

**UNEA-5.2 Highlights:
Wednesday, 2 March 2022**

On Wednesday, 2 March 2022, the resumed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) met for its final day of deliberations. Delegates convened in a high-level segment, hearing from dignitaries and ministers in a leadership dialogue, focusing on change in the context of individual behavior, policy setting, and financial incentives.

In the afternoon, the Assembly met in a closing plenary, adopting 13 resolutions and one decision, as well as the UNEA-5.2 ministerial declaration. In particular, they celebrated the adoption of the resolution on plastic pollution. Delegates also endorsed the political declaration of UNEA's Special Session to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of UNEP (UNEP@50).

High-level segment

Opening: The high-level segment convened under the theme "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." UNEA-5 President Espen Barth Eide (Norway) opened the meeting, stating "this is a day for the history books," and commended delegates for providing UNEA the tools to reset our relationship with nature, with a solid treaty on plastics, and a science-policy panel on chemicals, waste, and pollution, among other successes.

Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, noted the ever-widening divide between the developed and developing world. She remarked that, "our health, economies, and futures depend on our abilities to make our future sustainable," commending UNEA delegates for their efforts towards this endeavor.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UNEP, highlighted "the amazing job done by negotiators," agreeing on numerous resolutions and catalyzing action to address the triple planetary crisis. She underscored agreement on the resolution on plastic pollution, which will deliver the first step towards a global agreement on plastics. She stressed that "resolutions will shift the needle if they create real world impact," calling for implementation and support at the highest political level.

Felix Moloua, Prime Minister, Central African Republic, on behalf of Faustin-Archange Touadéra, President, Central African Republic, focused on actions and initiatives at the national level to support the transition to a sustainable future. He noted that environmental and socio-political challenges compromise the resilience of communities, and stressed that urgent, ambitious, and synergistic actions are needed to address existential threats.

Keriako Tobiko, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Kenya, on behalf of Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, stressed that the science is crystal-clear on the anthropogenic pressure on the planet, noting that "we have crossed the planetary limits, threatening the stability of global ecosystems." He highlighted the agreed draft resolutions, calling for "wholesome, multifaceted approaches" and strategic actions to address the existential challenges to humanity.

Leadership Dialogue: Kenyan journalist Victoria Rubadiri moderated the session, focusing on change in the context of individual behavior, policy setting, and financial incentives.

Setting the scene, Amina J. Mohammed highlighted natural assets as instrumental for building back better. She noted that the pandemic has demonstrated the complex link between nature and human health, indicating that sound conservation practices can limit the impact of emerging diseases. She further emphasized: reducing deforestation and ecosystem destruction as the greatest opportunity for climate change mitigation; and the need for urgent action to transform agriculture and food systems, as the main drivers of biodiversity loss.

Guy Loando Mboyo, Minister of Land Use Planning, Democratic Republic of Congo, highlighted national efforts aimed at reconciling human wellbeing with environmental conservation. He discussed a national initiative to evaluate natural resources, including soils, emphasizing the importance of spatial management to enhance knowledge of the natural resource base.

Reflecting on UNEP@50, Elizabeth Wathuti, Youth activist and Founder of Green Generation Initiative, Kenya, questioned why, despite all the available information, urgent action has not been taken. She said a growing movement of young people are leading action and holding leaders to account. Wathuti called for: shifting mindsets on how nature is treated; collective action; and drastic policy change, including ending subsidies which result in the destruction of nature.

Responding on how to close the global biodiversity funding gap, Achim Steiner, Administrator, UN Development Programme (UNDP), pointed out that "hundreds of billions of dollars are spent on harmful financing," highlighting nature-negative agricultural subsidies, which deplete the natural resource base. He advocated moving beyond polarized views concerning the privatization of nature, and highlighted the Task Force on Nature-related Financial Disclosures focused on transparency and accountability of financial markets.

Marianna Muntianu, Youth activist, Founder and President of the Russian Climate Fund, highlighted efforts undertaken by her organization aimed at reforestation. She noted that the younger

generation are doing everything they can, using all the skills at their disposal to protect nature.

Closing Plenary

Presentation of the HLS summaries: During the closing plenary, delegates heard summaries of the leadership dialogues.

Credentials: President Eide reported that 122 states had submitted formal credentials, and 41 had not communicated the necessary information regarding their representatives to the Assembly. The Assembly adopted the report without comment.

Adoption of the Ministerial Declaration: President Eide presented the Draft Ministerial Declaration (UNEP/EA5/24) entitled, “strengthening actions for nature to achieve the SDGs.” After highlighting two edits, regarding reference to the outcomes of the twenty-sixth meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP26) and the Glasgow Climate Pact, the upcoming fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15), and calling for an ambitious Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), the Assembly adopted the Declaration without comment.

Report of the Chair of the Committee of the Whole: Chair of the Committee of the Whole (COW), Andrea Meza Murillo (Costa Rica), provided the report (UNEP/EA.5/CW/L.1), noting that during a total of four plenary sessions and multiple contact groups, over the course of two days, the COW had considered 12 draft resolutions, one draft decision and one draft ministerial declaration. She reported that the COW submitted 10 draft resolutions, along with the decision on the date and venue of UNEA-6, and the ministerial declaration, for adoption at UNEA 5.2. She congratulated delegates for the bold and ambitious efforts underpinning the resolutions, and stressed the need for promoting multilateralism in order to address the mounting threats facing the planet. The Assembly took note of the report.

Adoption of the resolutions, decisions and outcome document of the session: Chair Eide introduced the draft resolutions forwarded from the OECPR for adoption. Delegates, with no further comments, adopted the following resolutions: Animal Welfare-Environment-Sustainable Development Nexus (UNEP/EA.5/L.10/Rev.1); Sustainable Nitrogen Management (UNEP/EA.5/L.12/Rev.1); and Future of the Global Environment Outlook (UNEP/EA.5/L.20/Rev.1).

SERBIA, as Co-Chair of Contact Group 1, noted that during late night negotiations, consensus was reached on the draft resolution on sustainable lake management.

Chair Eide introduced the draft resolutions forwarded from the COW for adoption. Delegates adopted the following resolutions, with no further comments: Sustainable Lake Management (UNEP/EA.5/L.8); Nature-based Solutions for Sustainable Development (UNEP/EA.5/L.9); Biodiversity and Health (UNEP/EA.5/L.11); Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste (UNEP/EA.5/L.13); Science-Policy Panel for the Sound Management of Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution (UNEP/EA.5/L.14); Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure (UNEP/EA.5/L.15); Enhancing Circular Economy (UNEP/EA.5/L.17); Environmental Aspects of Minerals and Metals Management (UNEP/EA.5/L.18); Due Regard to the Principle of Equitable Geographical Distribution (UNEP/EA.5/L.19); and End Plastic Pollution: Towards an Internationally Legally Binding Instrument (UNEP/EA.5/L.23/Rev.1).

PERU expressed deep satisfaction for the adoption of the resolution on plastic pollution, stressing it is the first step of a long process to end plastic pollution. RWANDA lauded the spirit of

cooperation witnessed at UNEA-5.2 and highlighted the work of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, to address the root cause of plastics pollution.

CHILE, as co-sponsors of the original resolution, commented on policies to fight plastics along the Pacific coast. COLOMBIA lauded the involvement of youth, recyclers, and other stakeholders in the resolution on plastics.

JAPAN pointed to unity that must lead efforts in upcoming negotiations to end plastic pollution. ECUADOR offered to host the first meeting of the intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC), and SENEGAL offered to host the first pre-INC meeting in Dakar. THAILAND said the plastics resolution is a key pathway to circular economy and a more inclusive pandemic recovery. The US said the plastics resolution marks the beginning of the end of the global plastics scourge.

VENEZUELA cited reservations to references to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. MONACO highlighted that this was a historic moment, at the beginning of a new legal, scientific, and international economic process for change and restoring hope. URUGUAY lauded the “historical success to end plastic pollution.” Welcoming the resolutions adopted, especially on ending plastic pollution, CUBA called for ensuring access to technology without discrimination, especially for vulnerable small island states.

BOLIVIA said that the resolutions had been adopted for Mother Earth, and expressed satisfaction with the recognition of the damage caused by industry through the generation of plastics. SWITZERLAND noted that “work begins right now to strive for an ambitious and robust outcome on plastic.” He announced Swiss financial support of CHF 300,000 for the INC process; CHF 700,000 for the process on mineral resource governance; and CHF 750,000 toward the science-policy panel.

CANADA expressed a debt of gratitude and appreciation for all the work committed to the ambitious agreement to end plastic pollution. Declaring “after the wedding comes the marriage,” GHANA noted that the real work begins now to end the scourge of plastic pollution by negotiating a strong treaty.

BRAZIL reflected on history in the making by proving that a multilateral response to plastic pollution is possible, describing UNEA. 5.2 as the most ambitious environmental assembly to date, and highlighting Nairobi’s contribution to sustainable development.

NORWAY described UNEA as “truly historic,” addressing a challenge that no country can solve alone. Expressing satisfaction, he said Norway is more than ready to begin work on the INC and very happy to co-chair the High Ambition Coalition with Rwanda.

The EU echoed statements by others that this was a truly historic moment, and urged member states to maintain momentum in moving forward during upcoming discussions and negotiations. PORTUGAL highlighted the preparatory work for the upcoming UN Oceans Conference taking place in Lisbon in June. TANZANIA expressed support for the upcoming work for the establishment of a science-policy panel on chemicals, waste, and pollution, and reiterated commitment to participate in the Open-ended Working Group.

MAURITANIA supported Senegal’s proposal to host the first pre-INC meeting. AUSTRALIA expressed special support for the resolution on plastics, and looked forward to collaborating with countries in the upcoming discussions of the INC.

Political Declaration for UNEP@50: President Eide presented the political declaration (UNEP/EA.5/L.26), and the Assembly endorsed it without comment, transmitting it to the special session

to be adopted at its first meeting, taking place Thursday, 3 March 2022.

Stakeholder Engagement: Speaking for MAJOR GROUPS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, Ayman Cherkaoui, Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection, expressed appreciation for the work by states, although lamenting the fact that the ministerial declaration did not make reference to the human right to a clean and healthy environment. He welcomed the resolution for establishing an LBI on plastic pollution, and looked forward to an inclusive and participatory process in its preparatory work and in the INC. He welcomed the work on chemicals, but expressed regret that no global action had been taken on pesticides, which threaten the health of farmers, and expressed disappointment that countries had not committed to halving nitrogen waste by 2030. Highlighting the many groundbreaking resolutions adopted by the Assembly, he stressed that the real work begins now with implementation and enforcement at the national level, highlighting that countries need to bridge the gap between words and actions. He looked forward to an open, transparent and participatory process ahead of UNEA 6.

Election of officers: Delegates elected by acclamation Leyla Benali, Minister of Energy, Transition, and Sustainable Development, Morocco, as UNEA-6 President. They further elected the following UNEA-6 Vice Presidents: Abdou Karim Sall, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Senegal; Jafar Barmaki, Ambassador, Iran; Malik Amin Aslam, Minister for Environment, Pakistan; Ján Budaj, Minister of Environment, Slovakia; Joaquim Leite, Minister of Environment, Brazil; Carlos Eduardo Correa, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Colombia; Zac Goldsmith, Minister for Pacific and the Environment, UK; and João Pedro Matos Fernandes, Minister of Environment and Energy Transition, Portugal.

Delegates also elected by acclamation Oleksandr Krasnolutsky, Ukraine, as UNEA-6 rapporteur.

Incoming UNEA President Benali congratulated UNEA-5 President Eide for the leadership and stewardship, noting the meeting sets the right expectations for UNEA-6. She stressed the need to translate the resolutions into concrete action and emphasized that multinational cooperation and international solidarity “must become the engines to build the world that we want to leave to our children.”

Provisional agenda and dates of UNEA-6: Chair Eide introduced the draft decision on the provisional agenda, date, and venue of UNEA-6 (UNEP/EA.5/L.21). Delegates adopted it without further comment.

Adoption of the meeting report: Rapporteur Barbara Creecy (South Africa) presented the draft proceedings of UNEA-5 (UNEP/EA.5/L.25), noting the report will be finalized following the inclusion of the summaries of national statements. Following review by member states and after the closure of the session, the final report will be published in all official languages. Delegates adopted the report pending revisions.

Closure of the meeting: The EU stressed that UNEA-5 is a historic success, recognizing the work of all involved in the negotiations to come up with concrete results to face the triple planetary crisis. She highlighted numerous resolutions, and underscored the invasion of Ukraine, calling for strengthening multilateralism and diplomacy to deal with the challenges.

MEXICO congratulated all for a historic result that “signifies our common vision to address the environmental and other crises based on international cooperation and towards justice, sustainable development, and well-being for the people and the planet.”

UKRAINE highlighted UNEA-5.2 as a success and expressed readiness to fight for the environment, “like we also fight for our future.” He condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, noting that “when these international terrorists leave, we will rebuild our country,” and called on the international community to stand with Ukraine.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, exercising a right of reply, stressed that, for the past eight years, “war has raged in Eastern Ukraine with 12,000 people killed by Ukrainian soldiers and neo-Nazi units.” He emphasized that through the years, the Russian Federation sought a peaceful, diplomatic solution, while the international community stood silent, noting his country is trying to stop a war.

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO observed, “without peace we cannot protect the environment,” and noted the need to bear in mind the specific needs of each country when prioritizing the circular economy.

KENYA reflected on the “tears of joy, celebrations, tears of hope, not only about plastics but on all resolutions that this session has approved.” He added that, “our children are celebrating, we have given them hope and told them that we care and that we have the courage and determination to put aside our own parochial brinkmanship.” He commended the UNEA Presidency, the Bureau, the Committee of Permanent Representatives, and payed tribute to all those who worked in the background to make this meeting a success, stating that there is “no better birthday present as UNEP turns 50.”

Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, congratulated delegates at UNEA-5, saying, “today the world and our grandchildren can look proudly upon us, as those that decided to end the scourge of plastics for all!”

In closing remarks, UNEA-5 president declared, “we wrote history today!” He expressed great pride for presiding over such a momentous meeting and expressed a deep honor at being able to use a gavel made of recycled plastic to end the meeting. He gavelled the meeting to a close at 6:28 pm (EAT).

In the Breezeways

The red carpet, pomp and ceremony, expressions of appreciation, backslapping, congratulatory statements, and finally clinking glasses, all signaled one thing: the sun had set on a successful UNEA 5.2, “a most incredible meeting,” one delegate, stated, emotionally. “I hear no objections, it is so decided,” again and again, and again. UNEA President, Espen Barth Eide, brought it home, gaveling the adoption of landmark decisions into the annals of history. Thunderous applause, the loudest cheers, and a standing ovation were reserved for the resolution to end plastic pollution. It is “the beginning of the end of the scourge of plastic pollution,” another delegate eloquently stated. “This is our Paris!” exclaimed another, recalling UNEP Executive Director’s prophecy from the beginning of the week.

After consecutive, grueling days and nights, the hard work, persuading, positioning, and bargaining had paid off, producing a “historic set of resolutions.” “The Nairobi spirit has clearly prevailed,” announced a minister heading to the UNEA reception. “This is something truly worth celebrating as UNEP turns 50,” applauded one delegate: “It sets UNEP up to be the leading authority on the environment well into the next half century.”

As we, the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (ENB), celebrate our 30th birthday today, it has been our greatest honor to once again witness history being made.