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

**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the
United Nations Environment Programme
151st meeting
Nairobi, 14 September 2020**

**Draft minutes of the 150th meeting of the Committee of
Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment
Programme, held on 30 April 2020 by videoconference****Agenda item 1****Opening of the meeting**

1. The meeting was opened at 2.05 p.m. on Thursday, 30 April 2020, 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 84 participants representing 61 members and 1 observer mission.
3. The Chair expressed condolences for the victims of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic around the world and within the United Nations. He congratulated representatives for their participation in the current first virtual meeting of the Committee, a significant achievement and precedent in the governance of UNEP. There would be no interpretation at the present meeting, which, on an exceptional basis, would be conducted in English only.
4. The representative of the secretariat said that a summary of work done to secure remote interpretation services had been posted on the meeting website. Testing was under way and it was to be hoped that a remote interpretation solution would be available in time for the next meeting in the event that pandemic restrictions continued.
5. The Chair said that the Minister for Climate and Environment of Norway, Mr. Sveinung Rotevatn, had been elected as the President of the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme on 1 March 2020. He had prepared a video address, which was available on the meeting website.
6. The representative of Norway invited representatives to view the video and noted that the joint meeting between the bureaux of the Committee and of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, scheduled to be held in Oslo in early June, would be conducted online, as would other meetings held in the context of the preparations.
7. The Chair congratulated Ms. Saqlain Syedah, Vice-Chair of the Committee, and Mr. Ado Lõhmus, Vice-President of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, who had been appointed by the President of the Environment Assembly and the Chair of the Committee to co-facilitate the informal consultations on the follow-up on General Assembly resolution 73/333, entitled "Follow-up to the report of the ad hoc open-ended working group established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/277."

8. The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Committee: Mr. Alejandro Montero Cid (Chile); Mr. Visvaldas Kulbokas (Holy See); Mr. Nagaosa Daisuke (Japan); and Mr. Ndong Dieng (Senegal).
9. He then bade farewell to the following departing members, thanking them for their contribution to the work of the Committee: Mr. Marco Ganci (Holy See); and Mr. Nobukazu Naniwa (Japan).

Agenda item 2

Adoption of the agenda

10. The agenda was adopted on the basis of the provisional agenda (UNEP/CPR/150/1/Rev.1).

Agenda item 3

Adoption of the draft minutes of the 149th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

11. The Committee adopted the minutes of its 149th meeting, held on 18 February 2020, on the basis of the draft minutes of the meeting (UNEP/CPR/150/2).

Agenda item 4

Report of the Executive Director

12. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a document entitled “Advance quarterly report to the 150th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. February–March 2020”.
13. In her oral briefing, the Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, Ms. Joyce Msuya, speaking on behalf of the Executive Director, Ms. Inger Andersen, expressed her deepest sympathies to those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic around the world, noting that, although the efforts of the world’s capitals were presently focused on the prevention of human suffering, the environmental agenda remained critically important as one of the most powerful safeguards against future global pandemics.
14. The pandemic had thrown the world into the worst recession since the Great Depression, but, despite the turmoil, UNEP remained open for business. Staff had adapted swiftly to working online and, notwithstanding some inevitable delays, progress had continued on the programme of work.
15. Although it was premature to speak of recovery, once the immediate medical emergency had passed, the world’s economies would be relaunched with renewed vigour to alleviate the suffering caused by the global tragedy of the pandemic. The United Nations had released a report, “A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19”, which highlighted the intimate relationship between humans, animals and the environment. Sustainable economic recovery could only be guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Environmental protection was central to sustainable and inclusive growth and to the protection of vulnerable populations against zoonotic diseases, biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change.
16. In response to the need of Member States to address the immediate challenges of the medical emergency, UNEP was supporting the strengthening of waste management systems; providing stronger scientific and policy support; and stimulating long-term green opportunities, with a focus on renewable energy, smart cities and infrastructure, green jobs, and sustainable consumption and production.
17. In the light of the rapid increase in medical and hazardous waste resulting from the pandemic, UNEP would assist Member States, guided by the implementation plan “Towards a pollution-free planet” (UNEP/EA.3/HLS.1) described in Environment Assembly resolution 4/21, to address gaps in medical waste management systems through capacity assessments, and would promote environmentally sound waste management technologies and methods to minimize the secondary impacts of such waste on human health and the environment.
18. It was time for humanity to review its relationship with nature. The *UNEP Frontiers 2016 Report: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern* had been prescient in sounding the alarm with regard to emerging zoonotic infectious diseases. COVID-19 was just one of many such diseases known to have crossed from animals to humans through pathways that were not yet fully understood. Mapping undertaken by UNEP on the links between deteriorating ecosystem health and habitat,

biodiversity loss and overexploitation of species would give Member States a clearer understanding of zoonotic transmission pathways and how to interrupt them. Such understanding was crucial to crafting better policy responses to guide human activities towards safer human-nature interactions and prevent future pandemics.

19. To protect human health, it was imperative to increase support for the global policy frameworks that safeguarded the environment and to achieve the milestones of 2020 with regard to biodiversity, chemicals management and climate change. UNEP was deeply committed to achieving a post-2020 global biodiversity framework and a framework for the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 that were ambitious, measurable and inclusive. Human health depended on strong planetary life support systems.

20. While the submission of new nationally determined contributions would be delayed due to the postponement of the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the pandemic was an opportunity to strengthen commitments further by creating green and sustainable job opportunities, promoting climate-friendly investment and building resilience when the time came to revive the world's economies. Stimulus packages should foster a recovery that "flipped the switch green", whether through investments in renewable energy or through improvements in industrial production, waste management and infrastructure. In the face of the collective vulnerability revealed by COVID-19, it was critical that recovery efforts be green, resilient, inclusive and sustainable.

21. The work done by UNEP to support Member States with regard to green fiscal stimulus packages and financing was focused on five design principles, namely, the centrality of green and decent jobs and income; investments in public wealth and social and ecological infrastructure; circularity to advance sustainable consumption and production; responsible finance for climate stability and ecosystem integrity; and socially inclusive outcomes.

22. The United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19 called for the mobilization of the UNEP Partnership for Action on Green Economy, whose operations in 20 countries could also provide integrated support on green jobs, the economy and the environment through peer-to-peer learning and knowledge transfer in the context of post-pandemic stimulus and recovery programmes.

23. New ways of working might inform and even enhance environmental diplomacy when face-to-face meetings were not possible. UNEP continued to support staff at multilateral environmental agreement secretariats to develop innovative methods of keeping environmental governance on track, by reviewing the legal, logistical, environmental and political implications of new methods and processes.

24. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, planet Earth had delivered its strongest warning yet that humanity must change. The global lockdown had shown a glimpse of an alternative future where wildlife reappeared in urban areas and skies were cleaner, but such benefits would not endure unless economies were built to work with nature rather than against it.

25. Climate change had not paused for the pandemic. The uncertainty caused by the pandemic paled in comparison with the uncertainty to be expected with planetary warming of 3–4°C. There were no individual solutions; only global ones. Decisive and united action must be taken to protect the planet from both threats to ensure that decades of progress in the fight against poverty were not erased and that what was built back after the pandemic was stronger and more resilient than before, and to protect planetary health and, in so doing, protect the health of all.

26. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the Deputy Executive Director for presenting the report of the Executive Director and the Bureau and secretariat for enabling the meeting to be held by virtual means. A number of representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, thanked the secretariat for the work of the task force on remote interpretation, and one thanked Member States for their flexibility in agreeing to hold the current meeting without interpretation. One representative remarked that, while the report was much improved, the reporting mechanism remained overly burdensome; it was to be hoped that a web-based solution would soon be available.

27. Turning to the pandemic, several representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed their sympathies to those affected around the world. Several representatives expressed their support for greater global solidarity at such a critical juncture, and a number noted that enhanced support should be directed towards the most vulnerable populations and regions, especially in Africa, whose special needs and circumstances should be taken into consideration.

28. Many representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, agreed on the urgent need for humanity to shift course towards a more sustainable future, expressed their support for the determination to “build back better” in the wake of the pandemic and concurred with the linking of economic recovery efforts to green stimulus packages. One representative, noting that financial and investment decisions could lock in negative environmental effects for years, specifically called on UNEP and its Member States to take advantage of recovery efforts as an opportunity to strengthen green and sustainable practices and the sound management of hazardous and chemical waste. In that regard, the reform of the United Nations development system presented timely opportunities. Another representative, noting the urgency and importance of making the transition towards green energy production and its vast promise to better the future of humanity, said that, by making it the focus of pandemic recovery efforts, governments would reap the twin benefits of stimulating the economy and achieving the transition.

29. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the fifth session of the Environment Assembly was an opportunity to address post-COVID-19 recovery initiatives in a manner that was in harmony with nature and with the respect for climate and the environment that was now imperative. It also represented an unprecedented opportunity to set the tone and agenda for pandemic recovery efforts, which must be implemented with an acknowledgement of the link between ecosystem and human health, with continued efforts to address marine litter and plastic pollution, and by taking courageous action to prepare a high-level political declaration.

30. A number of representatives underscored the close linkages between the health of ecosystems and human health, and several expressed their commitment to work tirelessly to address the climate and biodiversity crises in a unified, synergistic manner. In that regard, one representative noted the critical need to protect biological diversity and ecosystem integrity and highlighted the importance of elaborating a robust post-2020 biodiversity framework and of promoting the prioritization of biodiversity conservation across all economic sectors.

31. Several representatives expressed concern that the climate and biodiversity crises would exacerbate the proliferation of zoonotic diseases, and all who spoke agreed that further scientific research should be conducted in that field. In that regard, one representative, noting that the focus with regard to the transmission of zoonoses had been on the wildlife trade, drew attention to intensive animal husbandry and bioindustry and said that increased research was warranted on both of those vectors.

32. A number of representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed satisfaction at the gains made by the secretariat with respect to gender parity, while noting that equitable geographic representation had not yet been achieved. Several representatives said that their understanding of the implementation by UNEP of geographic equity had been marred by the fact that the regional groups described in the quarterly report of the Executive Director did not correspond to those used by the United Nations. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that his region remained the most underrepresented in UNEP and urged the secretariat to continue to prioritize equitable geographic representation. Several representatives requested that the gender parity information be reissued using the United Nations regional groupings.

33. A number of representatives expressed their appreciation for the increased cooperation and synergy with other United Nations entities mentioned in the report and requested more details on new or enhanced partnerships and how they would contribute to the effort to “build back better”. One representative asked how UNEP intended to engage with the United Nations system in the design of pandemic response funding instruments, noting that the role of UNEP was to provide expertise rather than to work on the ground. Another representative noted that the normative role of UNEP was more important now than ever.

34. Thanking representatives for their comments and support, the Deputy Executive Director said that the secretariat would amend the report with regard to the geographic regions used in the evaluation of progress in achieving gender parity. Regarding UNEP engagement with the broader United Nations system in formulating its response to the pandemic, she said that the Executive Director had been liaising with the office of the Secretary-General and with upper management across the system on the United Nations framework for urgent socioeconomic support to countries and communities in the face of COVID-19. In that regard, the Partnership for Action on Green Economy was an example of collaboration between UNEP and other United Nations entities in supporting countries to “build back better”. Colleagues in various regions were working with the secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora through the Resident Coordinator system, and a memorandum of understanding had been signed for the multi-partner trust fund for COVID-19 response and recovery announced by the Secretary-General.

Priority attention was being given to partnerships to support the green deal of the European Union and to deepen scientific knowledge of zoonotic diseases. Plastic pollution remained a strong focus and would continue to be addressed through the UNEP programme of work.

Agenda item 5

Implementation of paragraph 8 of Environment Assembly decision 4/2

35. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to section VII of a note on the preparations for the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEP/CPR/150/3), which was available on the meeting website, and recalled that, in paragraph 8 of Environment Assembly decision 4/2 on the provisional agenda, date and venue of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, the Executive Director had been requested to prepare, in consultation with Member States, the commemoration of the creation of UNEP by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm from 5 to 16 June 1972, making use of contributions from relevant stakeholders. At the sixth annual meeting of the subcommittee, in October 2019, the Government of Sweden had offered to host a high-level political meeting in Stockholm in early 2022 with assistance from the Government of Kenya. The Executive Director had also conducted informal consultations with regional and political groups on the way forward with regard to the commemoration.

36. The Deputy Executive Director thanked representatives for their participation in the consultations, whose results had fed into the creation of the proposal for launching the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UNEP during the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. The purpose of doing so was twofold: to contribute to the strengthening of UNEP and of global environmental governance; and to provide a forum in which, in the context of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 73/333, ministers for the environment and leaders in the global environmental community could address the environmental challenges facing the world.

37. The representative of the secretariat drew attention to a slide presentation entitled “Update on the preparations for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Environment Programme”, which had been uploaded to the website of the meeting, and provided a brief overview of its key information.

38. The slide presentation covered five points: the status of the consultations held by the Executive Director; the launch of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of UNEP; engagement and outreach after the launch; an update on the work on the science-policy interface mandated by Environment Assembly resolution 4/23 entitled “Keeping the world environment under review: enhancing the United Nations Environment Programme science-policy interface and endorsement of the Global Environment Outlook”; and the process for continued consultations with Member States.

39. At the 149th meeting of the Committee, in February 2020, the Executive Director had reported on the results of her consultations, which had revealed broad support for hosting the commemoration of the establishment of UNEP at the Programme’s headquarters in Nairobi and for launching the commemoration during the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in February 2021. Strong support had also been registered for broad participation by civil society and stakeholders, which suggested a process of commemoration rather than a single event. Finally, Member States strongly supported the holding of a high-level meeting pursuant to the mandate set out in General Assembly resolution 73/333, and it was understood that the proposal by the Government of Sweden with the support of the Government of Kenya to host that high-level meeting was distinct from the commemoration of the creation of UNEP mandated in Environment Assembly decision 4/2.

40. Launching the commemoration of the establishment of UNEP during the fifth session of the Environment Assembly would enable the achievement of a number of UNEP goals and would showcase the work of its partners, the secretariat, the Bureau and the Committee, in particular recent efforts to conduct online meetings, which represented a significant contribution to the modernization of global environmental diplomacy. The secretariat had a vision of engagement and outreach that would consolidate ownership by civil society, citizens at large and multilateral environmental agreements in the commemorative activities, leaving no one behind.

41. UNEP and the multilateral environmental agreements for which it provided the secretariat and accredited organizations would play a very special role in the commemoration activities, including through a proposed subcommittee that would prepare a proposal for science-policy input on the global environment, among other work, during the lead-up to both the fifth session of the Environment Assembly in 2021 and the high-level meeting in Stockholm in 2022.

42. In that regard, the secretariat had been working with the UNEP Science Division on three initiatives: a report on the global state of the environment; a review of 50 years of strengthening the science-policy interface; and a project which would see all the major United Nations environmental assessments presented in one place on a global assessment dialogue platform.
43. With regard to the way forward, the secretariat proposed that Member States discuss the matter with a view to supporting the launch of the commemoration of the establishment of UNEP during the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, and that a subcommittee meeting be organized as soon as practicable in the light of the constraints imposed by the pandemic. The subcommittee would consider a detailed proposal for science-policy input, provide feedback to the secretariat on engagement and outreach activities with regard to the commemoration of the establishment of UNEP, and provide a forum for Member States to make proposals and share ideas with regard to the high-level political meeting.
44. Lastly, he emphasized that the Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director maintained their firm commitment to continued consultation on all aspects of the implementation of paragraph 8 of Environment Assembly decision 4/2.
45. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the secretariat for the report on the preparations for the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UNEP. Several representatives noted that the lack of simultaneous interpretation was significant during online meetings, urging the secretariat to pursue its efforts to resolve that issue. One, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, recalled that multilingualism was a key component of the proper functioning of the United Nations.
46. Most of the representatives who spoke agreed with the proposal of the secretariat to launch the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UNEP during the fifth session of the Environment Assembly. A number of representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, stressed the distinct nature both of the commemoration of the establishment of UNEP and of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, and noted that they had expected a separate, dedicated report on the commemoration. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, remarked that it had not been agreed that the fifth session of the Environment Assembly and the commemorative activities would share a theme. In that regard, she requested, supported by two other representatives, that the secretariat prepare a separate report on the commemoration and include the issue as a separate item on the agenda for the next meeting of the Committee. All the representatives who spoke expressed their willingness to engage in discussions on the substantive elements of the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of UNEP.
47. Among the representatives who supported the proposal of the secretariat, there was broad consensus that the launch of the series of commemorative activities, culminating in the high-level meeting in Stockholm in 2022, represented a unique opportunity to accelerate real action on the environment. Several representatives recalled that the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals continued to lag, so much so that it risked becoming the weak link in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Unprecedented cooperation would be required to avoid such an outcome. In that regard, two representatives said that the commemoration and the high-level meeting provided a unique platform that should be exploited to the fullest extent, including by fostering broader stakeholder participation through outreach to young people, women and members of civil society.
48. Many representatives agreed that the commemoration was an important opportunity to take stock of past successes and failures, and, even more so, to prepare a forward-looking plan to strengthen the role of UNEP, both within the United Nations system and as the leading global environmental authority. One representative said that the fiftieth anniversary could inspire change for many years to come, as it was an opportunity to reform environmental governance so that it was fit for purpose. Another representative noted that the two events represented a unique opportunity to seize the moment to accelerate political action on the environment, including on issues such as plastic pollution and sustainable consumption and production. In that regard, representatives remarked that participants should strive to find synergy between the two events, which should not be seen as competing, but rather should be brought together through a more systemic and efficient approach. If that were achieved, the actions to guide Member States in prioritizing the environmental dimension would become a very visible part of the 2030 Agenda. Most importantly, the events were an opportunity to reshape UNEP for better implementation of its programme.
49. Turning to the high-level political meeting to be held in Stockholm in 2022, one representative noted that since the event had been proposed, little information had been forthcoming on its purpose, and that which had been received did not mention sustainable development. Another representative requested that a separate meeting be convened to consult on the preparations for the fifth session of the

Environment Assembly and for the high-level meeting in Stockholm, noting that the preparation of a draft political declaration for possible adoption at the latter would require a concerted effort.

50. He did not support the convening of a fully fledged conference on the environment, as such an event could perpetuate a silo approach to environmental issues, conflict with the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which was the official body for the review of progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and lead to duplication of work and parallel tracks of negotiation. Finally, he proposed that the organization of the high-level meeting could be facilitated if its mandate were provided by a resolution adopted by the Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

51. Responding to the comments, the representative of Sweden provided an update on her Government's preparations for the high-level meeting, which, she said, was intended to serve as a forum for the furtherance of the environmental agenda and the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. The outcomes of the high-level meeting should be action-oriented and should identify and support the development of the policies required to fast-track implementation on the ground and break down silos to enhance integrated action by all. The contributions of civil society organizations should be elicited early in the process, as the Goals could not be reached without their active participation.

52. Although other processes would contribute to defining the content of the meeting, early dialogues had yielded several potential areas of focus that included the environment as an opportunity for social and economic development; the need for a deep green transformation and for building back better; gender and the environment; sustainable consumption, production and resource use; the transformation of financial flows; and the strengthening of the nexus between climate and environment. The presentation of the enabling resolution to the United Nations General Assembly, initially scheduled for the first quarter of 2020, had been delayed, but would take place as soon as possible in the light of the pandemic-related restrictions. She welcomed the detailed discussions expected to take place later in 2020 during the subcommittee meeting and was drafting a document that would be shared with representatives before the meeting. The significance and magnitude of the challenge of improving environmental governance, and the importance of achieving real, science-based progress during the decade of action for the environment, meant that the high-level meeting was a unique opportunity to add value to existing processes.

Agenda item 6

Preparations for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly

53. Introducing the item, the Chair drew attention to a concept note on the preparations for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly entitled "Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" (UNEP/CPR/150/3), and invited the representative of the President of the Environment Assembly, Ms. Elin Rognlie, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Norway to UNEP, to provide an overview of the preparations.

54. In her remarks, Ms. Rognlie welcomed the innovative approach being taken by UNEP with regard to the medium-term strategy and in its campaign urging States to "build back better". Highlighting the complex linkages between the three dimensions of sustainable development, she noted that progress had been lagging in the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals even before the pandemic, which was hindering progress in the other two dimensions and was holding back the achievement of all the Goals. In that regard, the role of the Environment Assembly was more important than ever at the current juncture; humanity must make a great leap forward for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The pandemic and its economic effects would have profound implications for how the shift towards a sustainable future would be made. The fifth session of the Environment Assembly was an opportunity to contribute to a broader discussion about recovery and to clarify the fact that economies would not get back on track if environmental concerns were sacrificed. It was very important for the theme of nature to remain at the core of the preparations for the fifth session.

55. The Deputy Executive Director said that the concept note outlined the key elements of the preparations for the fifth session of the Environment Assembly at a time when the Assembly, its mandate and its theme were more relevant than ever. Stressing that the pandemic highlighted the intimate relationship between humans, animals and the environment, she said that the fifth session of the Environment Assembly was a powerful opportunity to revisit humanity's relationship with nature. The medium-term strategy would promote a shift towards a relevant, meaningful and consistent global vision for UNEP that would be explored during further dialogues with Member States, stakeholders and multilateral environmental agreement secretariats. A limited set of ambitious resolutions and

decisions to maximize the communication of the Environment Assembly's message to all the citizens of the world would enhance its position and impact as the highest global environmental authority.

56. Drawing attention to a visual slide presentation, the representative of the secretariat provided an overview of the salient points of the concept note. First, it was imperative that the secretariat receive the feedback of representatives on whether the theme of the Assembly remained relevant in the light of the pandemic; second, a limited number of action areas for the preparations for the Assembly should be identified; third, efforts should be made to define a process that would limit the proliferation of draft resolutions; fourth, it was necessary to determine the modalities of stakeholder participation in the fifth session.

57. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives thanked the secretariat for the overview of the preparations. Several representatives stressed that the fifth session represented an important opportunity to accelerate the balanced implementation of the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development through continued work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. One representative asked how the Committee could best work to enhance the authority, impact and relevance of the Environment Assembly and how, in turn, the international community could benefit from its universal leadership. Several representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that it would not be desirable to rethink the approved framework for sustainable development and that the Committee's only mandate was to implement the 2030 Agenda and its Goals.

58. A number of representatives noted that the Environment Assembly should serve to strengthen UNEP and raise its visibility as the global environmental authority guiding the environmental agenda. Several said that a strengthened UNEP would have an enhanced capacity to provide real assistance to Member States in implementing their environmental commitments, in particular developing countries, which often lacked the means for implementation. Many representatives expressed support for the creation of synergies between UNEP, other United Nations entities and multilateral environmental agreement secretariats, while stressing the need to refrain from duplicating their work or encroaching on their mandates. One representative said that complementarity would be key in that regard and that UNEP should focus its efforts on strengthening the science-policy interface.

59. Two others representatives, one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noted that, although it was important to guard against encroachment on the mandates of other entities, UNEP had a clear mandate to build bridges within the United Nations system to enable cross-cutting environmental challenges to be addressed with greater efficiency, and that its programme of work and medium-term strategy included issues related to climate change, biodiversity and ecosystems. Another representative highlighted the crucial importance of the leading role of UNEP in promoting the collection of sound, aggregated global environmental and climate data, which would enable countries to find the best tools to address their specific challenges, and encouraged UNEP to continue with that work despite the complications caused by the pandemic.

60. Several representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the theme of the fifth session remained relevant in the current circumstances. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the proposal of UNEP to promote the concept of "building back better" after the COVID-19 crisis. A number of representatives highlighted the need to place nature at the centre of recovery efforts and to establish broad collaboration with the international environmental processes scheduled to take place in 2021, including the Food Systems Summit and processes related to climate, biodiversity, and chemicals and waste. Several representatives noted that the organization of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly might need to be adjusted in the light of the postponement, due to the pandemic, of many interlinked international environmental events in 2020.

61. With regard to the proposed action areas defined in the concept note, one representative welcomed their consistency with the mandates of the multilateral environment agreements and their focus on nature and ecosystems, noting that making reference to "human and ecosystem health" under the "Nature for health" action area would highlight the links between human health and the environment. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that showing the linkages between the action areas and related Sustainable Development Goals would enable work streams to be clustered and facilitate the monitoring of progress, while another said that efforts should be made to ensure the consistency of initiatives taken under the proposed action areas with previous initiatives and frameworks, while continuing to consider emerging dynamics. Another representative requested more information on how the action areas had been defined and underscored the importance of using science as the basis for crafting informed policy decisions, noting that the key findings of the

sixth Global Environment Outlook report and of thematic assessments, such as the global chemicals and resources outlooks, provided ready-made frameworks to define the areas requiring political action.

62. Several representatives, including two speaking on behalf of groups of countries, expressed appreciation for the proposal to organize draft resolutions into four omnibus resolutions, while one noted that the proposal aligned with the goal of increasing the Committee's efficiency and could be discussed during the process to review its work. One representative noted that reports on the implementation of Environment Assembly resolutions included recommendations that could usefully contribute to the work of Member States in drafting follow-up resolutions. The reports should be made available to members before the annual subcommittee meeting to allow ample time for their consideration during drafting, which could help to avoid duplication. Another representative said that resolutions should be concise and impactful and should focus on areas where the impact of UNEP was vital.

63. With regard to the UNEP medium-term strategy, two representatives expressed their appreciation for the interactive sessions scheduled by the secretariat to begin as soon as possible, and one suggested that feedback on the strategy could be solicited from ministers for the environment by means of surveys or by inviting their suggestions via email. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the strategy should support the implementation of Environment Assembly resolutions, while taking into consideration new and emerging trends and mainstreaming gender issues across all programmatic activity. Another representative expressed reservations with regard to making the COVID-19 pandemic the focus of the strategy, noting that the imperatives of the environmental crisis would far outlast the crisis caused by the coronavirus.

Agenda item 7

Contribution of the Environment Assembly to the 2020 high-level political forum on sustainable development

64. Introducing the item, the Chair said that the secretariat and Bureau had been working with Member States to reach agreement on the long-overdue contribution of the Environment Assembly to the 2020 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development. Following discussions on 2 April at a subcommittee meeting and a silence procedure, a fifth version of the document, which enjoyed the support of the Chair and the Bureau, had been submitted for a new silence procedure on 24 April. Two Member States had broken the silence and the Chair had decided to include the matter as an agenda item for the present meeting with a view to reaching consensus on the document and submitting it to the President of the Environment Assembly for his consideration and onward transmission to the President of the Economic and Social Council.

65. Recalling that, rather than having been negotiated, the text had been developed by the secretariat based on guidance from Member States, the Chair asked whether members had any objections to the text as reflected in the fifth version of the document, which was available on the meeting website.

66. In the ensuing discussion, one representative said that his delegation had broken the silence because changes had been made to the document in breach of the silence procedure. Another representative said that his delegation had broken the silence because the circumstances resulting from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had complicated the ability of delegations to contribute in a timely and effective manner to the drafting process of the document. It was to be hoped that the final document would include reference to the critical need to provide means of implementation to developing countries, and that the lessons learned from the experience with the document could serve to guide the future work of the Committee, given that the current working methods might apply for some time.

67. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, expressed regret at the need for the inclusion of the present agenda item, which represented a setback at the end of a confusing process. While it was absolutely necessary for the Committee to agree on a text that was as close as possible to the version obtained in early April after input from all members, he was willing to support the compromise document put forward by the Chair and the Bureau, in particular in the light of the need to submit the document to the Economic and Social Council as soon as possible. He recommended that further discussions be held on the process, but that consideration of the document be concluded.

68. Another representative lamented the fact that the process had not yielded the concise, substantial document required to strengthen UNEP, the Environment Assembly and the Committee, and said that the delay in submitting it meant that it was now too late for the document to contribute meaningfully to the annual meeting of the high-level political forum. He proposed that, in the future, the secretariat should propose a few concise and carefully considered recommendations, which would then be submitted to the Committee for its consideration and input. The resulting version would be submitted to the President of the Environment Assembly, who, along with the Bureau of the Assembly, would finalize it and submit it to the Economic and Social Council. Most of the representatives who spoke highlighted the need to improve the process to ensure that it was well-managed, transparent and in compliance with established procedures.

69. The Committee agreed to convey the revised document to the President of the Environment Assembly for its subsequent transmission to the Economic and Social Council.

Agenda item 8

Report of the Subcommittee

70. The Committee took note of a document entitled “Chair’s report of the subcommittee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives”.

Agenda item 9

Other matters

71. There were no other matters.

Agenda item 10

Closing of the meeting

72. The meeting was declared closed at 6.40 p.m. on Thursday, 30 April 2020.
