

Meeting of the Bureau of the UN Environment Assembly
16 May 2024
16:00 – 18:00 (GMT+3)
Online meeting

Agenda item 5: Consideration of the process to define the theme for UNEA-7

This note, entitled “Guidance on the theme for the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly”, serves as a background document for consideration under agenda item 5 – Consideration of the process to define the theme for UNEA-7. The Bureau may wish to agree on the proposed guiding principles, basic criteria and timeline, and to request that the secretariat provide possible themes for consideration at the next meeting of the Bureau.

Guiding questions:

- 1. How can the theme for the Environment Assembly better help to ensure a focused and strategic UNEA-7?*
- 2. Are the proposed guiding principles and criteria, as well as the proposed timeline outlined in this document, relevant?*
- 3. Would the Bureau have any preliminary thoughts on a possible theme?*

Guidance on the theme for the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

I. Introduction

The United Nations Environment Assembly, as the highest-level global decision-making body on environmental issues, provides an unparalleled platform for countries to come together to tackle pressing environmental issues. It is a forum with unique authority to reach global agreement on the most pressing and emerging environmental issues. Armed with the right focus and political resolve, the Assembly has put science on the global multilateral table and shaped historic results for people and planet. It has provided a biennial boost to action on a range of issues, particularly those that are not the focus of specific conventions.

The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, in her report to the sixth session of the Environment Assembly, stated that “the Environment Assembly must be a standard-bearer as an effective, inclusive and multilateral forum where solutions are sought and agreement is reached: an Assembly that watches over the world, scales up action and responds to its most critical challenges, an Assembly that highlights emerging environmental issues while scanning the horizon for future problems, an Assembly that consolidates agendas, decisions and stakeholders to fill the gaps in international environmental governance, a bolstered Assembly that can play its part in revamping multilateralism while providing greater capabilities to the entire United Nations system and Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals”.

The seventh session of the Environment Assembly will take place after the fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States, to be held in Antigua and Barbuda from 27 to 30 May 2024, on the theme “Charting the course toward resilient prosperity”; the Summit of the Future, to be held in September 2024, aiming to build upon the Sustainable Development Goals Summit and deliver an action-oriented Pact for the Future to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity scheduled for October 21 to November 1 2024, in Cali, Colombia, as well as the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on 2-13 December 2024.

In addition, the "Second World Summit for Social Development" will convene in 2025 to address gaps, recommit to the principles outlined in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action, and give momentum to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Also, a high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (the 2025 UN Ocean Conference) will be co-hosted by France and Costa Rica and held in Nice, France, from 9 – 13 June 2025, and the 30th session of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is scheduled for mid-November 2025.

Furthermore, pursuant to UNEA resolutions the intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, as well as the ad hoc open-ended working group on a science-policy panel to

contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution, are expected to have completed their work by the end of 2024.

Importantly, the Environment Assembly will be approving UNEP's draft programme of work and budget for the period 2026-2027 and the draft medium-term strategy for the period 2026-2029 at its upcoming seventh session.

As the world's only universal-membership forum for the environment, the Environment Assembly can provide a platform for courageous decisions and new ideas to come to the fore. This can be achieved starting with a focused and strategic theme which gives Member States and stakeholders clear directions towards an ambitious and bold seventh session of the Environment Assembly.

II. Mandates

Decision 6/7 on the provisional agenda, date and venue of the seventh session of the Environment Assembly:

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), in its decision 6/7 of its sixth session entitled "Provisional agenda, dates and venue of the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly":

- a. Decided that the **seventh session** will be held in **Nairobi from 8 to 12 December 2025**.
- b. **Requested the Bureau of UNEA**, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR), **to define a theme for the seventh session** of the Environment Assembly no later than **twelve months in advance of the seventh session**.

This entails that the Bureau of UNEA should define the theme in early December 2024, at the latest.

Final outcome of the Consensual Process for Review by the Committee of Permanent Representatives

In the final outcome of the Consensual Process for Review by the CPR, as endorsed by UNEA in its decision 5/4, the specific guidance relating to the theme of UNEA reads as follows:

- a. Under the guidance of the UNEA Bureau and the Secretariat, **ensure that the UNEA theme provides a framework for political debate at the high-level segment as well as for official UNEA events**, including UNEA side events, the Major Groups and Stakeholder Forum, and the Sustainable Innovation Expo and the Science Policy Business Forum, and that **it informs Member States in their preparation of draft UNEA resolutions**, while fully respecting Member States' right to table draft resolutions on any subject in accordance with the UNEA Rules of Procedures (paragraph 1).

- b. Under the guidance of the UNEA Bureau and with the support from the Secretariat, and taking into account inputs from Major Groups and Stakeholders, **strengthen the science-policy interface at UNEA** by:
 - **Facilitating science-based decision-making**, where relevant, through dedicated briefings and consultations on the theme of UNEA and/or proposed resolutions, as appropriate (paragraph 8 (a)).
- c. In accordance with the UNEA Rules of Procedures and established practices, including as outlined in the UNEP Stakeholder Engagement Handbook, **strengthen the participation of and meaningful involvement of representatives of Major Groups and Stakeholders at UNEA and its preparatory process**, including in the context of selecting the UNEA theme ... (paragraph 9).
- d. The Bureau shall, in consultation with members of regional groups ... prepare for the sessions of UNEA, including **by providing guidance on the selection of an overarching theme ...** (paragraph 16, A.111 (c)).

III. Proposed guiding principles for defining the theme for UNEA-7

The Bureau of UNEA has a unique responsibility to define the main theme that will advance the work of the Environment Assembly.

The choice of theme is very important, as it contributes to the framing, authority, relevance and effectiveness of the Assembly and its outcomes. Therefore, in making their decision, the Bureau may wish to consider the following principles which have guided past sessions:

- The theme should contribute to the implementation of commitments included in the 2030 Agenda, the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), and relevant resolutions and declarations adopted by previous sessions of the Assembly.
- The process to define the theme should be based on broad, inclusive and transparent consultations, including the Committee of Permanent Representatives and major groups and stakeholders.
- The theme should provide the vision and sound political backing for an ambitious ministerial outcome document and a limited number of draft resolutions.
- The theme should be agreed in a timely manner and at the latest by early December 2024.

IV. Basic criteria for defining a theme.

Lessons learned from past UN Environment Assemblies point to the importance of timely identification of politically appealing and strategic themes. To facilitate the process, the following basic set of criteria have proven useful, namely, that the theme should:

- Provide clear vision and focus for UNEA-7
- Contribute to addressing the root causes of present environmental challenges as well as highlighting any emerging environmental issues that warrant international debate and policy guidance.

- Promote the development of science-based, actionable and solution-oriented outcomes that can deliver against multiple Sustainable Development Goals.
- Ensure alignment with the mandate of the Environment Assembly and relevance for the United Nations system as a whole.
- Be crisp, concise, easily communicable and understood by a specialist as well as general public.

V. Proposed timeline for consultations.

The Bureau may wish to consider the proposed timeline for consultations on the theme:

May 2024

- Initial discussion in the Bureau of UNEA.

June/July 2024

- Joint meeting of UNEA and CPR Bureaux to consider options for a theme, based on the proposals provided by the secretariat.
- Consultations with regional and political groups under the leadership of members of the UNEA and CPR Bureaux members.
- Consultations under the Committee of Permanent Representatives, including in the context of the 11th annual subcommittee meeting.

November 2024

- Additional consultations during the CPR subcommittee meetings, as needed.
- Additional consultations with regional and political groups through the UNEA and CPR Bureaux members, as needed.

December 2024

- UNEA Bureau meeting - Final decision by the UNEA Bureau on the theme.

VI. Background information

Overview of the themes of the previous sessions of UNEA:

- 1st [2014] “Sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda, including sustainable consumption and production” and “Illegal trade in wildlife.”
- 2nd [2016] “Delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”
- 3rd [2017] “Towards a pollution-free planet”
- 4th [2019] “Innovative Solutions for Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production”
- 5th [2021 and 2022] “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.”

- 6th [2022 and 2024] “Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.”

Themes of UNEP@50 and Stockholm+50

- UNEP@50 - "Strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”
- Stockholm+50 - “Stockholm+50: a healthy planet for the prosperity of all – our responsibility, our opportunity.”

Themes of the high-level political forum on sustainable development:

- 2019 “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.”
- 2020 “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for Sustainable Development.”
- 2021 “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for Sustainable Development.”
- 2022 “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”
- 2023 “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”, focusing on Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals).
- 2024 “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”, focusing on Goals 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals).

Themes of the future high-level political forum on sustainable development, under consideration in the General Assembly of the UN:¹

- For 2025: Advancing sustainable and inclusive solutions for leaving no one behind, focusing on Goals 3 (good health and well-being), 5 (gender equality), 10 (reduced inequalities), 14 (life below water) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals)
- For 2026: Transformative actions for a sustainable future for all, focusing on Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals)
- For 2027: Scaling up transitions for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda, focusing on Goals 4 (quality education), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 15 (life on land) and 17 ((partnerships for the Goals)

¹ To be revised based on the GA resolution to be adopted at the 78th session.