

*Draft Opening Remarks by H.E. Agrina Mussa, High Commissioner of Malawi to Kenya on behalf of the African Diplomatic Corps (ADC), at briefing by Ms. Inger Andersen, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, held virtually on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021*

- Madam Inger Andersen, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and your staff present here;
  - Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners;
  - Members of the African Diplomatic Corps Technical Committee (ADCTC);
1. Once again let me start by thanking you Madam Executive Director for organising this briefing for the African group in order to get our views on relevant environmental issues. **Allow me to state some points on behalf of the African Group. Let me also indicate that I am standing in, on behalf of H.E. Beyenne Russom, Ambassador of Eritrea and Dean of the African Group, who is not able to join us today.**
  2. Madam Executive Director, Excellencies, the African Group considers celebrations to mark 50 years since the creation of UNEP, as a very important milestone in environmental governance. UNEP @50 is a bold declaration of the journey that has been undertaken, and a manifestation of what lays ahead. Member states, in 1972, committed themselves to placing environmental issues at the centre of international concerns, in the process, adopting a series of sound principles for the management of the environment. This ideal was over the years strengthened through the outcomes of the two RIO and Johannesburg conferences which reinforced the integrity of the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and their interlinkages and complementarity

which should always be reinforced. Today, we stand at the crossroads of reflection on whether we have done justice to those ideals and commitments given that sustainable development remains the international community's most urgent priority and the core aim of the SDGs agenda. Perhaps we should have the Special Session of UNEP@50 seek to answer that question.

3. The African Group has taken note with appreciation the various existing and planned activities by the Secretariat regarding UNEP@50 since the celebrations were officially launched at UNEA 5.1. These activities to mention but a few include, initiatives, processes and steps that the Secretariat has taken in view of UNEP @50, including a dedicated section on UNEP@50 on the UNEP website, the thought starter on the Special Session as per the document dated 15 June 2021, stakeholder engagements and consultations with MEAs. In this regard, the African Groups wishes to get an update on how UNEP@50 was brought up at the High-Level Political Forum meeting and other relevant meetings of the MEAs. Furthermore, what messages have been conveyed to these relevant meetings to ensure that the discussions are in line with the discussions in Nairobi, as UNEP remains the authority for the environment
4. Without wasting much time, Madam Executive Director, the African Group, in general, considers the celebrations of UNEP @50 as an opportunity to take stock of the past, reflect on the present and envision for the future; while the strengthening of this UN Headquarters on the basis of paragraph 88 of the Rio+20 Declaration, remains at the centre of the possible outcomes. Specifically, and without prejudice to what my colleagues will say, the African Group would like to see the following as regards the **format, preparations and outcome** of the Special Session;

- a. The Special Session must have a theme around which the celebrations will revolve. The Group proposes the theme should in general focus on strengthening the Nairobi Headquarters function and on implementation and on predictable means of implementation, including financing;
- b. There should be a Plenary Session, preferably after the High-Level opening, to allow member states, specialised agencies and other stakeholders reflect on their experience with UNEP in its 50 years journey and share their thoughts for the future;
- c. The High-level dialogues or Roundtable discussions, as proposed by the Secretariat in the thought starter are a good idea, on the understanding that the guiding questions for engagement will draw from the theme and the possible outcome for the commemoration;
- d. The selection of participants to the high-level dialogues, while voluntary, need to reflect the geographical diversity and balance;
- e. The Special Session should have an outcome document to be prepared by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) based on the theme, and which will include key messages from the Special Session high-level dialogues, amongst others; these key messages should also be used for existing and planned activities on UNEP@50
- f. The communication for UNEP@50 should be discussed with member States in order to maintain consistency when sharing key messages
- g. While it is proposed that the political declaration regarding Resolution 73/333 may culminate or terminate at the celebrations of UNEP@50, the African Group continues to deliberate on the possible main outcome of the Special Session given its strong

position on the means of implementation. In this regard, any update on the New York resolution will be appreciated.

h. Clarity should be provided on the meetings that are planned to discuss preparations for UNEP@50, including information on how the Rules of Procedure guides member States in this regard

5. Let me take this opportunity to indicate that although the Special Session of UNEP @50 will be chaired by the President of UNEA 6, it should be recognised that the Bureau of UNEA 6, will only be elected and start its work after the resumed UNEA 5.2. As such, the expectation that nominees of UNEA 6 Bureau will have a mandate before their time, in matters of UNEP@50, need to be handled with caution. In this regard, we would like to hear from the Legal Advisor on the mandate of an nominees for Bureau, vis-à-vis UNEP@50; otherwise, the Group wishes to focus on the work of the CPR Bureau as laid out on this matter.
6. You will recall Madam Executive Director that in the current CPR Bureau, where the principle of division of labour was applied, the Vice Presidency of Africa was allocated to champion/facilitate UNEP@50. Therefore, the African Group looks forward to the support that the Secretariat will give to Algeria, the current African representative on the Bureau. as well as to join efforts so as to ensure a successful and meaningful UNEP@50;
7. Let me emphasise that the African Group believes that celebrations of UNEP@50 are a matter for all of us members and stakeholders of UNEP. We want to demystify the impression that has unfortunately being created and appears to all intents and purposes to be propagated at every opportunity that UNEP@50 is an African event. No, it is not. It is for all the member states, all the regions and all the other stakeholders. Of course, recognising the critical role that UNEP plays in the environmental agenda of

the SDGs, Africa will certainly be in the forefront, ensuring that the celebrations are impactful, under the UNEA-6 Presidency

8. On another note we would like to encourage and call for enabling conditions to resume in person meetings.
9. As I conclude, let me take this opportunity, to request for more information and clarification from the Executive Director regarding the letter, with reference: UNE-2021-01480, inviting Governments to consider providing financial support for UNEA 5.2 and UNEP@50.
10. With the foregoing in mind, allow me to request you Madam Executive Director to brief the Group, thereafter which interested Member States will share their views and recommendations. Once that is done, at the end, I hope you will be able to summarize possible key messages and recommendations from this meeting.
11. I thank you once again, Madam Executive Director and your team for arranging this interaction with the African Group.

**Closing Remarks by H.E. Beyene Russom, Ambassador of Eritrea to Kenya and Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps (ADC), at the briefing by Ms. Inger Andersen, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, held virtually on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2021;**

- Madam Inger Andersen, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment [Programme (UNEP) and your staff present here;
  - Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners;
  - Members of the African Diplomatic Corps Technical Committee (ADCTC);
1. I would like to once again most sincerely thank you Madam Executive Director and your team for this very helpful briefing with the African group. We believe that the sentiments gathered here, will together, with those from other groups, contribute to a most successful Special Session of UNEP@50;
  2. The African Group will remain available and actively involved in any and all preparatory processes towards UNEP@50 including interaction with Ms Msuya as the focal point on UNEP@50.
  3. I thank and a good day to you all