

Fifth Meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly

(UNEA-5, *on-line session*)

Nairobi, 22-23 February 2021

- Information from the Presidency and the Commission -

In light of the exceptional circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, UNEA-5 was split into two sessions: UNEA-5.1, which was held virtually on 22 and 23 February 2021, with a focus on urgent decisions to ensure the continuity of UNEP's activities, and UNEA-5.2, which will be an in-person session in February 2022, with the aim to consider substantive matters and for which there are high expectations. The overarching theme for the two sessions is "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals."

Following the recommendations of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR), which took place between 15 and 17 February, the UNEA-5 online session formally adopted three decisions: 1) on UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy for the period of 2022-2025 and the Programme of Work and Budget for the biennium 2022-2023; 2) on the management of trust funds and earmarked contributions; and 3) on the adjournment and resumption of UNEA-5.

The UNEA-5 online session also endorsed a political message which was prepared by Norway's Environment Minister and President of UNEA-5 Sveinung Rotevatn, entitled "Looking ahead to the resumed UNEA in 2022 – Message from online UNEA-5". This message was endorsed by all Member States and, although weakened in the course of consultations preceding the UNEA session in order to achieve consensus, it calls for urgent action to protect the planet, for a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and for progress in the upcoming meetings of UNFCCC, UNCCD, CBD and SAICM negotiations and for a high ambition for the resumed UNEA-5, namely to address marine litter and plastic pollution.

Delegates from 151 countries and more than 100 Ministers, including 20 Ministers of Environment and 6 Deputy Ministers from the EU, as well as high-level representatives of the civil society, participated in this online session of UNEA-5 and related side-events (Plenary and Leadership Dialogue, Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum, the Youth Environment Assembly, the Science Policy Business Forum).

Portuguese Minister of the Environment and Climate Action João Pedro Matos Fernandes delivered a statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States during the opening plenary. Commissioner Sinkevičius and several Ministers from EU Member States participated in the "Leadership dialogues" and in the Assembly's various events, and Director General Fink-Hooijer intervened at the adjournment session (on the political message of UNEA-5 and on UNEP@50).

Other high-level representatives who addressed the online session of the UN Environment Assembly with pre-recorded messages included, in the opening plenary, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the President of the UN General Assembly Volkan Bozkir and the Cabinet Secretary of Environment and Forestry of Kenya, Keriako Tobiko, on behalf of the host country. During the adjournment session, ECOSOC's President Munir Akram addressed the plenary, as did the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta. UNEP's Executive Director Inger Andersen made various interventions on several points of the agenda.

Most representatives made strong political statements on the need to tackle the pressing environmental planetary crisis. Particularly during the "Leadership Dialogues", the message on green recovery and transition came across very strongly, pointing at the pandemic and related recovery packages as an opportunity to reset the socio-economic system and boost investments in green jobs, infrastructure and technologies. The leaders highlighted the central role of nature for human well-being and sustainable development and the role of nature-based solutions for addressing other planetary crises, notably climate change and pollution, while highlighting concrete economic benefits.

Among the several issues referred, this UNEA-5 session was conducive to aspirations towards launching negotiations on a global agreement on plastics with positive remarks from a significant number of UN Member States, such as the United States and Russia. In this regard, Germany announced the intention to convene, together with Ghana, Ecuador and UNEP, an international Ministerial Conference on marine litter and plastic pollution towards the end of the third quarter of 2021.

In the adjournment session, Kenya's President Kenyatta kicked off the commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the creation of UNEP by the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, which will culminate in a Special Session to be held back-to-back with the resumed session of UNEA-5. In a subsequent intervention, Sweden referred to its offer to host Stockholm+50, a UN high-level meeting, in June 2022, underlying the complementarity between the two events.

In addition, several side-events took place, including notably the launch of the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency (GACERE) by the EU, together with UNEP, UNIDO and several partner countries (11 have already joined). The side-event confirmed EU leadership in driving the global transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and circular economy, in line with the Council conclusions on the March 2020 Circular Economy Action Plan. Prior to UNEA session, the UN Secretary-General, also launched the flagship UNEP "Synthesis Report" (*Making Peace with Nature*), co-financed by the EU. The report received very good references from a number of Ministers in their respective interventions. Other events included "Ocean Action for Sustainability - Building a global vision to tackle plastic pollution" promoted by Kenya and UNEP with the participation of the Portuguese Minister of the Sea.

In sum, the various outcomes and side-events addressed, among others, the following themes: innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production, environmental governance, resource efficiency, chemicals and waste, marine litter and microplastics, biodiversity and ecosystems.

The EU and its Member States stand ready and look forward to continuing working towards an ambitious and successful resumed session in 2022, which ensures the implementation of effective measures addressing global environmental concerns, while promoting long-term resilience and sustainable development.
