

Summary of the 5th Meeting of the UN Environment Assembly: 22-23 February 2021

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), the highest decision-making body on environmental matters in the UN system, had no choice but to meet virtually for its fifth session. Overcoming technological and time zone challenges, UNEA's first online session was successful, adopting a limited set of three procedural decisions: endorsement of the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for 2022-2025, and programme of work (PoW) and budget for the biennium 2022-2023; the management of trust funds and earmarked contributions; and agreement to convene a resumed, in-person fifth session in 2022.

These procedural decisions allow the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to continue its work strengthening the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNEA-5 also endorsed a statement entitled "Looking ahead to the resumed UNEA in 2022 – Message from online UNEA-5." The message highlights, among others, the three major environmental crises that UNEP has committed to addressing: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

The Assembly also launched the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the creation of UNEP by the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972. Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, commenced the commemoration, stressing that it provides an opportunity for both celebration and reflection. A two-day Special Session celebrating the event will take place in Nairobi, Kenya, in March 2022.

Over half of the online session of UNEA-5 was devoted to a high-level leadership dialogue. Ministers, other senior government officials, and civil society representatives outlined their contributions to the environmental dimension of sustainable development and building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world. They also communicated their vision for united work under UNEP.

Key points from the dialogue include:

- nature's health and human health are inextricably linked;
- the nature crisis is interlinked with the climate and pollution crises;
- the COVID-19 pandemic is both a threat and an opportunity;
- green recovery should put us on a path towards a low-carbon, sustainable world;
- green recovery must address the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable;

- UNEP has a crucial role to play in environmental governance; and
- multilateralism has never been more important since the environmental crisis knows no boundaries.

The online session of UNEA-5 convened from 22-23 February 2021. One-hundred fifty-one Member States were registered for the virtual session, which attracted 12,000 online attendees.

A Brief History of the UN Environment Assembly

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) was formed in the wake of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), in response to the grave challenges stemming from environmental degradation, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and rising inequality among a global population projected to reach 11 billion by the end of the 21st century.

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Origins of UNEA

The United Nations Environment Programme was created as a result of the [1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment](#), which established UNEP as the central UN node for global environmental cooperation and treaty making through UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 2997 (XXVII). The UNEP Governing Council (GC) was established as the main governing body with the UNGA electing its 58 members, based on the principle of equitable geographic representation. The Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF) was constituted by the GC, as envisaged in UNGA resolution 53/242 (1998). Whereas the GC had a programme-focused role in reviewing and approving UNEP's activities and budget for each biennium, the GMEF reviewed important and emerging policy issues in the field of the environment.

Some of the highlights from GC/GMEF sessions from 2000-2012 include:

- adoption of the Malmö Ministerial Declaration in 2000, which agreed that the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development should review the requirements for a greatly strengthened institutional structure for international environmental governance;
- creation of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management;
- the 2005 Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-Building;
- establishment of the *Ad Hoc* Open-ended Working Group to Review and Assess Measures to Address the Global Issue of Mercury; and
- establishment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

The twelfth GC Special Session from 20-22 February 2012, in Nairobi, Kenya, marked UNEP's 40th anniversary.

Rio+20 convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 13-22 June 2012. Its outcome document, "The Future We Want," called on the UNGA to strengthen and upgrade UNEP through several measures, including, *inter alia*:

- introducing universal membership of the UNEP Governing Council;
- ensuring secure, stable, adequate, and increased financial resources from the UN regular budget;
- enhancing UNEP's ability to fulfill its coordination mandate within the UN system; and
- ensuring the active participation of all relevant stakeholders.

Following Rio+20, the UNGA adopted resolution 67/213 on strengthening and upgrading UNEP and establishing universal membership of its GC. On 13 March 2013, the UNGA further adopted resolution 67/251, which changed the designation of the UNEP GC to "the UNEA of the UNEP." The GC convened for the last time from 19-22 February 2013, in a universal session that laid the groundwork for the first meeting of UNEA to take place in June the following year.

UNEA thus subsumes the functions of both the GC and the GMEF, and provides high-level leadership on the global stage in a role described by former UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner as "the world's parliament on the environment."

The Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) is the Nairobi-based subsidiary body of UNEA, and meets intersessionally. With the advent of universal membership, the Open-Ended

Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR) meets in advance of each UNEA session to negotiate resolutions.

Key Turning Points

UNEA-1: Member States and international agencies hailed the first session of UNEA (UNEA-1), from 23-27 June 2014 in Nairobi, Kenya, as a "coming of age" for global environmental governance. Ministers adopted a ministerial outcome document, which reaffirmed their commitment to full implementation of the Rio+20 outcome as well as the Rio Principles from the 1992 Earth Summit. Delegates called for continued efforts to strengthen UNEP to support implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, which was then under negotiation.

In a high-level segment, ministers discussed the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including sustainable consumption and production, and illegal trade in wildlife, focusing on the escalation in poaching and the surge in related environmental crime. UNEA-1 also convened two symposia addressing two key aspects of environmental sustainability: the environmental rule of law and financing a green economy. UNEA-1 adopted 17 resolutions, including resolutions on strengthening UNEP's role in promoting air quality, combating illegal trade in wildlife, and taking action on marine debris and microplastics.

UNEA-2: UNEA-2, from 23-27 May 2016, endorsed a draft Global Thematic Report on "Healthy Environment, Healthy People" and adopted 25 resolutions, including one spelling out the roles of UNEP and UNEA in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by providing policy-relevant information through its assessment processes, supporting the work of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). Other resolutions addressed, *inter alia*, food waste, sustainable coral reef management, and protection of the environment in areas affected by armed conflict. Two ministerial roundtables addressed the links between environmental quality and human health and environment, addressing, *inter alia*, air and water quality, heavy metals, climate change, and marine plastic debris.

UNEA-2 also agreed to hold subsequent meetings in odd-numbered years, to be in line with the UN budgetary cycle.

UNEA-3: UNEA-3 took place from 4-6 December 2017, on the theme "Towards a Pollution-free Planet." UNEA-3 adopted 11 resolutions, addressing, *inter alia*, water pollution, soil pollution, lead paint, and management of lead-acid batteries. A resolution on the Sixth Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-6) report emphasized this publication as UNEP's flagship environmental assessment report, and agreed to time its release for UNEA-4. Discussions at UNEA-3 indicated that GEO-6 would focus more on emerging issues and policy effectiveness than previous publications.

UNEA-3 issued a ministerial statement, which underscored that everyone has the right to live in a healthy environment, and flagged concerns regarding the uncontrolled use of chemicals, the impacts of such pollution on the poor, and the environmental damage caused by armed conflict and terrorism.

UNEA-4: UNEA-4 took place from 11-15 March 2019, on the theme "Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production." UNEA-4 coincided with the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum; Science, Policy and Business Forum; Sustainable Innovation Expo; and the Cities Summit.

UNEA-4 concluded with the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration, 23 resolutions and three decisions, which addressed shared and emerging global environmental issues. The forum also endorsed the UNEP Programme of Work and budget for the 2020-21 biennium and launched the Sixth Global Environment Outlook report.

UNEA-5 Report

UNEA-5 President Sveinung Rotevatn, Minister for Climate and Environment, Norway, opened the online meeting of UNEA-5 on Monday morning, 22 February. He noted that 151 Member States were registered for the online session, proving that “we have adapted to a new way of doing things.” President Rotevatn called for transforming our relationship with our planet, identifying action to simultaneously address climate change, protect biodiversity, and reduce pollution.

Keriako Tobiko, Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Kenya, on behalf of UNEP’s host government, welcomed participants to the online session of UNEA-5, taking place “against the backdrop of the global pandemic and its serious consequences.”

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen emphasized that despite currently understanding the root causes of environmental crises, the situation is still worsening and demands drastic change. She urged all participants to do even more to rise to a challenge of existential proportion, committing to turning 2021 into the year humanity begins making peace with nature.

Hera Ali and Gyubin Hwang, representatives of the MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH, drew attention to the [Youth Environment Assembly](#), held prior to UNEA-5, and called for rights-based, equitable youth involvement in environmental processes. They further asked for incorporating intergenerational concerns, including economic losses to future generations, in decision making.

UNGA President Volkan Bozkir outlined current worrying trends regarding species’ extinction, global warming, and land degradation, underscoring the “pressing demands on a planet whose capacity cannot meet our needs.” He called for turning the pandemic into an opportunity, pursuing true transformational change, using the SDGs as our compass.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that the pandemic has caused turmoil worldwide and consequently, inequalities are growing. He emphasized that the busy year ahead is critical for resetting our relationship with nature and further articulating the environmental dimension of sustainable development. He stressed the need to adopt clear action plans in forthcoming meetings on climate change, biodiversity, the ocean, pollution, and plastics to address the impending challenges.

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, drew attention to the African Green Stimulus Programme, adopted by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), to address the impacts of COVID-19. She welcomed the UNEP MTS 2022-2025, the PoW, and the budget, but stressed virtual sessions do not provide a level playing field for participants, highlighting the previous week’s OECPR meeting and its technical and connectivity issues. She supported adopting a possible consensual message or statement as an outcome of this session.

Oman, for the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, highlighted that COVID-19 provides an opportunity to build back better. He announced that the region has committed to reaching zero plastic litter by 2050. He also stressed the worrying trend of regional sandstorms and increasing desertification, underscoring the need for urgent action.

Argentina, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP, focused on the unprecedented challenge posed by COVID-19. He noted UNEP has risen to this challenge, but that the virtual format magnifies imbalances. Argentina drew attention to the Bridgetown Declaration, signed at the 22nd Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean in February 2021, which highlights the need to transform the current crisis into an opportunity, ensuring economic revival integrates environmental imperatives.

Malawi, for the GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA (G-77/CHINA), drew attention to [The SDGs Report 2020](#), which notes that, for the first time since 1998, global poverty is increasing. He noted how eradicating global poverty remains the greatest global challenge. He highlighted how virtual sessions have shown that the digital divide is real, but also acknowledged that virtual sessions have facilitated the participation of countries without diplomatic presence in Nairobi.

Portugal, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION (EU), also representing Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine, stressed the importance of achieving the SDGs and using UNEA-5 as the launching pad to accelerate environmental ambition in the upcoming crucial Conferences of the Parties (COPs) of the Rio Conventions. He highlighted that the UNEA-5 theme of strengthening action for nature to achieve the SDGs is “not a slogan but a necessity; nature cannot wait.”

Oman, on behalf of the LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES, delivered a statement highlighting the importance of strategic cooperation at UNEA-5.

SWITZERLAND noted that environment and human health is a constant, therefore multilateral work is a necessity and cannot stop, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COLOMBIA highlighted its national and regional strategies to preserve and protect the environment.

JORDAN asserted how this pandemic has forced the world to better understand the linkages between nature and people and drew connections between Jordan’s humanitarian crises through the continued arrival of refugees and its persistent environmental challenges.

NICARAGUA noted that the emergence of zoonotic diseases provides an opportunity to rethink our development models, moving towards production and consumption patterns that respect the planet.

Emphasizing collective responsibility for a healthy future, ALGERIA focused on national efforts to ensure environmental protection and social development, prioritizing ecosystem restoration and actions to address soil degradation.

TANZANIA commended efforts to use nature-based solutions to achieve the SDGs in their social, economic, and environmental dimensions, and called for increased support for access to finance, technology, and innovative solutions for post-pandemic recovery.

BANGLADESH noted that the pandemic undermines progress towards climate change and sustainable development. He drew attention to an ambitious recovery programme at the national level, and called for international cooperation for faster, cheaper, and easier recovery.

Organizational Matters

On Monday morning, President Rotevatn introduced the meeting's agenda (UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1) and organization of work (UNEP/EA.5/1/Rev.1/Add.1). Delegates adopted them without amendments.

He noted that, in light of the exceptional circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, this online session of UNEA-5 would undertake initial consideration of Agenda Items 1- 4, 6, 8, 12 and 15. He added that the remaining items on the agenda will be considered at the resumed in-person meeting of UNEA-5, to be held in 2022.

President Rotevatn further said that two sessions of a leadership dialogue would be held on the afternoon of Monday, 22 February, and the morning of Tuesday, 23 February, respectively, on the theme of "Contribution of the environmental dimension of sustainable development to building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world," to facilitate the participation of representatives from different time zones.

UNEA Vice President Ado Lohmus (Estonia) presented the report of the Credentials Committee. UNEA-5 took note of the report.

Report of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR)

On Monday, CPR Chair Fernando Coimbra (Brazil) presented the report on the work of the online part of OECPR-5 (UNEP/OECPR/5/3) and the report on the work of the CPR since UNEA-4 (UNEP/EA.5/INF/2).

He noted that, since UNEA-4, the CPR held eight regular meetings, two meetings of the Annual Sub-Committee for implementation review and oversight, and multiple meetings in smaller formats to fulfill its role during the intersessional period. He highlighted the three draft decisions recommended for adoption by UNEA-5; commended all for their commitment in challenging times; and underscored that the CPR's role is even more relevant in the forthcoming period until the resumed session of UNEA-5.

UNEA-5 took note of the report.

Programme of Work and Budget, and Other Administrative and Budgetary Decisions

President Rotevatn introduced three draft decisions, reminding delegates that they had been extensively deliberated upon at the online session of OECPR-5 and recommended them for adoption.

UNEA-5 adopted the draft decisions on: management of trust funds and earmarked contributions; the adjournment and resumption of UNEA-5 and OECPR-5; and an MTS for 2022-2025, and PoW and budget for the biennium 2022-2023.

Decision on management of trust funds and earmarked contributions: The decision (UNEP/EA.5/L.2) establishes trust funds for the revolving fund activities of the Bamako Convention; the "Faith for Earth Coalition" and the UNEP Financial Services Initiative. It also approves the extension of the trust funds for, *inter alia*, the Adaptation Fund Board; the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment; Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-lived Climate Pollutants; UNEP's Implementation of the Ecosystem Based Adaptation; and trust funds in support of regional seas programmes, conventions, protocols, and special funds.

Decision on the adjournment and resumption of UNEA-5: In the decision (UNEP/EA.5/L.3), UNEA-5, *inter alia*:

- Decides to adjourn UNEA-5, and to resume deliberations at its headquarters in Nairobi from 28 February to 4 March 2022;

- Decides that OECPR-5 will resume from 21-25 February 2022, and requests the CPR to decide on the format and agenda of its meeting;
- Calls upon the Secretariat and Member States to continue work on all relevant work streams, with a view to continue joint efforts to strengthen actions for nature to achieve the SDGs, and to follow-up on relevant mandates from previous sessions of UNEA;
- Takes note of the reports of the UNEP Executive Director submitted to UNEA-5 on progress achieved in the implementation of UNEA resolutions, as set out in the annex to this decision, and decides to review these reports at the Annual Subcommittee Meeting in 2021 and the resumed session of UNEA-5;
- Decides that at its resumed session, UNEA-5 shall finalize implementation of UNGA resolution 73/333 to prepare a political declaration for a UN high-level meeting, and invites the UNGA to consider the appropriate event for the adoption of such declaration, including the option of adopting it as one of the outcomes of the special session of UNEA to commemorate the 50th anniversary of UNEP, taking into account the result of further consultations;
- Recommends that the CPR, at its 154th meeting, shall consider, in view of systemic problems, in a comprehensive manner, the cycle of term of office of the CPR Bureau in relation to the UNEA Bureau;
- Decides that the resumed UNEA-5 shall consist of plenary meetings, a sessional Committee of the Whole, and a high-level segment, including leadership dialogues and a multi-stakeholder dialogue;
- Strongly encourages Member States to submit draft resolutions for consideration by the resumed session of UNEA-5 at an early stage, preferably at least eight weeks in advance of the resumed session of OECPR-5 to allow for a productive period between the virtual and resumed session of UNEA-5, taking into account the limited time and resources available for negotiation of such draft resolutions; and
- Decides to convene a special session of UNEA to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of UNEP to be held in conjunction with the resumed session of UNEA-5, for two days in March 2022 in Nairobi, under the leadership of the Presidency and the Bureau of UNEA-6.

Decision on the MTS 2022-2025 and PoW and budget for the biennium 2022-2023: In the decision (UNEP/EA.5/L.4), UNEA-5, *inter alia*:

- Approves the MTS 2022-2025 and the PoW and budget for the biennium 2022-2023;
- Approves appropriations for the Environment Fund in the amount of USD 200 million for the biennium;
- Stresses the need for the PoW and budget to be based on results-based management;
- Authorizes the Executive Director to enter into forward commitments not exceeding USD 20 million for Environment Fund activities, to implement the 2022-2023 PoW;
- Requests the Executive Director to continue to improve the achievement of programme objectives, and the efficient and transparent use of resources to that end, subject to UN processes of oversight, review, and independent evaluation; and to ensure

that trust funds and earmarked contributions to UNEP are used to fund activities that are in line with the PoW;

- Urges all Member States and others in a position to do so to increase voluntary contributions to UNEP;
- Welcomes the efforts made by the Executive Director, in close consultation with the CPR, to design a resource mobilization strategy that improves the adequacy and predictability of resources and encourages the Executive Director, in close consultation with the CPR, to implement the strategy with the priority to broaden the contributor base from Member States as well as other partners;
- Requests that the Executive Director in UNEP's recruitment strategy pay due regard to the principle of equitable geographical distribution, in accordance with Article 101, paragraph 3, of the UN Charter and submit a comprehensive report on human resources to be considered at the resumed session of UNEA-5; and
- Requests the Executive Director to submit for consideration and approval by the UNEA-6, in consultation with the CPR, a prioritized, results-oriented, and streamlined PoW for the period 2024-2025.

Leadership Dialogue

A high-level leadership dialogue convened Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning. Ministers, other senior government officials, and civil society representatives outlined their respective country's contributions to the environmental dimension of sustainable development to building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world, and communicated their vision for united work under UNEP.

UNEP Deputy Executive Director Joyce Msuya opened the dialogue on Monday, noting it constitutes a platform for sharing ongoing environmental initiatives and visions for a future post-pandemic world. Participants watched a short video, visualizing the impacts of the pandemic.

Andrea Meza Murillo, UNEA Vice-President and Minister of Environment and Energy, COSTA RICA, introduced the session, stressing the important role of environmental ministers. She called for political will, synergies between bodies and conventions, and mobilization of public and private funds to achieve environmental sustainability.

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen stressed that "leadership means trusting science, immediate action, living up to our agreements, financing solidarity, protecting the vulnerable, respecting multilateralism, and leaving no one behind," urging participants for immediate action.

Huang Runqiu, Minister of Ecology and Environment, CHINA, focused on the forthcoming COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to be held in Kunming, China. He underscored the need to adopt an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework to curb biodiversity loss, calling for global cooperation.

Svenja Schulze, Minister for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, GERMANY, emphasized the opportunity, in view of the investment programmes to tackle the pandemic, to invest in a sustainable and inclusive future. She highlighted the need to address the links between nature conservation and human health, and called for strong implementation mechanisms and adequate funding.

Carlos Correa Escaf, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, COLOMBIA, noted that the pandemic highlighted the fragilities of our economies and societies. He further outlined national efforts towards tackling deforestation, broadening the carbon market, and strengthening ecotourism.

John Podesta, Center for American Progress, noted the Biden Administration's commitment to international environmental obligations and urged setting biodiversity targets alongside climate ones as these challenges are interconnected.

Alue Dohong, Vice Minister of Environment and Forestry, INDONESIA, highlighted Indonesia's focus on green policies by, *inter alia*, introducing a social forestry programme, improving mangrove protection, and ecosystem and land resiliency. He drew attention to the fourth COP for the Minamata Convention, which Indonesia will host in Bali in November 2021.

Paula Cristina Francisco Coelho, Secretary of State for Environment, ANGOLA, explained how COVID-19 serves as a reminder of the intrinsic link between nature, our societies, and our economies.

Stientje van Veldhoven, Minister for the Environment, the NETHERLANDS, noted, "leadership is accepting science and moving forward." She highlighted the National Clean Air Agreement, and the National Plastic Pact, and invited all participants to the World Circular Economy Congress in April 2021.

Gabriel Quijandria, Minister of Environment, PERU, drew attention to the National Adaptation Plan and the country's circular economy approach. He announced that Peru intends to be carbon neutral by 2050.

Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment, EGYPT, noted how Egypt, as Presidency of CBD COP14, launched an initiative for a coherent approach to addressing biodiversity loss, climate change, and land and ecosystem degradation. Fouad also highlighted her government's USD 1.9 billion budget portfolio dedicated to its Green Recovery Plan.

Bruno Oberle, Director General, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), highlighted that a nature-based recovery is cost-effective and creates jobs. He said the next IUCN Congress will forge a post-pandemic path.

Michal Kurtyka, Minister of Climate and the Environment, POLAND, stressed that cities are sensitive areas with special needs, highlighting Polish initiatives to improve rainwater management and urban greenery. He said Poland will host the 11th World Urban Forum in Katowice in 2022.

Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya, Minister of Environment, RWANDA, outlined Rwanda's in-depth assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on climate ambition and revision of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.

Rasheed Hassan, Minister of Environment, MALDIVES, highlighted the Maldives' plan to phase out single-use plastics. He underscored the need to further strengthen regional environmental governance and cooperation.

Malik Amin Aslam, Federal Minister of Climate Change and Advisor to the Prime Minister on Climate Change/Federal Minister, PAKISTAN, stressed that there is only one path out of COVID-19, and that is through nature-based recovery. He said UNEA-5 should send a clear message on this and noted Pakistan will host World Environment Day on 5 June 2021.

Gila Gamliel, Minister of Environmental Protection, ISRAEL, highlighted the national strategy towards a circular economy and the plan to generate 95% of electricity from renewable sources. She drew attention to efforts to address desertification and initiatives for innovative and efficient land use to protect biodiversity.

João Pedro Matos Fernandes, Minister of Environment and Climate Action, PORTUGAL, stressed the need to embody environmental principles in post-pandemic recovery plans. He emphasized that it is possible to decouple greenhouse gas emissions from economic growth, and highlighted the UN Ocean Conference, co-hosted by Kenya and Portugal.

Keriako Tobiko, Cabinet Secretary for the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, KENYA, outlined national efforts for environmental sustainability, including bans on single-use plastic, reforestation and restoration programmes, and waste management legislation.

Adrián Peña, Minister of Environment, URUGUAY, highlighted waste management policies at the national level and the path towards carbon neutrality. He drew attention to the Montevideo Environmental Law Programme, implemented by UNEP.

Marcia Bernicat, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and Environmental and Scientific Affairs, US, noted President Biden's remarks that urgent action is required to address the global environmental crisis. She highlighted the renewed US commitment to the Paris Agreement, and the need to address marine debris and ocean plastic.

Artūrs Toms Plešs, Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development, LATVIA, said that green recovery can provide an opportunity to build a more resilient and sustainable future. He highlighted national efforts to tackle climate change, promote sustainable agriculture, and move towards circular economic models.

Juan Cabandié, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, ARGENTINA, highlighted how Argentina has substantially increased its commitments to the Paris Agreement and tripled its budget for the preservation of forests and nature. He noted that Latin American countries continue to tackle large debts, requesting assistance in a way that is sustainable and to the benefit of the environment.

Ambassador Dmitry Maksimych, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, stated that despite many environmental initiatives placed on hold due to the pandemic, the Russian Federation continues to work towards a more sustainable, greener future by, *inter alia*, prioritizing its commitment to the Paris Agreement and launching a national campaign for forests.

Sonam Wangchuk, Civil Society Representative, India, explained his local community's endeavors to protect their mountains and glaciers, and beseeched inhabitants of large cities and governments to take more action and change their behaviors.

Peter Schiefke, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, CANADA, stated that Canada is committed to rebuilding a society that is more resilient and inclusive. In this vein, Canada intends to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 and has increased its marine protected areas to 14% of the country's total marine area.

Lea Wermelin, Minister for the Environment, DENMARK, highlighted a new climate law to cut CO₂ emissions by 70% by 2030. She drew attention to further investments in more sustainable

energy, transport, construction, and housing sectors. She further noted the introduction of greener farming technologies as well as work underway with other Nordic countries on marine litter.

Jorge Arturo Argueta Villamar, Undersecretary for Environmental Policy and Planning Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources, MEXICO, noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many prejudices of humanity and underscores the need for a "One Health" approach. He further stressed the importance of linguistic, cultural, and Indigenous heritages in Latin America as the true custodians of nature and, accordingly, urged for environmental considerations to be cultural and cross-cutting.

Barna Tanczos, Minister of Environment, Waters and Forests, ROMANIA, highlighted that his country is promoting sustainable development throughout public policy. He stressed commitment and cooperation are key as we are living in one of the most demanding periods in history.

Teresa Ribera, Deputy Prime Minister for the Ecological Transition, SPAIN, stated that Spain is using policy as a leverage for transformation, highlighting activities on ecosystems and wastes.

Marcus Henrique Morais Paranaguá, Deputy Minister for Climate and International Relations, BRAZIL, highlighted Brazil will achieve climate neutrality by 2060, but has not ruled out accelerating progress.

Leonore Gewessler, Federal Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, AUSTRIA, noted it has transferred its contribution to UNEP, but is happy to explore further cooperation. She stressed UNEP is the leading global authority on environment, well suited to setting the agenda and promoting coherent implementation.

Javier Naranjo, Minister of Environment, CHILE, said COVID-19 is an opportunity to build back better. He noted that Chile is predicting 180,000 new jobs in the area of circular economy by 2040.

Béringère Abba, Secretary of State for Biodiversity, FRANCE, highlighted the ecological transition at the national level with four priority sectors: building energy renovation; decarbonization of modes of transport; fair and sustainable agriculture; and green energy deployment.

Ján Budaj, Minister of Environment, SLOVAKIA, noted that the pandemic has paradoxically improved our chances to explain the need for change. He emphasized the need to leave no one behind, and underscored national efforts, including new protected areas and initiatives for biodiversity conservation.

Fekadu Beyene Aleka, Commissioner, Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Commission, ETHIOPIA, emphasized the need for green recovery, noting the devastating impacts of the pandemic. He drew attention to national efforts for clean energy generation, clean water supply, and biodiversity conservation.

Per Bolund, Minister for the Environment and Climate, and Deputy Prime Minister, SWEDEN, stressed that the future is fossil free, underscoring the need for continued investments in green technology and innovation, and circular business models. He highlighted the need to address marine plastic litter and pollution of microplastics, and invited all to Stockholm+50, the 50th anniversary since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the first UN Conference on the Human Environment.

Lee White, Minister of Forests, Oceans, Environment and Climate Change, GABON, noted that the pandemic is related to our broken relationship with nature, calling for building back greener

and better. He underscored Gabon's commitment to maintain national forest cover and highlighted initiatives towards a green, circular economy.

Hussein Makhoul, Minister of Local Administration and Environment, SYRIA, noted national efforts to address the pandemic.

Arlette Soudan-Nonault, Minister of Tourism and Environment, CONGO, highlighted national efforts on ecosystem restoration, the establishment of protected areas, and reforestation. She also drew attention to the need for sustainable management of the Congo Basin fragile ecosystem.

Vladislav Smrž, Vice President and Deputy Minister, Ministry of the Environment, CZECH REPUBLIC, noted that national recovery plans focus on principles of circular economy and energy saving. He called for credibility, efficiency, and effectiveness in projects to build a resilient post-pandemic world.

Guðmundur Ingi Guðbrandsson, Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, ICELAND, underscored that the climate crisis knows no boundaries, calling for synergies using nature-based solutions. He further highlighted the role of faith-based organizations discussing environmental issues.

Marco Lambertini, Director General, World Wildlife Fund, noted that we will only address the planetary emergency effectively if we address the interconnectedness between environmental, health, economic, and social issues. He expressed his optimism for a super year for nature and sustainability, halting and reversing current trends to meet future challenges.

On Tuesday morning, Bérangère Abba, Vice-President of UNEA Bureau and Secretary of State for Biodiversity, France, set the scene for the second session of the leadership dialogue. She noted that the pandemic revealed how vulnerable we are as a result of our disconnect with nature. She emphasized that sectoral policies are interlinked, calling for a cross-cutting, synergistic approach to achieve ambitious environmental goals.

Afroz Shah, Champion of the Earth 2016, India, underscored that implementation is key, stressing the need to engage everyone in environmental protection. He called for massively scaling up collaboration at the ground level to initiate action for change.

Roberto Cingolani, Minister of the Environment, ITALY, said that technology and innovation, used in a fair and reasonable manner, will be the engine of the required ecological transition. He highlighted UNEP's holistic approach, noting it will inspire the Italian forthcoming presidency of the Group of 20 (G-20).

Highlighting how the pandemic disturbed economic growth with vulnerable countries hit the hardest, Mohamed Mubarak Bin Daina, Chief Executive, Supreme Council for Environment, BAHRAIN, drew attention to national efforts to build back better. He described initiatives on air quality, sustainable production and consumption, and addressing sea-level rise.

Sonam Phuntsho Wangdi, Secretary of the National Environment Commission, BHUTAN, outlined national efforts for environmental protection based on the national philosophy of Gross National Happiness. He underscored health and socio-economic challenges related to the pandemic, calling for global solidarity, and financial and technical support to poorer countries for transformative, green recovery.

Rafael Nakacinda, Minister for Water Development, Sanitation and Environmental Protection, ZAMBIA, outlined national efforts to introduce extended producer responsibility for plastics, and

the resultant improvements in solid waste management. He also highlighted innovative efforts to promote investment in waste management.

Zac Goldsmith, Minister for Pacific and the Environment at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UNITED KINGDOM, announced that the UK has committed GBP 3 billion to investments in nature-based solutions. He invited other countries to work with the UK to commit to cleaning up commodity supply chains that are responsible for deforestation.

Sussan Ley, Minister for the Environment, AUSTRALIA, highlighted Australia's efforts in moving towards a circular economy, having recently banned the export of unprocessed waste streams, and investing in new recycling infrastructure.

Mukhtar Babayev, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, AZERBAIJAN, noted his country's investments in smart cities and smart villages, focused on green energy supply.

Fahed Al Hammadi, Acting Assistant Undersecretary, Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, announced the UAE's commitment to planting 30 million mangroves by 2030, and to exploring climate smart agriculture.

Danas Augutis, Vice-Minister of Environment, LITHUANIA, noted that COVID-19 has highlighted once again to the global community how biodiversity, ecosystem services for human health, and economies are interlinked. He explained Lithuania is focusing on protecting and conserving forests and wetlands in its national environmental policies.

Rocky Dawuni, Civil Society Representative, urged for an alignment of our collective purposes to better the environment. The Rocky Dawuni Foundation is supporting youth leadership, opportunities in the green economy and planting of trees in various communities in Africa to help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Kondo Tomohiro, Vice-Minister for Global Environmental Affairs, JAPAN, expressed Japan's interest to initiate discussions with UNEP on marine litter and biodiversity. He pointed out that the post-2020 global biodiversity framework would need to expand beyond the CBD's mandate and take into account the nexus with other relevant conventions. On this note, he stated that Japan would enhance its commitments under the Satoyama Initiative.

Parnel Charles Jr., Minister of Housing, Urban Renewal, Environment and Climate Change, JAMAICA, stated that Jamaica is currently reviewing its climate change policy framework to align with the Paris Agreement. Jamaica also intends to tackle the marine litter problem as well as ensure its green economy strategy is complementary to its national investment policy.

Meelis Münt, Secretary General, Ministry of the Environment, ESTONIA, announced its commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050 and phase out oil shale by 2040. Estonia, he stated, is additionally preparing a circular economy action plan to be completed by the end of 2021.

Jasim Abdulazeez Hammadi Al-Mohammed, Minister Technical Deputy, Ministry of Environment, IRAQ, reiterated national efforts to ensure the country is resilient and adapting to the changing environment by joining various international conventions, such as the Minamata and Basel Conventions.

Virander Kumar Paul, High Commissioner of INDIA to Kenya, outlined national efforts to reduce emissions, foster the use of renewable energy and alternative fuels, and conserve wildlife

and biodiversity. He further highlighted the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the UNEA-4 resolution on single-use plastic pollution.

Aziz Rabbah, Minister of Energy, Mines and Environment, MOROCCO, described efforts at the national level to accelerate transition to a green economy by 2030. He highlighted actions to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions, calling on major polluters to work together to protect people and the planet.

Georgios Amyras, Deputy Minister of Environment and Energy in charge of Environmental Protection, GREECE, called for addressing the vision of sustainable development as a way of living. He drew attention to national efforts to move towards carbon neutrality, protect forests and biodiversity, and promote circular and green economy applications in everyday life.

Jameel Mtour, Chairman of Environment Quality Authority, PALESTINE, highlighted efforts to address the pandemic and policies to reduce environmental impacts, including its waste management strategy. He called for solidarity and support to developing countries, especially those in conflict, for effective environmental and social protection.

Alisher Maksudov, Chairman of the State Committee for Ecology and Environmental Protection, UZBEKISTAN, stressed that a sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic world requires green solutions that balance the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. He drew attention to the environmental disaster taking place at the Aral Sea, highlighting efforts to address the problem.

Mario Šiljeg, State Secretary, Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development, CROATIA, underscored the One Health Approach and joint international efforts regarding zoonotic diseases' outbreaks. He noted the importance of securing adequate funding for UNEP's work, and addressed national policies, focusing on preserving natural capital.

Abdou Karim Sall, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development, SENEGAL, outlined the national zero waste programme, adding that it has enacted laws to address the environmental impacts of plastic products. He highlighted the African Green Stimulus Programme, inviting UNEP to support its implementation.

Irena Vujovic, Minister of Environmental Protection, SERBIA, announced that it has joined the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and outlined stimulus packages put in place to build back better.

Prem Bahadur Ale, Minister of Forests and Environment, NEPAL, explained that Nepal will be at net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and is investing in low carbon development.

Oswaldo Barbera, Minister of Ecosocialism, VENEZUELA, underscored the need for funding support and capacity building to overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Sun Lili, Society of Entrepreneurs and Ecology, China, underscored the need for strengthened environmental data and pollution information disclosure.

Nancy Tembo, Minister of Forestry and Natural Resources, MALAWI, stressed that technocrats need to be fully supported to ensure environmental management in this digital age. She further announced Malawi's monthly National Clean-up Day.

Mehmet Emin Birpinar, Deputy Minister of Environment and Urbanization, TURKEY, outlined how Turkey's updated roadmap for climate change takes into account the new circumstances

introduced by COVID-19. He added that Turkey is committed to increasing its usage of solar energy and decreasing its fossil fuel usage by 25% by 2033.

Jeoung-ae Han, Minister of Environment, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, noted how the country is expanding its land and marine protected areas so that nature, humanity, and wildlife can co-exist harmoniously. She stated that they will host the 4th Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific in October 2021.

Mohammed Khashashneh, Acting Secretary General, Ministry of Environment, JORDAN, introduced the national plan for green reconstruction following the end of the pandemic. He outlined the challenges that Jordan faces with water scarcity and refugees and encouraged global climate action plans that coincide with national sustainable development plans.

Krista Mikkonen, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, FINLAND, stated that Finland would dedicate at least 50% of its post-pandemic recovery resources to support a green transition. In 2020, she added, Finland invested EUR 1.5 billion for sustainable recovery by replacing oil heating in buildings, providing subsidies for renewable energy, and investing in electric vehicle charging stations.

Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for the Environment, EU, explained how the EU's Green Deal has nature at its heart. He noted that the Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency was launched the day before and thanked UNEP for its agreement with the EU on the Roadmap for Enhanced Cooperation.

Grace Fu, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment, SINGAPORE, noted that global warming poses an existential threat and drew attention to the national Green Plan 2030 based on five pillars: city and nature, sustainable living, energy efficiency, green economy, and resilient future.

Allanur Altyyev, Minister of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, TURKMENISTAN, noted that sustainable development, rational use of natural resources, and environmental safety are the foundations of national environmental policy, focusing on efforts to address climate change.

Zakia Khattabi, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, BELGIUM, emphasized the need for a green transition to a circular economy. She called for collaboration and ambitious plans to simultaneously tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and the consequences of the pandemic.

Abdulla Abdulaziz Turki Al Subaie, Deputy Director, Radiation and Chemicals Protection Department, QATAR, addressed national initiatives to promote environmental sustainability, calling for a strategic approach to national climate action plans.

Aaron Farrugia, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Planning, MALTA, urged to focus less on yesterday and more on tomorrow's solutions. He outlined national actions during the pandemic, including the promotion of sustainable consumption patterns and water management.

Alain Piquemal, Permanent Representative and Member of the Council of State, MONACO, drew attention to thematic strategies at the national level to achieve biodiversity conservation, emissions reduction, and waste management. He further highlighted Monaco's initiatives at the global level regarding oceanic health and ecosystem conservation.

Carole Dieschbourg, Minister of Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development, LUXEMBOURG, emphasized the need to change our economic model, and consumption and production patterns, to live within planetary limits. She highlighted national success stories, including engaging the financial sector in sustainable strategies and called for investment in the planet's natural capital.

Simon Stiell, Minister for Climate Resilience, the Environment, Forestry, Fisheries, Disaster Management and Information, GRENADA, called for strengthening implementation capacities through policy development, enforcement mechanisms, and capacity building to move towards action.

Franz Perrez, Head of International Affairs Division, Federal Office for the Environment, SWITZERLAND, stressed the need for a comprehensive, effective, and efficient international regime to protect human health and environment. He highlighted the meetings to celebrate the 50th anniversaries of UNEP and the Stockholm Conference as opportunities to achieve further progress.

Calling for cooperation at all levels, Eang Sophalleth, Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment, CAMBODIA, highlighted national efforts for environmental protection and resource efficiency, including the National Council for Sustainable Development.

Constantinos Kadis, Minister for Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment, CYPRUS, emphasized that green recovery from the pandemic is the only option for a sustainable future. He called for channeling the necessary investments in supporting policies towards pollution abatement, sustainable resource management, emissions' reduction, and biodiversity protection.

Winpeg Moyo, High Commissioner, ZIMBABWE, encouraged thinking outside the box, noting that the business-as-usual approach cannot address the environmental crisis. She drew attention to national climate change policies, renewable energy initiatives, and disaster risk reduction programmes.

UNEP Deputy Executive Director Msuya thanked all participants, underscoring their leadership and commitment to implementing concrete actions for a resilient post-pandemic world.

UNEA-5 Consensual Message

On Tuesday, in plenary, President Rotevatn introduced a consensual statement entitled "Looking ahead to the resumed UNEA in 2022 – Message from online UNEA-5" (UNEP/EA.5/L.5). He clarified that the statement does not constitute a negotiated document of UNEA-5 and shall not set a precedent for either the resumed fifth session or any of UNEA's subsequent sessions.

The Assembly endorsed the consensual statement.

The AFRICAN GROUP noted that, despite difficult discussions, the virtual session was able to adopt three key decisions, and looked forward to substantive deliberations during the intersessional period. Highlighting the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of UNEP's creation, the Group noted its commitment to discussions on the preparations, taking into account the key role of the incoming African presidency of UNEA-6.

The EU congratulated all for their efforts, underscoring the need to be ambitious and address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. She highlighted the recently launched Global Alliance on Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency, and reminded Member States that the resumed session is just around the corner.

ISRAEL lamented politicization of the Assembly by some Member States, and drew attention to climate change in arid areas, ecological connectivity, and circular economy in the building sector.

ARGENTINA underscored the role of international cooperation, calling for adequate provision of means of implementation and a fair transition to assist developing countries.

SWITZERLAND highlighted Member States' continued commitment to the environment, evidenced by the political messages and the MTS adoption.

PERU called for multilateral action to tackle global challenges, stressing the need for low-carbon, resilient economies.

NIGERIA highlighted national initiatives in cooperation with UNEP and invited all to work during the intersessional period for a successful resumed session.

COLOMBIA confirmed its commitment to international environmental efforts towards 2022, based on the goals and targets agreed upon at the online UNEA-5 session. She added that action cannot wait until in-person meetings can resume, and it is important to carry forward work virtually.

MALAYSIA noted how COVID-19 has prompted the world to build resilience and, moving forward, he urged for common but differentiated responsibilities in environmental obligations and more transparency and accessibility.

OMAN noted that the work of this online session should move forward to ensure the 2030 and 2050 targets are achieved. He maintained that UNEP needs to be bold in its global leadership on crucial issues such as biodiversity, forest cover, and the protection of air quality and oceans.

The Institute for Planetary Synthesis urged Member States not to wait another year to start work on UNGA resolution 73/333 and think of actions that can be brought to the attention of ministers.

Final Outcome: In the online UNEA-5 message, President Rotevatn underlines the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation and collective action to successfully address global challenges. He expresses deep concern about the devastating global effects of the pandemic, undermining our common efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

The message draws attention to how the UNEP MTS 2022-2025 will seek to mitigate the environmental impacts of COVID-19 and, additionally, highlights the three major environmental crises that UNEP has committed to addressing: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

The President's message underscores UNEA Member States' efforts to enhance and continue supporting the:

- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Addis Ababa Action Agenda;
- UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement;
- CBD and the negotiations on a post-2020 global biodiversity framework;
- UN Convention to Combat Desertification; and
- Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) and the sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020.

Finally, the message communicates the intention of UNEA to reconvene in person for a resumed session of UNEA-5 in 2022 and the plans to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the creation of UNEP in Nairobi in 2022.

Launch of the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of UNEP

During Tuesday's plenary, President Rotevatn introduced the Commemoration of the creation of UNEP by the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm from 5-16 June 1972. A short video was shown highlighting UNEP's achievements.

Stephen Stec, Central European University, representing the SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MAJOR GROUP, highlighted that the 1972 Stockholm Conference was the first meeting where civil society representatives could address delegates directly. He welcomed engagement with civil society for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of UNEP, noting that an initial survey shows deep appreciation for UNEP's achievements and great expectations for the future.

UNEP Executive Director Andersen reflected on the organization's 50-year journey, noting that it has propelled conversation on the environment in the streets, schools, economic booths, and voting spaces. She highlighted scientific knowledge as an important tool for policy making, and called for building meaningful synergies with multilateral environmental agreements.

UNEA President Rotevatn stressed the need for balanced and integrated sustainable development as we embark on a decade of action. He emphasized that environmental emergencies must be addressed today, highlighting the need to further empower UNEP and think outside the box to achieve a sustainable world for all, especially the most vulnerable.

Uhuru Kenyatta, President of KENYA, marked the kick-off of the 50th anniversary commemoration, stating that it provides an opportunity for both celebration and reflection. He urged for action to address the environmental crises and underscored the importance of UNEP's global environmental mandate. He reminded all of the sobering reality of environmental degradation, poverty, and food insecurity around the world. President Kenyatta emphasized that Kenya is committed to continuing to support UNEP's activities, looking forward to welcoming all Member States and participants to the resumed session of UNEA-5 and UNEP's commemoration meeting.

SWEDEN noted that Kenya, as the host of the UNEP commemoration event, and Sweden, as the host of the meeting celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1972 Stockholm Conference, agreed to join hands to ensure that these two important events will be mutually reinforcing, contributing to a revitalized environment for multilateralism.

PERU stressed the need to consolidate and strengthen efforts to support regional and sub-regional initiatives to ensure that no one is left behind.

The EU emphasized that UNEP's work is more relevant and urgent than ever, welcoming the Assembly's decision to hold the celebrations in Nairobi in conjunction with the resumed session of UNEA-5. She noted that the commemoration event constitutes an excellent opportunity to adopt the political declaration called for by UNGA resolution 73/333.

ARGENTINA welcomed the discussions on the commemoration of UNEP and recognized UNEP as the only UN headquarters in the Global South.

SWITZERLAND noted that the commemoration should not only be a celebration but a moment to restrengthen action on the environment.

GERMANY stressed that, together with Ghana and Ecuador, they are requesting the importance of marine litter and plastic pollution on the agenda for resumed UNEA session. She further announced that Germany, with the aforementioned countries, would host a conference on the topic later this year.

The WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP beseeched UNEA to seek expansion of the purview of SAICM so that polluting companies are held accountable for the damage they incur on vulnerable groups and the environment.

Adoption of the Report of the Session

On Tuesday afternoon, President Rotevatn informed delegates the provisional report of the meeting had been circulated in English, calling for adoption with the understanding that the report would be amended to include the summary of the leadership dialogue and closing plenary's deliberations. He noted that the report would be submitted to the 2021 session of the UN Economic and Social (ECOSOC).

UNEA-5 adopted the report (UNEP/EA.5/L.1).

Closing Plenary

ECOSOC President Munir Akram, in a special message to UNEA-5, stressed the need to respect nature and its boundaries, a lesson highlighted by the current pandemic. He called for transitioning to a new economic and social paradigm that values nature conservation as much as gross domestic product and gross national income. He further noted that science and technology offer answers, pointing to the power of digitalization for green objectives.

President Rotevatn noted that additional messages to UNEA-5 from UN organizations, multilateral agreements, and other bodies may be found on the meeting's website.

UNEA-5 heard interventions from representatives from the Global Major Group and Stakeholders Forum, the UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment, and the Major Group for Children and Youth reflecting on the Youth Environment Assembly.

The [Global Major Group and Stakeholders Forum](#) representative underscored the need for transformative action, increasing the pace and scale of implementation efforts. She called for climate-neutral, pollution-free societies that respect the planet's ecological boundaries. She further called for holding accountable those contributing to climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. Lamenting weak progress and inadequate synergies, she urged for a political declaration that leads to a concrete action plan, including targets, timelines, and indicators.

Spokespersons from the [UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment](#) noted that over 5,000 people participated in this highly interactive session held between 18-20 February 2021, and highlighted that the forum encouraged more efforts on green entrepreneurship; improving environmental data usage so that it is more strategic; and ensuring greater access to earth observation science for Indigenous populations.

The MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH requested UNEA to ensure environmental science is more inclusive of Indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge. It requested Member States to listen to youth and allow youth to play a more participatory role in policy making.

UNEP Deputy Executive Director Msuya summarized the key points from the high-level leadership dialogue.

UNEP Executive Director Andersen applauded the success of the first virtual UNEA session and saluted Member States for recognizing that “we can no longer wait to make peace with nature.”

President Rotevatn thanked everyone for their work at this session and reiterated that global problems require global solutions. He adjourned the meeting at 6:49 pm EAT (GMT+3).

A Brief Analysis of UNEA-5

With planes grounded and international travel essentially halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, delegates had no choice but to meet virtually in an online session of the United Nations Environment Assembly. The meeting could not be delayed since UNEA had to take key administrative decisions to enable the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to forge ahead in its work. Referred to by many as a wake-up call, COVID-19 prompted participants in the UNEA leadership dialogue to commit to, and call on each other to, “build back better,” initiate “nature-based recovery,” and “make peace with nature.”

This brief analysis looks at what this meeting means for UNEP, in the context of the Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2025, which charts the Programme’s direction for the next four years. It also reflects on the impact of the leadership dialogue and looks forward to expectations for the resumed in-person session of UNEA-5 in 2022.

UNEP’s Medium-Term Future

UNEA-5 agreed to endorse UNEP’s MTS 2022-2025, as well as its biennial Programme of Work and budget (2022-2023). These decisions were taken quickly and without deliberation, with protracted discussion having taken place the previous week at the [fifth meeting of the Open-Ended Committee of Permanent Representatives](#) (OECPR-5).

The MTS is centered around the three planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Specifically, the MTS includes three strategic objectives. These are: climate stability, where net zero greenhouse gas emissions and resilience in the face of climate change are achieved; living in harmony with nature, where humanity prospers in harmony with nature; and a pollution-free planet, where pollution is prevented and controlled, and good environmental quality and improved health and well-being are ensured for all.

Undoubtedly, these are lofty objectives. And none of these objectives can be achieved by UNEP alone. The MTS gives UNEP a broad mandate—to cooperate and engage with the private sector, to amplify regional efforts, and increase assistance to countries. Delegates expressed support for, and confidence in, UNEP as the leading global environmental authority. Several noted they had made their required contributions to UNEP, but stood ready to commit additional funds. Nothing shows faith and confidence like adequate and stable financing.

Leadership in a Virtual World

The MTS also commits UNEP to leveraging UNEA—the United Nations’ highest-level decision-making body on the environment—as the primary global platform for environmental action. According to the MTS, driven by sound science, UNEA will continue to “inspire, identify and capture bold transformative actions for the environment,” while focusing on solutions that speak to all. To this end, UNEA held a leadership dialogue as an opportunity to identify and capture bold and transformative actions.

The concept note prepared by UNEP in advance of the dialogue asked leaders to discuss concrete measures that they have taken—or will take—to ensure that the environmental dimension of sustainable development is fully taken into consideration when building a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world. It also asked leaders to provide direction on how the global community can work together to build a stronger political momentum, and how UNEP may support this.

Over 80 ministers made commitments to action to deliver on the three planetary crises. The content of specific interventions cannot be criticized, as countries and civil society representatives eagerly and comprehensively addressed these questions. However, a dialogue implies an exchange of views or a back and forth of some sort. Indeed, the concept note stated each session would be facilitated by a professional moderator with the task of enabling an interactive exchange of views among participants.

Instead, the leadership dialogue can be more accurately described as a series of successive monologues. However, this may be due to the limitations inherent in functioning in a virtual space. Despite the mandate for an interactive discussion, and a stated intention to host a moderated discussion, the opportunity for an exchange of views was not provided at the online session of UNEA-5. The dialogue was blighted by frequent issues with interpretation. Some speakers had difficulty connecting to the online platform, others could not be heard clearly, and there was no active moderation. While it is likely that UNEP did the best with what is technically feasible in an online session, a face-to-face format may be necessary to truly identify and capture transformative action.

Towards 2022 and UNEP@50

The online session of UNEA-5 proceeded on the assumption that by March 2022, face-to-face meetings and international travel will be possible and feasible and UNEA-5 can resume in person. There is no doubt that everyone looks forward to resuming substantive work and convening a Special Session to commemorate UNEP’s 50th anniversary. While participants flagged the limitations of virtual meetings over and over again, some also welcomed the increased accessibility of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) for those countries without representation in Nairobi. This suggested the hybrid scenario, that is with both a face-to-face and an option to attend remotely, may add long-term value to international negotiations. It may also be a necessity, at least in the next couple of years. As vaccine roll outs are uneven across countries, it is uncertain if delegates from all Member States will be willing and able to travel internationally in 2022. Despite there being no apparent Plan B for the resumed UNEA-5 session, a hybrid scenario seems a likely one. If a hybrid event is convened, the challenge remains to ensure people attending remotely are not marginalized relative to those attending in person. It is likely, however, with careful planning, this challenge can be overcome, and this set up may even usher in a welcome new era of increased accessibility for international negotiations.

Upcoming Meetings

7th Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Forum: The 7th APAN Forum will be held virtually under the theme “Enabling Resilience for All: The Critical Decade to Scale-up Action,” sharing learnings from actions towards climate-resilient development.

dates: 8-12 March 2021 **location:** virtual **www:** <http://www.asiapacificadapt.net/adaptationforum2020/>

Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030 (P4G) Summit: This Summit, hosted by the Republic of Korea and P4G, will bring together high-level government officials, CEOs, and civil society leaders to deliberate on how scalable and replicable market-based solutions can advance increased ambition on climate action and sustainable development. **dates:** 30-31 May 2021 **location:** TBC **www:** <https://p4gpartnerships.org/content/p4g-seoul-summit>

Global Major Group and Stakeholders Forum online consultation: This event will gather perspectives from Major Groups and Stakeholders in preparation for the resumed UNEA-5 session in 2022. **dates:** June 2021 **location:** online

World Environment Day: This year’s observance of World Environment Day will be on the theme of ecosystem restoration and focus on resetting our relationship with nature. It will also mark the formal launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030. **date:** 5 June 2021 **location:** Pakistan **www:** <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/pakistan-host-world-environment-day-2021>

60th Meeting of the Global Environment Facility Council: The Council is the GEF’s main governing body, and meets twice annually to develop, adopt, and evaluate the operational policies and programmes for GEF-financed activities. **dates:** 15-17 June 2021 **location:** TBC **www:** <https://thegef.org/council-meetings/gef-60th-council-meeting>

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2021: The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will convene the 2021 session of the HLPF under the theme “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.” Following the first five days, the HLPF’s three-day ministerial segment takes place jointly with ECOSOC’s high-level segment. **dates:** 6-15 July 2021 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2021>

IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020: The IUCN Congress will be a key milestone for nature conservation and the development of a new global framework for biodiversity. **dates:** 3-11 September 2021 **location:** Marseille, France **www:** <https://www.iucncongress2020.org/>

2021 Food Systems Summit: Convened by the UN Secretary-General, the Summit aims to maximize the co-benefits of a food systems approach across the 2030 Agenda and address the challenges of climate change. The Summit will provide a platform for ambitious new actions, innovative solutions, and plans to transform food systems and leverage these shifts to deliver progress across all of the SDGs. **dates:** September 2021 (TBC) **location:** UN Headquarters, New York (TBC) **www:** <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit>

4th Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia-Pacific: The Forum is an opportunity for Member States in Asia-Pacific to bring an Asia-Pacific perspective to discussions at the UN Environment Assembly. **dates:** October 2021 **location:** Seoul, Republic of Korea

Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 26): The 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26), the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 16), and the third meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 3) are expected to convene one year after their originally scheduled dates. **dates:** 1-12 November 2021 **location:** Glasgow, UK **www:** <https://unfccc.int>

UNEA-5 Resumed Session: Convening under the theme, “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the SDGs,” UNEA-5 will provide a platform for discussing and implementing nature-based solutions that contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, by holistically addressing its social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Building on the online session in February 2021, the meeting will discuss ways to ensure that policies for economic recovery following COVID-19 lead to a resilient and inclusive post-pandemic world. A special session of UNEA to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of UNEP will be held for two days (5-6 March 2022) in conjunction with the resumed session of UNEA-5. **dates:** 28 February – 4 March 2022 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/>

Eleventh Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF11): The Forum will provide a platform for global leaders to share expertise on the global challenges in urban development and the innovative ways to overcome them. The forum will focus on how the world can achieve the SDGs to meet global standards of the New Urban Agenda. **dates:** 1-30 June 2022 **location:** Katowice, Poland **www:** <https://wuf11.katowice.eu>

For additional meetings, see <https://sdg.iisd.org/>

Glossary

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
CPR	Committee of Permanent Representatives
MTS	Medium-Term Strategy
OECPR	Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives
PoW	Programme of Work
SAICM	Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly