

**OECP-6 speech
(12 minutes)**

Web title: Setting the stage for powerful decisions at the UN Environment Assembly

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Welcome to the Sixth Meeting of the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives. We are gathering a week ahead of the sixth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6). At a time when the kind of unity this committee, and the assembly itself, has demonstrated down the years is more important than ever. At a time when multilateralism must transcend geopolitical strife and tackle three environmental planetary crises; delivering climate action, nature action and pollution action. This work is at the heart of UNEP's mandate. Get it right, and we can build a future that works for everyone – the underlying principle of the SDGs.

I am grateful for a strong statement of intent at UNEA-6. As of today, we have 6,000 registered delegates. 179 countries represented. 139 ministers and vice ministers. All record highs. We have seven heads of state attending. And registration is still open. There are 218 different events over the next two weeks, with 133 different organizers and 256 speakers. This makes UNEA more powerful and representative than ever.

Let us also remember that the Youth Environment Assembly got the ball rolling this weekend. Over 300 youth from across the world gathered to put forward their ideas and perspective on UNEA resolutions. This culminated in a Global Youth Declaration on Environment that they presented to me yesterday. Let me tell you, they did not hold back. The declaration is a clarion call from these young leaders that nothing less than the most ambitious UNEA will be enough.

We all know that UNEA itself gets the glory. But this committee is the engine under the hood, electric of course, that takes those resolutions to the verge of the finishing line. For that, I thank you.

Excellencies,

On your docket this week are 20 draft resolutions and two decisions, which you will finesse, finalize and hopefully agree to forward to UNEA-6. You have already done a huge amount of work to bring us to this point. For that I thank you – and my special thanks to the co-facilitators for their leadership. My thanks also to the Chair and Bureau of the committee for the excellent intersessional preparatory work. Now I ask for a final push to get as many resolutions as close to the finishing line as possible. Be ambitious. Be cooperative. Set the tone for a UNEA that smoothly delivers effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to solve the most urgent and emerging environmental challenges.

I am particularly pleased to see that many of the resolutions before you are focused around areas that I highlighted in my report to UNEA-6. Resolutions on mining, desertification, sand

and dust storms, water and so much more. Resolutions that will empower UNEP to support Member States, and the wider world, to deliver on important deals, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Paris Agreement and the new Global Framework on Chemicals.

These obviously remain your resolutions. The point of my report was to put forward suggestions based on UNEP's horizon scanning, which comes from our mandate to keep the environment under review – a mandate strengthened by the Rio+20 outcome on the Future We Want. In essence, we flag issues of concern and areas of work; it is then up to Member States whether to pick up on these issues.

One such issue, which I mentioned in my report, is climate-altering technologies. Solar Radiation Modification is a rapidly advancing field of technology that's being investigated. This is not science fiction. We need to be clear-eyed and well informed. Once the genie is out of the bottle, we can't stuff it back in and ignore it.

Let's think about UNEP's history. We, and many others, have had to come in and try to rectify problems because the impacts of new technologies hadn't been fully thought out. Ozone-depleting substances. Carbon dioxide and methane emissions. Lead in petrol. Mercury. Plastic polymers. Had we followed the precautionary principle, the world would not be in the state it is today.

This is a crucial lesson for SRM, since a single actor's unilateral decision could affect the whole world. We need a global conversation among all member states, based on the best science. This is why we released UNEP's One Atmosphere report. Why we briefed on the issue in New York, in Geneva and in Nairobi. And why we will continue to keep a watch and brief on this issue.

Excellencies,

New resolutions are not the only items on your packed agenda. UNEP's Deputy Executive Director Elizabeth Mrema will present reports on the organization's budget and programme performance, as well as progress on the resolutions passed at UNEA 5.2. You will hear more from her and the wider team later. You will also find copies of the 2023 Annual Report on your desks. Copies in all UN languages are available at the back of the room.

On performance, allow me to shed some light on the Evaluation Office's 'Synthesis Report' for the 2022-2023 biennium, which found solid results on project delivery. For example, 96 per cent of projects evaluated were rated as satisfactory or higher on strategic relevance.

Allow me also to recall Member States' recurrent request to elevate Nairobi as the world's environmental hub. The UNEP compound was home to IPCC 15. SBSTTA 25. MOP 35. INC 3. Meanwhile, Kenya hosted the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi. All of this in the second half of last year. The message is clear: environmental diplomacy in Nairobi delivers.

UNEP has also been busy on the international environmental scene. At COP28, UNEP's Emissions Gap Report and Adaptation Gap Report informed and drove negotiations. The UNEP-led Cool Coalition teamed up with the UAE presidency for the Cooling Pledge, to which over 60 countries signed up. UNEP was deeply involved in new efforts on tracking and cutting methane emissions. And more.

From implementing Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, to the gaveling of the Global Framework on Chemicals in September, to plastic negotiations and the science-policy negotiations, we were fully engaged. And we will be equally engaged in the upcoming UNCCD COP16, hosted by Saudi Arabia.

UNEP has also been working hard to make the organization more global and fit for purpose. The new Climate Change Division is up and running, as planned. At this meeting, you will also hear figures on our diversity, which show that the balance between under-represented regions and over-represented regions is going in the right direction. As part of this process, the first cohort of the Young Talent Pipeline onboarded in January.

We hope to accelerate this process – although the UN liquidity crisis will have a negative impact. Unfortunately, we have had to freeze Regular Budget posts. The liquidity crisis could also worsen the disconnect between the load of resolutions and the budget for their implementation. However, we will continue to look at how to satisfy demands by Member States in the resolutions space with the budget available. Here, I would again like to thank the Member States who filled the Environment Fund up with US\$88.9 million in 2023, an increase of almost ten per cent over the previous year and the best result since 2009.

Excellencies,

UNEP and the environmental agenda have made great strides. The immediate job now is to lengthen these strides through the resolutions and decisions you will pass at UNEA-6. I urge you to do your utmost to set the stage for UNEA-6 to be a roaring success, because this is not just an opportunity to strengthen environmental action and UNEP itself. It is an opportunity for Members States to build a bridge between UNEA-6 and the Summit of the Future. And make no mistake, it is the future that you are shaping. A future in which all nations and peoples live in peace, prosperity and equity. A future that will only be made possible by a stable climate, healthy nature and a pollution-free world.

I thank you.