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

**First special session: commemoration of the  
fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the  
United Nations Environment Programme**  
Nairobi (hybrid), 3 and 4 March 2022

**Draft proceedings of the United Nations Environment Assembly  
at its first special session: commemoration of the fiftieth  
anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations  
Environment Programme**

1. The first special session for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was held at the headquarters of UNEP in Nairobi on 3 and 4 March 2022.

**I. Opening of the session (agenda item 1)**

2. The session was opened at 10.20 a.m. on Thursday, 3 March 2022, by Ms. Leila Benali, President of the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. Opening statements were delivered by Ms. Benali; Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly, via video message; Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, via video message; Mr. Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the Economic and Social Council; and Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP.

3. In her opening remarks, Ms. Benali said that the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of UNEP was a moment to celebrate environmental multilateralism, look to the future and reflect on past achievements and lessons learned. The previous 50 years had witnessed the growth and shaping of the multilateral institutions that would continue to protect the environment in years to come. Since the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, at which UNEP had come into being, the many notable achievements of its Governing Council had included co-establishing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and creating the Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law. In 2013, the United Nations General Assembly had adopted resolution 67/213 to strengthen UNEP in response to growing environmental challenges. Soon thereafter, the Governing Council had been replaced by the United Nations Environment Assembly. The task for the global community since then had been to honour the commitments entrusted to the Assembly. The results of the Assembly's work were tangible, and included, most recently, the adoption of the landmark resolution on plastic pollution, the implications of which were enormous. However, serious challenges remained. Increasing inequalities and the intensive use of the planet's finite resources threatened to undermine the progress made, while the COVID-19 pandemic and associated challenges were too complex and multifaceted for any one State to tackle on its own. It was imperative to continue strengthening multilateralism in pursuit of lasting solutions. Respect for a global rules-based system, as embodied by the Environment Assembly, had underpinned environmental conservation over the previous 50 years. Although environmental multilateralism could be a slow and frustrating process, doubting it was counterproductive. In the words of the former Executive Director of UNEP, Klaus Töpfer, "the extraordinary rise in both human

populations and consumption levels leaves us no choice but to take innovative and ambitious actions to reverse the widespread destruction of species and ecosystems”. Recent achievements had been made possible by the foundations laid by previous generations. The challenge going forward was to take the multilateral environmental system to the next level, paving the way for future generations.

4. In his statement, Mr. Shahid said that, over the previous 50 years, UNEP had coordinated a worldwide effort to confront the planet’s biggest environmental challenges and had played a key role in creating institutions and reaching agreements that had enhanced knowledge of those challenges and propelled international action. It had helped to lay the foundations for scientific consensus on environmental decline, and its convening power and rigorous scientific research had provided a platform for countries to advance the global environmental agenda. As the international community commemorated the Programme’s efforts and achievements, it should reflect on whether it was doing enough to support those efforts and meet its obligations to the planet. It had to redouble its commitments and stay on track to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. His country, Maldives, was a small island State heavily reliant on its ecosystems for its sustenance and economy. He knew the human cost of environmental degradation and climate change, which was why he had made protecting the planet one of the key priorities of his “Presidency of Hope” and why he would continue to support the work of environmental champions such as UNEP. It had been almost 50 years since the historic conference in Stockholm that had led to the Programme’s establishment. The 1972 Stockholm Declaration had provided the first agreed set of principles for work in the field of the human environment, and its legacy lived on. In recognition of that, he would convene a preparatory meeting for the Stockholm+50 event at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The event itself would serve as a space for reflection on the dependencies between humanity and the environment, and on the international community’s responsibility for the well-being of both. The two commemorations would foster stronger partnerships for and with future generations, whose voices had to be heard. In May, he would convene a high-level meeting focused on the sustainable and resilient recovery of the tourism sector, at which he would emphasize the need for the world to transition to blue and green economic practices, while in July, he would convene a high-level thematic debate entitled “A Moment for Nature”, at which participants would reflect on solutions to common bottlenecks across the environmental agenda. Though the challenges were many, he believed that, through multilateralism and concerted efforts, the international community would prevail.

5. In his statement, Mr. Guterres spoke about the new way forward offered to the world in 1972 with the creation of UNEP, which had been based on a vision for a better, healthier Earth and built on the pillars of international cooperation. Over the years, UNEP and its partners had worked with Member States to combat air pollution, restore the ozone layer, protect the world’s seas, promote a green and inclusive economy and raise the alarm about biodiversity loss and climate change, showing that multilateralism worked and could deliver solutions for people and the planet.

6. Although humanity continued to wage a suicidal war against nature, with climate disruption, biodiversity and habitat loss, and pollution and waste threatening societies and much of life on Earth, it was now clear what needed to be done. First, protect the most vulnerable, which meant scaling up international cooperation to provide the financial and technical assistance that vulnerable countries and communities needed for greater resilience. Thus, donors and multilateral development banks should more than double the share of climate finance allocated to adaptation to at least 50 per cent by 2024. Second, cut global emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 to reach net zero emissions by 2050, meaning no new coal and no coal finance, the phase-out of coal in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development by 2030 and by 2040 everywhere else, and decarbonization of every sector, especially energy and transportation, in every country by 2030. Third, halt the extinction crisis, which called for an ambitious and actionable post-2020 biodiversity framework. Fourth, drastically reduce chemical, plastic and solid waste pollution, which meant tackling the drivers of environmental degradation, especially poverty and unsustainable consumption and production – the establishment an intergovernmental committee to negotiate a legally binding global agreement on plastic pollution was an encouraging move in that regard. In addition, the world had to transform its financial and accounting systems to reflect the true cost of economic activities, including their impact on nature. It was also imperative to follow science and engage in multilateral action, both of which were supported by UNEP.

7. Mr. Guterres concluded by urging countries to draw on past achievements for inspiration to make the huge efforts needed to ensure that present and future generations could live on a sustainable planet. All countries had a crucial role to play in protecting people and the planet, and all should grasp the opportunities to work together in an active, open and networked multilateralism.

8. Mr. Kelapile began by commending UNEP for effectively implementing its mandate as the focal entity for environmental issues, notably through its focus on environmental education, its advocacy of sea and wetlands protection and its contribution to environmental multilateralism, as well as support for green technologies, particularly solar energy and electric mobility. The celebration of the achievements of the past 50 years was also an opportunity for Governments and other stakeholders to reaffirm their commitment to work even more closely and collaboratively with UNEP. With the future uncertain, UNEP would need strong support for its efforts to address the triple planetary crises.

9. The Economic and Social Council, the principal United Nations organ dedicated to development matters, valued UNEP input to the Council's work on championing the environmental dimension of sustainable development, particularly as environmental challenges mainly affected vulnerable groups in society. Building back better and recovering from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic should include addressing the triple planetary crises, which would require close collaboration with UNEP to inform policy measures on climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The Council would be convening Member States and other stakeholders in July for the twenty-second session of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, where goal 14 relating to life below water and goal 15 relating to life on land of the Sustainable Development Goals would be among the goals to be reviewed in depth. The Council counted on UNEP, Member States and other partners to ensure that the Forum benefited from the discussions and outcomes of both the special session and the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly. Member States were also invited to engage with the Council through participation in preparatory activities, such as the Council's forum on financing for development follow-up and the multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, to ensure that those forums and the high-level political forum itself reflected the interconnectedness of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, as well as all the other multilateral environmental agreements. Concluding his statement, Mr. Kelapile reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening multilateralism, international cooperation and solidarity and engaging all stakeholders to increase ambition for sustainable development and climate action. Noting that the special session was taking place at a time when global peace was facing threats above and beyond the setbacks caused by the pandemic, he expressed the hope that global peace would be maintained, to enable the Council and the entire United Nations system, including UNEP, to contribute meaningfully to a recovery led by the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. In her statement, Ms. Andersen said that UNEP had come a long way since 1972. The journey had sometimes been difficult but had always been guided by vision, science and the certainty that a healthy environment benefited everyone. It had carried the environment from the fringes to the mainstream and had led to an understanding of the need to transform societies and economies to protect the earth. The current international community was standing on the shoulders of the Stockholm giants: Maurice Strong, Indira Gandhi, Olof Palme and Jomo Kenyatta. Their deeds and achievement in putting the environment on the socioeconomic map lived on. They had laid the foundations for modern-day awareness of the topic and had woven the tapestry of multilateral environmental agreements that held the international community to account. The obvious example was the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the implementation of which had saved millions of lives and shown that environmental multilateralism did deliver. Among many other achievements, there was one overarching success: UNEP had come to lie at the heart of environmental protection. The world had realized that it could not pollute its way to development and clean up later. Change was being demanded, and stakeholders were acting. None of that had been in place 50 years previously. However, the journey would end only when humanity could thrive without skewing the delicate balance of life on the planet. Accelerated action was needed before the triple planetary crises left the international community reeling in the wake of its destruction. The to-do list was long: ensure economic decisions accounted for nature; reshape energy, transport and food systems around decarbonization and circularity; transform economic and financial models so that capital backed people and the planet; and reinvigorate multilateralism through the common agenda. UNEP would throw everything at those transformations, but it could not succeed alone. Everyone's input was needed to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals. While many people saw storm clouds gathering overhead, a glistening golden thread of environmental action had been woven in 1972, a thread that the environmental community had thickened into a guide rope strong enough for all to grasp. The time had come to hold fast to that rope and follow it into a world where humanity lived as part of nature, not above it. The international community owed it to its past, its present and most certainly its future.

11. During the opening plenary meeting, prior to consideration of the adoption of the political outcome of the special session, representatives and other participants viewed a commemorative video on UNEP at 50.

## **II. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work (agenda item 2)**

### **A. Adoption of the agenda**

12. The Environment Assembly adopted the following agenda for the session on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/EA.SS.1/1).

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.
3. Credentials of representatives.
4. Statements by representatives.
5. Presentation of the report of the Executive Director on the science-policy interface.
6. Presentation of the stakeholder report entitled “The UNEP We Want”.
7. Leadership dialogues:
  - (a) Looking back: 50 years of UNEP;
  - (b) Looking forward: achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for people and planet.
8. Multi-stakeholder dialogue.
9. Adoption of the political outcome of the session.
10. Adoption of the report of the session and the Chair’s summary.
11. Closure of the session.

### **B. Organization of work**

13. Based on the organization of work as presented in the annotated agenda (UNEP/EA.SS.1/1/Add.1), the Environment Assembly agreed to the organization of work proposed by the President, including consideration of item 5, presentation of the report of the Executive Director on the science-policy interface, and item 6, presentation of the stakeholder report entitled “The UNEP We Want”, during the second plenary meeting, to be held in the afternoon of 3 March 2022.

14. The Environment Assembly further agreed that the time limit for statements in explanation of a position before action and after action on a proposal be limited to three minutes. Regarding the right of reply, the Assembly agreed that such right should be exercised at the end of the consideration of an item, with the number of interventions in the exercise of that right limited to two per item for any delegation at a given meeting, the first such intervention being limited to three minutes and the second to two minutes.

### **C. Attendance**

15. The following Member States were represented at the resumed fifth session: [to be completed]
16. The following non-Member States were represented: [to be completed].
17. [To be completed] were represented as observers.
18. The following United Nations bodies, conventions and related secretariats were represented: [to be completed]
19. The following United Nations specialized agencies and related organizations were represented: [to be completed]
20. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: [to be completed]
21. In addition, a number of non-governmental and civil society organizations were represented as observers.

## **III. Credentials of representatives (agenda item 3)**

22. [to be completed]

## IV. Statements by representatives (agenda item 4)

### A. Statements by representatives

23. Ministers and other high-level representatives of countries, and representatives of United Nations entities and intergovernmental organizations, delivered statements during the special session to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). A number of representatives expressed appreciation to all those who had worked to prepare for and organize the present meeting, including the UNEP Secretariat and the Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly, and thanked the Government and people of Kenya for hosting the meeting.

24. Introductory remarks were delivered by Mr. Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, President of Botswana, Mr. Muhammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria and Mr. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya.

25. In congratulating UNEP on reaching the milestone of its fiftieth anniversary, several representatives said that it was apposite to reflect on the achievements of UNEP during its existence, the lessons learned from that experience, the present role of UNEP within the global environmental agenda, and the future directions it should take in combating the overwhelming environmental challenges facing the planet. Since its inception, the Programme had fulfilled its major role as the leading advocate for the environment within the United Nations system, a role that would grow in significance with increasing awareness of the need for nature-based solutions to global problems.

26. Several speakers reflected on the inception of UNEP following the landmark United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972. The event had been a catalyst in prompting countries to start working together to strengthen environmental governance at all levels, ushering in a new era for the global environmental movement. At that time, Nairobi had become the first, and remained the only, United Nations headquarters in the global South, symbolizing the realization that the success of environmental action could only be achieved through equal, inclusive multilateralism. The mood at the time had been optimistic that the challenges could be addressed through strong environmental governance; and while those challenges had burgeoned, UNEP had played a pioneering role in taking measures to address the planetary crisis at all levels, at the same time evolving in line with the needs of a rapidly changing world.

27. The achievements of UNEP during its 50-year history had been considerable and impressive. The Programme had provided a platform for cooperation across the full spectrum of the international community in coordinating joint action to address environmental issues, and had been responsible for, or assisted in the creation of, many programmes, partnerships and agreements in its relentless efforts to combat the complex and multifaceted environmental challenges facing the planet. In taking such action, two factors were critical: issues should be dealt with based on the latest expert scientific knowledge; and the international community must respond in unison. In that regard, UNEP had played a vital role. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, created by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization in 1988, had provided the scientific basis to address climate change. In addition, numerous multilateral agreements had been prepared and supported by experts under the guidance of UNEP, including the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, adopted in 1987, which remained the only universally ratified treaty under the United Nations; the Convention on Biological Diversity, which became effective in 1993; the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal; and, most recently, the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

28. Other milestones alluded to by representatives in which UNEP had played a pivotal role included the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, and its associated global treaties on climate and biodiversity; the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which had been the first-ever survey of the health of the world's biological resources; the creation in June 2012 of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme; the establishment in 2013 of the first United Nations Climate Technology Centre and Network in Copenhagen; and the Paris Agreement, adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at its twenty-first session, held in Paris in December 2015. In addition, UNEP had helped to lay the foundations for a scientific consensus on environmental decline, thereby playing a key role in the body of law that had been enacted globally. All of these actions were testament to the gradual realization by humanity that long-term development was not possible without sustainable management of the planet's natural capital.

29. Several speakers gave consideration to the role and ethos of UNEP, and the attributes that had contributed to its success. One speaker defined the role of UNEP as recognizing and analysing challenges related to the natural and human environment, developing relevant plans and agreements, and promoting environmental knowledge and information. Another highlighted the role of UNEP in communicating to decision makers the fundamental importance of the environmental sector in recovery from crises, building resilient societies, and promoting the transition to a green economy, and emphasizing that the recovery of the environmental sector could remove much of the burden from the health sector and help countries achieve targets of poverty reduction and ensuring that no one was left behind. The scientific basis of its actions, and its positioning at the science-policy interface, was viewed as a key factor; one representative said that its technical assistance, backed by rigorous scientific research, had helped Member States to engage, act boldly and advance the global environmental agenda. Another representative remarked that UNEP had been created as the world's first environmental conscience – an anchor institution for the environment that identified problems, suggested policies, connected countries, and promoted collective action. The strong relevance of the work of UNEP for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals was highlighted. One representative said that UNEP had provided a platform for countries to engage, act and advance towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Another remarked that, in the context of the 2030 Agenda, humanity must take action to preserve the planet, its environment, and collective well-being.

30. In keeping with the role of UNEP as an indispensable partner in delivering the environmental dimension of multilateral environmental agreements, several representatives spoke of the strong relevance of UNEP to the work of their organizations. The representative of the Convention on Biological Diversity stated that the Environment Management Group's Issue Management Group on Biodiversity, established in 2021 and co-chaired by UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, was preparing the ground for United Nations system collaboration on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, to which UNEP would make an essential contribution. The representative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said that the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP almost coincided with the establishment of the OECD Environment Committee in 1971. UNEP had become an observer of the Committee in 1974 and continued to work closely with OECD in its efforts to put environmental issues at the heart of economic policymaking. Finally, the representative of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) said that the two programmes worked in unison to establish a holistic approach to the built and natural environments at all levels of government. Further opportunities for cooperation would be presented by the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to assess progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the eleventh session of the World Urban Forum, both scheduled to take place in 2022.

31. A number of representatives spoke of the role of UNEP in improving environmental governance in their countries or regions. A wide range of areas that had benefited were cited, including the reduction in emissions with the assistance of the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles; the preparation of environmental legislation and incorporation of environmental matters into long-term developmental planning; capacity-building, institution-building and the preparation of reports on environmental matters; biodiversity conservation, including rare flora and fauna; mitigation of chemicals and legacy pollution; the preservation and creation of national parks and protected areas; sustainable wetlands management and reforestation; sustainable waste management, including bans on plastic bags and single-use plastics; and climate change mitigation measures, for example the development of a national carbon offset framework, clean mobility and energy efficiency. From a regional perspective, representatives referred to the valuable role of UNEP in supporting the implementation of regional conventions, for example the Bamako Convention on the Ban of the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa, and the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution (Barcelona Convention) and its Mediterranean Action Plan.

32. At present, the planet faced escalating environmental challenges – including the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution – that placed at centre stage the pivotal role of UNEP in guiding humanity towards a more sustainable future. As one representative observed, the Programme's mission was as critical in 2022 as it had been in 1972. The science-policy interface, for example, was more pertinent than ever as the global community sought evidence-based solutions to overcome such challenges as zoonotic diseases and plastic pollution. New, emerging challenges – typified by the issues of marine litter and plastics and the COVID-19 pandemic – required innovative solutions and strong, adaptive leadership, bringing UNEP to the fore. Ending poverty by 2030, as expressed in Sustainable Development Goal 1, would be unattainable without a strong environmental dimension to development programmes. Food security, access to safe drinking

water, and the provision of adequate education and health services were other critical problems faced by a large proportion of the world's population. Such issues were compounded by the lack of resources, technical capacity and funding faced by many countries.

33. In such circumstances, it was vital to re-evaluate the work and focus of UNEP to ensure that it was best positioned to add maximum value in its role as the leading global authority that set the global environmental agenda and promoted the coherent implementation of the environmental pillar of sustainable development, in accordance with paragraph 88 of the outcome document, entitled "The Future We Want", of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012. Opportunities were available to reflect on the dependency between humanity and the environment, and the need to ensure the well-being of both. Humanity had a common responsibility to hand over to its successors an environment fit for habitation. In supporting that aim, it was essential that UNEP work closely and cooperate with other actors to utilize scarce resources most effectively within a spirit of multilateralism and synergy, embracing the contributions of governments, private sector organizations, civil society, non-governmental and youth organizations, and indigenous communities. One representative said that UNEP should increase its role in strengthening the national capacities of countries to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development at the national, regional and global levels. Another representative said that an inclusive and proactive UNEP must take account of the specific needs of vulnerable communities, including small island developing States.

34. More specifically, one speaker suggested three critical actions as part of the process of transformation and renewal: inclusive representation, including strong engagement of highly vulnerable economies; simplification of funding mechanisms to scale up interventions at the regional and subregional levels; and closing the gap between policy acceptance and implementation at the national, regional and international levels. Another remarked that a renewed science-policy interface would facilitate multi-stakeholder engagement and strengthen the link between policy and action, while another stated that it was imperative to provide more voice to the scientific community in developing countries. UNEP should also act strongly to ensure that policymakers and decision makers deliver on previous commitments to ensure an inclusive, green recovery. There was a need for more relevant governance frameworks, better performance trackers, accountability mechanisms, reliable data and digital tools. UNEP was uniquely positioned and had a crucial role to play in reinvigorating international cooperation and spurring collective action. The primary mission of UNEP to act as the environmental conscience of the United Nations and the planet was as relevant today as it had been 50 years ago.

## **B. Statements by representatives of regional and political groups**

### **1. African States**

35. The representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo [f], speaking on behalf of the African States, paid tribute to UNEP and to Mostafa Tolba, one of the Programme's pioneers, stressing that African countries had been actively engaged in the creation of UNEP and remained committed to ensuring that the environment remained a central part of the global sustainable development agenda. While much progress had been achieved over the last five decades, the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution demonstrated that much work remained to be done, and it was to be hoped that over the next decades, greater emphasis would be placed on the implementation of agreed international environmental obligations in order to avert future threats to the well-being of both people and the environment. In closing, she said that the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP would help to cement the Programme's role as the global environmental authority, and she urged Member States to organize national-level activities to commemorate the anniversary, including activities that highlighted the important roles of women, young people and vulnerable communities in addressing environmental challenges.

### **2. European Union and its member States**

36. The representative of the European Union, speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States, and also on behalf of Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine, said that the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of UNEP stood in sharp contrast with the situation in Ukraine, and demonstrated the attachment of the international community to multilateralism and the international legal order, which was denied. Since its inception, UNEP had galvanized commitments and action to address the world's most pressing environmental challenges, and under UNEP leadership the world had seen an ever-stronger and growing global environmental agenda, and a whole network of multilateral environmental agreements developed under the Programme's auspices. Such agreements

reflected global consensus on the challenges humanity faced, and were a testament to the importance of international solidarity in addressing them. Much progress had been achieved, but the world was far from overcoming all environmental challenges, and the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution must be tackled in an integrated way, through multilateralism and international cooperation, which were more important than ever. In closing he drew attention to three landmark resolutions adopted by the Environment Assembly at its resumed fifth session, on the development of an international legally-binding instrument to address plastic pollution, the use of nature-based solutions to address biodiversity loss and climate change, and the start of a process towards the establishment of an intergovernmental panel on chemicals, waste and pollution, which proved that, together with UNEP, Member States were strongly committed to tackling the triple planetary crises without delay.

### **3. Group of 77 and China**

37. The representative of Colombia [f], speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the influence of the developing world had been significant throughout the 50-year history of UNEP, including through the leadership of two Executive Directors, namely Mr. Mostafa Tolba from Egypt and Mr. Achim Steiner, a German-Brazilian national, who had both shaped the contours of the leading global environmental authority. Reflection on past achievements also provided an opportunity to reinvigorate international cooperation and spur collective action and, in the context of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as referred to in the General Assembly resolution 66/288 entitled “The Future We Want”, it was important to underline the relevance of recognizing the individual efforts that developing countries were making to fulfil their environmental commitments in the context of multilateral environment agreements, taking into consideration national circumstances and priorities. It was also vital to develop integrated international and national financing frameworks, in support of nationally owned sustainable development strategies, in order to implement the Addis Ababa Action Agenda further, thus effectively mobilizing and aligning a wide range of financing sources and instruments with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, making use of the full potential of all means of implementation.

### **4. Latin American and Caribbean States**

38. The representative of Chile [f], speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States, said that the resolutions adopted at the resumed fifth session served as a strong indication to the world of the commitment of Member States and stakeholders to global environmental challenges, even during difficult and uncertain times. UNEP had, throughout its history, played a fundamental role in integrating different visions into the policy decision process and promoting global and multilateral agreements to protect the planet on the basis of scientific knowledge, such as the ozone treaties. It was therefore regrettable that important obligatory and voluntary targets relating to substances harmful to the ozone layer had been missed or were in danger of not being met.

39. She welcomed the political declaration adopted by the Environment Assembly at the current session. The declaration reaffirmed the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities enshrined in General Assembly resolution entitled 66/288, and would serve as a tool for supporting the strengthening of international environmental governance within the context of the institutional framework for sustainable development, renewing efforts at all levels to enhance implementation of existing obligations and commitments under international environmental law and recalling the need to enhance the provision and mobilization of all types and sources of means of implementation.

### **5. Asia-Pacific States**

40. The representative of Oman, speaking on behalf of the Asia-Pacific States, said that UNEP continued to hold the key role in dealing with environmental crises. Now, more than ever, it was vital for all countries to strive to strengthen their resilience in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had highlighted the interconnection between human and environmental health. It was incumbent on everyone to play their part to protect the planet in the face of the triple planetary crises, and the 50-year anniversary of the founding of UNEP served as an opportunity both to reflect on the achievements of the past and to commit to a path for the future founded on joint efforts.

### **6. Arab States**

41. The representative of Oman, speaking on behalf of the Arab States, said that, in its fifty years of existence, UNEP had acquired a wealth of experience that had seen an increasing role for the environment in the international arena since the world had first recognized its central importance at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. It was now time to reflect on the



lessons learned over the last five decades and to focus on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, while giving special consideration to the circumstances and needs of developing countries and those countries that were most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In closing, he paid tribute to Egypt's Mostafa Tolba, who had served as second Executive Director of UNEP for 17 years, and he expressed appreciation to the President, the Bureau, the Executive Director of UNEP and her team, and to the Government of Kenya for organizing the fiftieth anniversary commemoration.

## **V. Presentation of the report of the Executive Director on the science-policy interface (agenda item 5)**

42. Introducing the item, the President [f] drew attention to a report by the Executive Director entitled "Reflecting on the past and imagining the future: a contribution to the dialogue on the science-policy interface," which was set out in the annex to the note by secretariat on progress in the implementation of resolution 4/23 on enhancing the science-policy interface of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/EA.SS.1/2).

43. In her presentation of the report, the Executive Director drew attention to ozone-depleting substances, mercury and lead in petrol as three examples where the journey from science to policy to action had saved millions of lives and protected the environment. Yet in all cases, there had been a significant time lag between the identification of the problem by science and the policy and action needed to address it. In the case of ozone-depleting substances, the time lag of thirteen years from science to action had been due in part to industry resistance, and in part to the slow flow of information in the pre-Internet days. In the case of climate change and biodiversity loss, scientific panels had been raising alarms for some time, yet action continued to be insufficient, perhaps because climate change and nature and biodiversity loss had seemed like a future threat. However, it was now clear that they constituted immediate threats that were causing death and human suffering, be it from more frequent and intense storms and droughts, degraded soils incapable of producing food, or polluted air.

44. In order to address the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, it was essential to close the time lag between scientific discovery and action by creating a nimbler and more inclusive science-policy interface. The creation of this new interface would require reform in four broad areas. First, there was a need to make knowledge production systems more streamlined, efficient and open, and to provide real-time information on threats and solutions accessible to people everywhere. The revamped UNEP World Environment Situation Room would serve to fill that role, but, in order to ensure action followed, monitoring and evaluation of implementation would be critical. Second, science must be more proactive and identify existing and potential new solutions through mechanisms such as early warning, foresight, scenario-building, predictive analytics and a new generation of integrated assessment models. Three, the science-policy interface must involve not only scientists and politicians, but also engage with every group with an open mind, in particular, with indigenous peoples and local communities, who had managed their land in harmony with nature for centuries and held invaluable traditional knowledge on solutions, as well as the private sector, which when determined to find solutions helped to effect change at lightning speed. Fourth, the digital revolution, which had democratized communication and the transmission of ideas, must be embraced; it was a great accelerator that held enormous potential if digital tools were used well.

45. In a nutshell, there was a need to rapidly develop specific and relevant solutions through the engagement of diverse stakeholders, and to communicate those solutions quickly through real-time digital tools. If this new science-policy interface were created, science would become more accessible, trusted and democratic, and therefore more useful. Society would be involved in producing and acting on science, while decision makers would have a wider range of solutions on which to act.

## **VI. Presentation of the stakeholder report entitled "The UNEP We Want" (agenda item 6)**

46. Ms. Yugratna Srivastava, co-facilitator of the children and youth major group, provided an overview of the methodology used to produce the report entitled "The UNEP We Want". Her group, together with the science and technological community major group, had been mandated by the Major Groups Facilitating Committee, in October 2020, to lead the development of the report, with the mandate being recognized by the Environment Assembly at the online meeting of its fifth session and subsequently during various subcommittee meetings; the process thereby serving as a model for designated and meaningful civil society engagement. The time-consuming, bottom-up consultation

process had ensured that substantive information had been gathered as to how UNEP was viewed by the global population, and a consensus-based process had been used in drafting the joint statement of the major groups and stakeholders included in the report. The power of collective engagement and of youth was reflected in the membership of the drafting team, the majority of which were based in countries of the global South, and which included, among others, young parents, full-time research students and those engaging with the United Nations system for the first time, all working against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

47. Mr. Stephen Stec, co-facilitator of the scientific and technological community major group, noting that the compilation process had truly been an example of intergenerational equity, provided an overview of the outcomes of the report, which hinged on diversity, equity and recognition. Major groups and stakeholders required opportunities to eschew the typical requirement of international processes that they speak with one voice, allowing the diverse voices of a complex global society to be heard. It was also necessary sometimes to allow traditionally marginalized voices to be louder than others, in order to redress imbalances in access and opportunity that persisted within both UNEP and its governing body. Although the effectiveness of UNEP at the national level had continuously improved, its visibility remained low at the grass-roots level and it lacked the resources and autonomy to work effectively with local and national communities. The open-access and responsive science-policy interface could support marginalized and indigenous communities, but more needed to be done. The authoritative voice and the information platform of UNEP was highly valued, sometimes even making the difference between life and death, but the organization needed to strengthen its support of the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and do more to address all aspects of environmental equity and justice, in particular for those disproportionately affected by the triple planetary crises.

48. The major groups and stakeholders should not be considered as a monolith or merely representatives of special interests, as they already resolved among themselves complex positions on many challenging and diverse issues, and therefore should receive more recognition and be used more effectively by UNEP. Annual meetings of the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, with Member States attending as observers, would allow for the body to set its own agenda and pass its own resolutions in years when the Environment Assembly was not being held, allowing for emerging issues to be identified, long-term challenges to be set and proposals formulated.

## **VII. Leadership dialogues (agenda item 7)**

49. [to be completed]

### **A. Looking back: 50 years of UNEP**

50. [to be completed]

### **B. Looking forward: achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for people and planet**

51. [to be completed]

## **VIII. Multi-stakeholder dialogue (agenda item 8)**

52. [to be completed]

## **IX. Adoption of the political outcome of the session (agenda item 9)**

53. At the opening plenary meeting of the special session, the President recalled that the Environment Assembly, in its decision 5/3, had decided that it would finalize, at the resumed meeting of its fifth session, implementation of the mandate entrusted to it by General Assembly resolution 73/333 of 30 August 2019 to prepare a political declaration for a United Nations high-level meeting and invited the General Assembly to consider the appropriate event for the adoption of such a declaration, including the option of adopting it as one of the outcomes of the special session. At its resumed fifth session, the Assembly had endorsed the draft political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme” and recommended it for adoption at the special session.

54. The Environment Assembly adopted, by consensus, the political declaration of the special session of the United Nations Environment Assembly to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme". The declaration is set out in [to be completed]

**X. Adoption of the report of the session and the Chair's summary (agenda item 10)**

55. [to be completed]

**XI. Closure of the session (agenda item 11)**

56. [to be completed]

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