

Agenda Item 5: “Stockholm + 50” – an opportunity to consider a new long-term vision for the global environmental agenda in the context of the 2030 Agenda

Introduction

This discussion paper outlines various opportunities to celebrate the 50-year anniversary of the UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 2022, and how to use this occasion as a possible opportunity to consider a new comprehensive long-term vision for the global environmental agenda in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Background

On 15 December 1972, the General Assembly established the United Nations Environment Programme through its resolution 2997 (XXVII), as a follow-up to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in June 1972, with the aim to meet the "urgent need for a permanent institutional arrangement within the UN System for the protection and improvement of the environment." The Programme was created to coordinate environmental programmes within the United Nations system; to advise UN intergovernmental bodies on the formulation and implementation of environmental programmes; to secure the effective co-operation of, and contribution from, the scientific and other professional communities; and to provide advisory services for the promotion of international co-operation in the field of the environment.

During its more than 45 years, the UN Environment Programme has played a significant role in raising the awareness on the state of the environment and new and emerging environmental challenges at the global, regional and national levels; supporting science-based policy decision-making; developing international environmental agreements; promoting environmental science and information; and promoting policy development, developing partnerships, strengthening regional institutional capacity, and promoting a proactive engagement of non-State actors, such as environmental non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other stakeholders. A non-exhaustive selection of key achievements of the United Nations Environment Programme and the UN Environment Assembly is listed as an Annex to this document.

In September 2015, a new comprehensive framework for the achievement of global sustainable development was agreed by Heads of State and Government at UN Headquarters in New York at the UN Sustainable Development Summit. The agreement, entitled, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," includes a plan of action for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, to be implemented by the year 2030. The process of arriving at the post 2015 development agenda was led by Member

States with broad participation from Major Groups and other civil society stakeholders. The UN System, including the UN Environment Programme, is currently undergoing significant and comprehensive reform measures, including at country level, to effectively support its Member States in implementing this agenda.

In this context, the recent General Assembly resolution 72/277 of 10 May 2018 entitled “Towards a Global Pact for the Environment” may also be relevant. By that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session in 2018 a technical and evidence-based report that identifies and assesses possible gaps in international environmental law and environment-related instruments with a view to strengthening their implementation. UN Environment is entrusted with preparing this report. The General Assembly also decided to establish an ad hoc open-ended working group under the auspices of the General Assembly, to consider the report and discuss possible options to address possible gaps in international environmental law and environment-related instruments, which may include the scope, parameters, feasibility of an international instrument and convening of an intergovernmental conference to adopt an international instrument.

Looking ahead: “Stockholm + 50 and the possible need for a long-term vision for the global environmental agenda

Looking ahead, 2022 will mark the 50th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference and the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme. It also marks the 30-year anniversary of the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio in 1992, and it will also be half-way into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It may take place against the backdrop of a possible Pact for the Environment, and post-2020 strategic frameworks and approaches for e.g. biodiversity, international management of chemicals, sustainable consumption and production, and possibly other environmental policy processes with a time frame beyond 2020/2030. The anniversary may be useful opportunity to take stock of progress, and possibly consider a new comprehensive vision for the global environmental agenda applying a long-term [2050] perspective. Several options to frame such a discussion could be considered;

- **A Special Session of the UN Environment Assembly** (in accordance with rule 5 of the Environment Assembly Rules of Procedure) could be organized in 2022 in Nairobi, Stockholm or elsewhere, with the participation of Ministers of Environment, high-level representatives of the UN system and representatives of Major Groups and other stakeholders. Such a meeting could explore which efforts and policies implemented over the past 50 years have solicited effective action, strengthened cooperation among Member States, and raised awareness to protect and conserve the environment worldwide. The Special Session could identify challenges that still need to be addressed, secure renewed political commitment to act, and effectively contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This would require a specific decision to be taken at the fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly in March 2019. The meeting could

result in a Ministerial or other High-Level Declaration outlining a vision for addressing future environmental challenges. Alternatively, it may also be a ceremonial meeting, without substantive negotiated outcomes.

- Another option is to organize a dedicated **United Nations Environment Conference or Environment Summit** in 2022 focusing on the environmental dimension of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. This conference could also commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference and the UN Environment Programme and consider a vision for addressing future environmental challenges. This would require a resolution of the UN General Assembly, including on the date and venue of the special conference/summit, as well as the outcomes.
- A third option is to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference and the UN Environment Programme and consider a long-term vision for the future at a dedicated **meeting during the high-level segment of the General Assembly** in September 2022. This would also require a specific decision of the General Assembly.

Key questions for further consideration

1. *How can we use the occasion of the 50-year anniversary of the UN Environment Programme to raise awareness about global environmental challenges, and consider a new vision for the global environment?*
2. *How should the role of the UN Environment Assembly and the UN Environment Programme evolve in the era of the UN 2030 Agenda and UN reform, to ensure that the environment is fully integrated into the implementation process?*
3. *How can the UN Environment Assembly and the UN Environment Programme support the process and implementation of new environmental targets beyond 2020, such as the biodiversity strategic framework and its targets, targets adopted under the new Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, and a possible Pact for the Environment?*
4. *How can we best commemorate the 50-year anniversary of the UN Environment Programme in 2022?*

ANNEX: A non-exhaustive selection of key achievements of the United Nations Environment Programme and the UN Environment Assembly

- The 1985 Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which protect the ozone layer by reducing the production and consumption of ozone depleting substances.
- The Regional Seas Programme, which includes thirteen regions involving more than 140 coastal states and territories, designed to protect the marine environment and mitigate environmental degradation in oceans and coastal areas including through international legal instruments (regional seas conventions).
- Establishing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading international body for the scientific assessment of climate change, with the World Meteorological Organization in 1988.
- The science-based analysis of the Programme provided a basis for informed facilitation, negotiation and adoption of the Rio generation conventions agreed in 1992, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.
- The Basel (1989), Rotterdam (1998), Stockholm (2001) and Minamata (2013) Conventions, which protect human health and the environment against adverse effects of hazardous wastes, chemicals and mercury.
- The contribution as implementing partner to the Global Environment Facility which today is the world's largest public funder of projects to improve the global environment.
- The development of regular, authoritative and scientifically based global and regional environmental assessments of the state of the environment.
- The "Finance Initiative" which promotes the integration of environmental considerations into internal banking operations and business decisions, banking products and services, and financial risk management.
- A solid contribution to the formulation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators, pursuing the principle of integrating environmental considerations into all Goals.

At the Rio+20 Conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, Heads of State and Government committed to strengthening the role of the United Nations Environment Programme as the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment. They reaffirmed General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII), as well as the 1997 Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of UN Environment Programme, and the 2000 Malmö Ministerial Declaration. The General Assembly was invited to adopt a resolution strengthening and the UN Environment Programme at its sixty-seventh session.

On 21 December 2012 the General Assembly agreed to establish universal membership for the Governing Council of the UN Environment Programme (resolution 67/213), which was transformed **the United Nations Environment Assembly**. Since then, the Environment Assembly has met three times (in 2014, 2016 and 2017) in Nairobi. The last session was organized as a special session to mark a transition from the even-year to odd-year cycle.

The **First Session** took place from 23-27 June 2014, on the themes “Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including sustainable consumption and production”, and “Illegal trade in wildlife”, including the escalation in poaching and related environmental crimes. The session adopted one decision and 17 resolutions. A Ministerial Outcome Document was adopted, although several Member States noted reservations on this document.

The **Second Session** convened from 23-27 May 2016 on the overarching theme of “Delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” The High-Level Segment included interactive dialogues aimed at identifying relevant partnerships, policies and tools in areas including air quality, ecosystems, and chemicals and waste management. Ministers also discussed and endorsed the Global Thematic Report on “Healthy Environment, Healthy People.” The session 24 resolutions and two decisions, including on a number of organizational matters such as the UN Environment Programme Medium-Term Strategy 2018-21 and changes to the UNEA cycle to ensure a better fit with broader UN budgeting processes. A draft ministerial outcome document failed to achieve consensus.

The **Third Session** convened from 4-6 December 2017, under the overall theme “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet.” It gathered the highest number of participants ever attending an Environment Assembly or Governing Council, with over 4,300 delegates participating the Assembly and related events – including 1197 delegates from more than 170 Member States, 711 representatives of Major Groups and other stakeholders, and 94 intergovernmental organizations. The session adopted 11 resolutions and 3 decisions. For the first time, the session also adopted a negotiated Ministerial Declaration by consensus.