraged all Member States to pay the fair share, which was calculated on an individual country basis and was vital for the effective, inclusive and balanced implementation of the UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023.

16. The celebration to mark the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP – a unique opportunity to acknowledge, reflect on and imagine the future of environmental governance and the place of UNEP in the world – was 10 months away, and the strategic plan for the series of celebratory events was being deployed. With regard to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972, intergovernmental deliberations on the drafting of an enabling resolution were being conducted in New York. Those distinct but related commemorations would be mutually reinforcing and would contribute to the reinvigoration and strengthening of the global environmental agenda, environmental multilateralism and the role of UNEP in achieving the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals. It was crucial that the world unite in 2021 to take transformative action on climate, biodiversity and pollution and to strengthen environmental multilateralism for the well-being of humanity.

17. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the Executive Director and the secretariat for the quarterly report and commended UNEP for the successful online part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, in particular in the light of the ongoing pandemic restrictions.

18. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed appreciation for the continued strengthening of the science-policy interface and for the work done by UNEP to support sustainable consumption and production, including in the context of the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency. In that regard, several representatives welcomed the publication by UNEP of recent science-based reports, including *Making Peace with Nature: A Scientific Blueprint to Tackle the Climate, Biodiversity and Pollution Emergencies* and the *Adaptation Gap Report 2020*. One representative said that those reports presented evidence that progress in the achievement of many environmental goals continued to lag. Another representative, noting that his delegation welcomed the strengthening of the science-policy connection in the UNEP medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023, said that, while the biodiversity and climate change pillars each had a dedicated scientific body, the chemicals and pollution pillar of the work of UNEP lacked such a body. He looked forward to the creation of such a body and said that he would liaise with other interested parties on the matter in the coming months.

19. The urgent need for economic recovery spending to be green was highlighted by many representatives, including one who spoke on behalf of a group of countries. Several representatives drew attention to green events and green recovery initiatives organized by their Governments, with one representative suggesting that the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, which was active in many countries, could be used by UNEP to enhance the work already being done.

20. One representative, emphasizing her country’s continued commitment to environmental conservation, said that a healthy environment was the basis for sustainable development and poverty eradication. Another representative noted that the publication in February of *The Economics of Biodiversity: the Dasgupta Review*, which included contributions from UNEP, had been significant, although lamentably, it had revealed that the world was collectively failing to safeguard nature, its most important asset. One representative said that UNEP was uniquely positioned to promote an understanding of the importance of the natural environment to human and economic development, while another representative said that only by restoring damaged ecosystems could biodiversity loss and climate change be reversed.

21. One representative said that the economies of developing countries had suffered the greatest setbacks owing to the pandemic, and that the failure to provide adequate means of implementation for those countries to achieve a green recovery would only serve to further widen inequality and worsen global poverty. One representative urged UNEP to mainstream poverty reduction into all its programmes. Another representative noted that unsustainable interactions with the environment had a

cascading effect on all aspects of life, including food security, the availability of clean water, economies, human settlements and migration, directly hampering efforts to address poverty and inequality.

22. A number of representatives expressed their appreciation for the work done by UNEP to promote a global agreement on plastic pollution. One representative asked how the work of the ad hoc expert group on marine plastic litter and microplastics would be linked to the ministerial conference on plastic pollution to be held in September 2021.

23. One representative, thanking UNEP for its contribution to promoting the sustainable management of medical waste, much of which was plastic, noted that, notwithstanding the need to prioritize action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, countries continued to struggle with nitrogen overuse, which had negative impacts on climate and biodiversity. He urged UNEP to examine the ways in which work on the Colombo Declaration on Sustainable Nitrogen Management could be integrated into the work done under multilateral environmental agreements.

24. One representative said that certain regional groups remained underrepresented among UNEP staff, while another sought clarification on how UNEP planned to address the matter of equitable geographic representation.

25. One representative, emphasizing the vital role of restoring damaged ecosystems in countering climate change and biodiversity collapse, said that secure and stable funding for UNEP would be key in that regard. Her Government had made its contribution to the Environment Fund, thereby supporting the UNEP medium-term strategy and programme of work, and had contributed 3 million euros to the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030, which would be launched on 5 June, World Environment Day. Another representative, expressing her country's commitment to the work of UNEP, said that it had paid its fair share and had also provided softly earmarked funding. She noted that core funding represented the organization's backbone, without which it could not fulfil its mission.

26. One representative said that continuing the practice of convening meetings online should be considered in the future. Another representative stressed that successful negotiations depended on political will, whether online or in person, and that the same spirit of collaboration that had guided the Committee during in-person meetings should be maintained in all meetings. He emphasized the importance of working together and of maintaining well-established practices, noting that failing to do so could stall the environmental agenda, destabilize UNEP and weaken its importance as the leading global body for environmental governance. Two representatives of major groups and stakeholders said that, irrespective of the meeting format, participants from civil society should be able to participate in meetings on the same footing as Member States, with one noting that, owing to the pressing need to address environmental concerns, postponement was not possible. It would therefore be important to become accustomed to taking far-reaching decisions in an online format.

27. Responding to the comments, the Executive Director thanked representatives for their engagement and support and expressed her appreciation to the countries that had made their contributions to UNEP.

28. Acknowledging the geographical and gender imbalances in the staffing of UNEP, she said that the organization remained committed to improving in that regard and noted that a recruitment event had recently been held in cooperation with the Russian Federation. UNEP had received invitations from other countries to participate in similar events. She expressed her commitment to continued improvement through a systemic approach, inviting representatives to provide relevant suggestions.

29. She said that she had taken note of the call for the creation of a scientific body dealing with chemicals and waste. She thanked Switzerland for its financial contributions used to create DaRT, an integrated portal to facilitate reporting on biodiversity in the context of the multilateral environmental agreements, and said that UNEP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations would co-facilitate the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, whose secretariat would be based in Nairobi. She said that the executive directors and the executive secretaries of the conventions hosted by UNEP maintained regular communication with each other and noted that the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, had called for a series of meetings to continue to enhance synergies between them.

30. Regarding work to reduce nitrogen pollution, she welcomed the launch of the #Nitrogen4NetZero initiative in Sri Lanka in April 2021 during the Nitrogen for Climate and Green Recovery event, and said that UNEP was providing support for reducing nitrogen pollution through the Green Environment Fund and in keeping with Environment Assembly resolution 4/14 on sustainable nitrogen management.

31. Thanking representatives for their comments on a green recovery, she noted that the work being done by the Global Recovery Observatory was important to understanding which approaches were the most effective. Reports such as *Are We Building Back Better?* and *The Dasgupta Review* would enhance the understanding of the importance of nature for economies.

32. Responding to a question, she said that, with regard to the ministerial conference on plastic pollution to be held in September, UNEP would continue to provide technical input as requested by Member States. She looked forward to the presentation of the conclusions of the ad hoc expert group on marine plastic litter and microplastics to the Environment Assembly at the in-person part of its fifth session.

Agenda item 4

Consideration of the cycle of term of office of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

33. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the note by the secretariat on the election of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (UNEP/CPR/154/2), and recalled that, in paragraph 7 of Environment Assembly decision 5/3, on the adjournment and resumption of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, the Assembly had recommended that the Committee of Permanent Representatives, at its 154th meeting, consider, in view of systemic problems and in a comprehensive manner, the cycle of the term of office of the Bureau of the Committee of Permanent Representatives in relation to that of the Bureau of the Environment Assembly.

34. The note by the secretariat included a link to a background document for a subcommittee meeting held on 21 April (UNEP/SC/2021/6/2/Corr.1) that set out three options for the election of the bureaux.

35. The Chair said that, despite rich discussions at the meeting of the subcommittee and the meeting of the Bureau convened in May, no consensus had been reached. The term of office of the current members of the Bureau would conclude on 30 June 2021 and it was therefore urgent to reach agreement on the matter. He called for representatives to approach the discussion in a flexible and constructive manner.

36. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives, including several speaking on behalf of groups of countries, expressed their preference for option B, under which the current Bureau would be re-elected with the same regional composition until June 2022. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, suggested that, if option B were chosen, the timing of future Environment Assembly sessions might have to change in order to enable the Bureau of the sixth session of the Environment Assembly to serve its full term. A number of representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the term of office of the next Bureau of the Committee should not be cut short, and several representatives emphasized the importance of respecting the principle of equitable geographical representation and rotation.

37. Many representatives, including two speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed their preference for option A. A number of representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noted that option A was the only option that could be implemented without the need for the Environment Assembly to adopt a decision, and one representative said that option A was the only option that could be implemented without changing the rules of procedure.

38. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the election of the Bureau and Chair of the Committee should take place according to established practice and in keeping with the existing cycle of rotation. He drew attention to a shared candidacy model that would be implemented by his regional group with respect to its membership of the Bureau.

39. One representative noted that no other United Nations organization had seen the need to align the cycles of its bureaux, either during the COVID-19 pandemic or over the previous decade. He said that, when the timing of the Environment Assembly session had been changed for the event to take place in odd years, one regional group had served as President of two consecutive sessions of the Assembly, which had not been viewed as problematic. He called for an expert on the United Nations system-wide reform to be consulted on the broader legal and policy implications of returning to an even-year cycle for the Environment Assembly. Many representatives, including several speaking on behalf of groups of countries, said that it would be best to consider the alignment of the cycles of the bureaux in the context of the review process for the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

40. One representative, speaking on behalf of the President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, said that when the Committee had agreed to a two-part Environment Assembly session, the extension of the term of office of the Bureau of the Assembly had been implicit. She noted that the President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly was committed to the agreement reached during the first part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, in its decision 5/3, whereby a special session of the Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UNEP, to be held in Nairobi for two days, on 3 and 4 March 2022, in conjunction with the resumed fifth session, would be convened under the leadership of the Presidency and the Bureau of the sixth session.

41. A number of representatives cautioned that excessive focus on procedural matters could only delay the work of the Committee and risked jeopardizing the position of UNEP as the global authority on environmental governance and the importance of the United Nations Office at Nairobi. Several, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noted that it was important to recall the extraordinary circumstances under which the decision had been taken to hold the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in two parts. A number of representatives called for the Committee to compromise to enable continued focus on its substantive work and several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, emphasized that their positions corresponded to principle and policy and were not intended to target any regional group. One representative said that elections could not be held in an online context and that the current Bureau members should therefore continue to serve.

42. Responding to the comments, the Executive Director said that, despite the differences in the views of representatives, it was important for the Committee to avoid a governance crisis and move forward in a unified manner, in the interest of enabling UNEP to continue with its important work. She called for representatives to work together to find a solution and invited the UNEP Legal Officer to address the Committee.

43. Thanking representatives for their comments, the Legal Officer said that the issue of regional rotation had been addressed in paragraphs 5 and 14 of document UNEP/CPR/154/2. He noted that two questions had been raised by representatives. The first question related to the review process for the Committee mandated in Environment Assembly decision 4/2, on the provisional agenda, date and venue of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, in which the Assembly had requested the Chair of the Committee, in close consultation with the President of the Environment Assembly, to present to the Committee a consolidated proposal outlining a consensual process for review by the Committee for the improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee and its subsidiary bodies. The scope of that review included the scheduling of sessions of the Environment Assembly and meetings of its subsidiary bodies. That review process had nearly been completed at the annual subcommittee meeting in 2020, and the way forward with regard to preparing for a possible decision to be adopted by the Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session therefore remained in the hands of the Chair.

44. The second point raised, which related to the system-wide implications of returning to an even-year cycle for the Environment Assembly, had been addressed in respect of its legislative implications in paragraph 18 of document UNEP/CPR/154/2. The legal representative had taken note of the requests for further clarification and possible elaboration on paragraph 18 with regard to any other legislative and system-wide implications of the timing of the sixth session of the Environment Assembly, which would require further work.

45. Thanking representatives for the rich discussion, the Chair said that the review process for the Committee had not been concluded during the annual subcommittee meeting owing to the strong opposition expressed to online negotiations. In the light of the inability of the Committee to reach consensus on the cycle of the term of office of the Bureau of the Committee, an extraordinary meeting of the Committee would be convened in June and a meeting of the Bureau would be held during the last week of May. He encouraged regional groups and Member States to explore all the options with a view to reaching agreement.

Agenda item 5

Election of officers

46. The election of officers was deferred owing to the need to call an extraordinary meeting of the Committee before the election could be held.

Agenda item 6

Assessment and lessons learned from the online part of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

47. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a document on the assessment and lessons learned during the online part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly (UNEP/CPR/154/6), and a note entitled “Virtual meetings: short questionnaire results” (UNEP/CPR/154/3).
48. The Executive Director expressed deep appreciation to representatives for their responses to the survey, which had been conducted by the secretariat to gather feedback on the proceedings of the online fifth session of the Environment Assembly.
49. Drawing attention to an audiovisual presentation, the representative of the secretariat said that a rigorous assessment process had been conducted after the online part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, which had been preceded by the online fifth session of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives. Noting that the online part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly had been compliant with the rules of procedure of the Assembly, he said that it had been a resounding success, with important decisions adopted and unprecedented levels of public engagement through social media. Member States had provided written and video statements and many new UNEP partnerships had been announced. The online event had provided opportunities for inclusive engagement despite the technical challenges experienced by some participants, with 10 million instances of engagement of some sort with participants around the world, including 2.1 million views of Environment Assembly videos. The goal of expanding public awareness of the work of UNEP had been achieved.
50. Among the successes of the online part of the fifth session were the adoption of three decisions, the endorsement of a political message, a high-level leadership dialogue and the online participation of 10 million people around the world.
51. Informal consultations held before the event had been instrumental to its success. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, regional offices of the United Nations had held successful meetings in preparation for the Assembly session, which had been preceded by sessions of the science-policy business forum, the global major groups and stakeholders forum and other inclusive side events. One area for improvement in the future was to provide more opportunities for stakeholders, Member States and other United Nations entities to organize complementary events, whether online or in person.
52. The online format had presented an opportunity for the participation of delegates who would have been unable to travel to attend an in-person event. The environmental footprint of the Assembly session had been reduced and cost savings had been realized.
53. Challenges included the frequent inability of some participants to take the floor owing to technical difficulties. While no effort had been spared by the Chair and those leading each event to rectify those issues, the inability to network at side events and to engage in person had hampered discussions.
54. Noting that the list of lessons learned that had been presented to the Committee was not exhaustive, he invited representatives to provide their input, which would be reviewed in preparation for the next session of the Environment Assembly. He invited representatives to provide input on both the positive and negative lessons learned. He invited representatives to consider how UNEP could best take advantage of technology to strike a balance between online and in-person meetings and to ensure equality of representation and opportunities for engagement and participation for participants who were unable to travel and attend meetings in person. Noting that the limitations imposed by the pandemic had resulted in some advantages that should be embraced, he said that the duration of pandemic-related restrictions remained unknown. Despite the uncertainty, UNEP remained committed to holding the second part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in person.
55. Turning to strengthening political leadership and stakeholder engagement, including with regard to multilateral environmental agreements, he said that UNEP was providing opportunities for cross-cutting engagement and strengthened partnerships. He invited representatives to provide their input on how those efforts could be enhanced. Good planning for side events well in advance of the next session of the Environment Assembly would provide more opportunities for engagement with parliamentarians, young people, the business community, cities and the scientific community, among others.

56. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives, including two speaking on behalf of groups of countries, thanked the Chair, the presidency of the Environment Assembly, the secretariat and the Executive Director for their efforts to ensure the success of the online part of the fifth session of the Assembly, in particular with regard to the adoption of the three administrative decisions that supported the implementation of the medium-term strategy for the period 2022–2025 and programme of work and budget for the biennium 2022–2023. Several representatives said that the goal of the online part of the fifth session had been met with regard to ensuring that UNEP could continue its important work and expressed their willingness to continue working with UNEP to ensure that the second part of the fifth session would be equally successful.

57. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the online fifth session of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives had shown that, although online negotiations were demanding, they were possible, in particular in the context of targeted outcomes, as long as transparency, inclusiveness and equality of participation were ensured. High levels of participation across regional groups during the event was testament to the broad commitment to the achievement of the environmental agenda. In the light of the pandemic-related restrictions, an assessment of the success of the online event was timely. It would be important to maintain flexibility with regard to the format of the conduct of future meetings to ensure continuity in the work of the governing bodies of UNEP and to prepare for the resumed fifth session of the Assembly, during which substantive outcomes would need to be achieved irrespective of its format. The assessment had demonstrated that online meetings presented challenges, in particular with relation to technology, Internet connectivity, time zone disjuncture and the absence of opportunities for personal connection. Technical improvements and training would be important in bridging the digital divide and ensuring the equal participation of all, in particular if the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly were conducted in an online or hybrid format. Online events could, however, broaden opportunities for participation and reduce both costs and environmental footprint. She requested an update from the secretariat on the reopening of the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

58. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, recalled that the decision to hold the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in two parts, with the first part being held online, had been motivated by the exceptional global situation. A number of representatives said that the assessment by the secretariat of the success of the online part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly had been overly optimistic. Many representatives expressed concern with regard to the potential for the second part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly to be held online or in a hybrid format, citing technical difficulties, the digital gap, time zone disjuncture, limitations for informal interactions and networking opportunities, impacts for multilingualism in the absence of consistent interpretation and difficulties in conducting line-by-line negotiations online. A number of representatives noted that the matters to be considered by the Environment Assembly at the second part of the fifth session were weighty. One representative said that an online or hybrid format would entail engaging in online negotiations, which ran counter to the policy message rejecting virtual negotiations on substantive matters adopted by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) at its eighth special session. One representative said that he did not understand the reasoning behind the failure to reopen the United Nations Office at Nairobi and suggested that the question be put to the executive directors of the entities whose offices were located there. One representative said that political will was essential to the success of any international meeting and that, if some countries were unable to participate on an equal footing, it could hinder the achievement of positive outcomes. Many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed their reluctance to participate in online negotiations or cautioned against doing so. Many representatives emphasized the importance of inclusive, transparent, equitable and effective participation for all countries.

59. The representative of Norway, speaking on behalf of the presidency of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, said that the success of the online first part of the session had resulted from the commitment, engagement and efforts of all the participants. Despite the extension by one day of the fifth session of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, consensus had been reached and the three administrative decisions essential to the continued functioning of UNEP had been adopted by the Environment Assembly. She thanked Member States, the Chair, the Bureau and the secretariat for their efforts to ensure the success of the event. The lessons learned would provide valuable input for the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly and for other United Nations meetings to be held in the lead-up to that meeting. The presidency of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly was committed to ensuring the success of the resumed fifth session of the Assembly under any format agreed by representatives. It was key that all Member States work together to ensure participation for all on equal terms. Although it was unanimously agreed that the resumption of in-person meetings would be most welcome, one advantage of conducting meetings

online was the increased opportunity for engagement for many participants, in particular those representing civil society. In closing, she expressed her commitment to addressing the comments made with a view to continuing to work towards a healthy environment for all, which, she said, was the most important consideration.

60. Thanking representatives for their comments, the representative of the secretariat requested that any further comments be submitted in writing within one week of the close of the present meeting in order to facilitate their consideration by the Bureau.

61. The Executive Director, expressing her appreciation to representatives for their comments, noted that the reopening of the United Nations Office at Nairobi was beyond her control and that of the Director-General of the Office.

Agenda item 7

Report of the subcommittee

62. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to the Chair's report of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (UNEP/CPR/154/4). The Committee took note of the report.

Agenda item 8

Other matters

63. One representative said that the co-facilitators of the working group on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 73/333, during a subcommittee meeting held during the second week of May 2021, had proposed that a meeting scheduled to be held from 15 to 17 June to consider the further development of the political declaration mandated by that resolution be postponed until after the eighth annual subcommittee meeting in early November, given that it would not be possible to convene a hybrid or in-person meeting in June. Owing to the need to complete the consultations on the political declaration in time for the second part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, he requested that, if the meeting could not be held in a hybrid or in-person format in November, representatives approve the organization of an online meeting. Thematic workshops would be held in June and July without line-by-line discussions or debates about wording, using the structure of the document entitled "Draft building blocks of a political declaration", to advance the drafting of the declaration in a spirit of consensus. The co-facilitators would thus be able to take into account the input from the thematic workshops, the written input received and the input from informal consultations with regional groups, in preparing the draft declaration. The co-facilitators of the working group encouraged Member States to consider the venue for the meeting to be held in November with a view to advancing the process for the adoption of the declaration.

64. One representative said that a number of representatives had proposed the creation of a group of friends in Nairobi, to be co-chaired by Chile and Rwanda, on combating marine plastic litter and microplastic pollution, based on the model of the group of friends to combat marine plastic pollution established in New York in 2020. The group of friends in Nairobi had been formed with the aim of raising the profile of the plastic pollution issue in Nairobi, pushing for ambitious global action on marine plastic litter and microplastic pollution at the second part of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, in 2022, promoting knowledge and a better understanding of the sources, pathways and impacts of that pollution and promoting joint actions to engage with the private sector, society at large and academia. She invited those interested in joining the group to contact the co-chairs of the group and requested the support of the secretariat in determining the best platform to be used for meetings of the group.

65. A number of representatives drew attention to other initiatives and meetings to address plastic pollution.

Agenda item 9

Closure of the meeting

66. The meeting was declared closed at 7.15 p.m. on Thursday, 20 May 2021.