

**Special Session Commemorating UNEP@50 Highlights:
Thursday, 3 March 2022**

On Thursday, 3 March 2022, pomp and ceremony filled the plenary on the first day of the special session in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP@50) in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates immediately adopted a political declaration on UNEP@50, which had been negotiated and approved by the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA).

Delegates attended an opening plenary, hearing from presidents and dignitaries, interspersed with musical interludes. They also heard national statements, commemorating UNEP's work over 50 years.

Plenary

Opening and Adoption of Agenda: UNEA-6 President Leila Benali (Morocco) opened UNEP@50, and introduced the overall theme, "strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." UNEA-6 President Benali introduced the meeting's agenda (UNEP/EA.SS.1/1 and UNEP/EA.SS.1/1/Add.1) and delegates adopted it without comment. She also introduced the organization of work, including two high-level leadership dialogues and a multi-stakeholder dialogue. Delegates adopted it without comment. Delegates also watched a commemorative video on UNEP@50. During the session, delegates were treated to several musical interludes, including performances by the Red Forth choir and the Kenyan band, Sauti Sol.

Adoption of the political outcome of the session: UNEA-6 President Benali introduced the draft Political Declaration of the Special Session of UNEA to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of UNEP (UNEP/EA.5/L.26), and the Assembly adopted it without comment.

High-level statements: UNEA-6 President Benali said that in order to move forward, "we need to unpack the past," and outlined UNEP's environmental achievements since its creation. She emphasized that the celebration of UNEA@50 is also a celebration of multilateralism and an opportunity to continue the conversation on ways to scale up achievements over the next 50 years. She concluded by saying, "UNEP's forefathers left us the responsibility to build a better world!" and challenged delegates to swing the pendulum to the next level.

Via video message, President of the United Nations General Assembly Abdulla Shahid congratulated UNEP on its 50 years of being at the forefront of environmental action, highlighting the Programme's achievements. He drew attention to a high-level debate on A Moment in Nature, held in July 2022, noting that youth are integral to discussions about the environment and sustainable development.

Via video message, UN Secretary-General António Guterres lauded UNEP for 50 years of raising the alarm on environmental threats. He underscored the importance of addressing new

challenges related to chemicals and pollution, including plastic pollution; called for global decarbonization in every sector; and stressed the need for increased financial and technical assistance to enable developing countries to implement multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

Colleen Vixen Kelapile, President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), underlined UNEP's achievements, including on awareness raising, environmental advocacy, and education, and the formulation of MEAs. He stressed that addressing the triple planetary threats of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution aligns with COVID-19 recovery strategies.

Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, reminded participants of the "Stockholm giants" whose words and deeds laid the foundations for environmental multilateralism, which continue to guide the way in tackling the triple planetary crisis. She invited delegates to reflect on the significant achievements since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, and to strengthen their resolve in fulfilling the long list of actions needed for sustainable and equitable transformation.

Mokgweetsi Masisi, President of Botswana, welcomed the opportunity to reflect on historic achievements and ponder future challenges and ways forward, calling on countries to strike a balance for sustainable development. He reaffirmed Botswana's commitment to multilateralism and appealed to the international community to prioritize incentivizing successes in conservation.

Muhammadu Buhari, President of Nigeria, reiterated that no country or continent can address the triple planetary crisis alone, expressing his assurance that more success would be recorded as countries journey in collective struggle under the guidance of UNEP.

Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, celebrated UNEP's extraordinary environmental journey over the last 50 years, commending the Programme for "stirring the environmental ship through troubled waters and remaining focused on implementing its mandate." He congratulated UNEA-5 for its achievements, including the resolution on plastic pollution. Kenyatta highlighted the UN Office in Nairobi (UNON) as the only UN headquarters in the Global South, and announced planned developments around UNON, including the provision of land for humanitarian and logistical activities. He concluded by announcing a new biannual award, *Amani na Mazingira* (peace and environment), for championing environmental sustainability and peace.

Alexander Van der Bellen, Federal President of Austria, via video, stressed that much has been achieved during UNEP's trajectory, highlighting the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol. He urged for a strong UNEP to act faster than ever to address the triple planetary crisis and achieve the SDGs.

Iván Duque Márquez, President of Colombia, via video, underscored his country's commitment to contribute to the path towards sustainability, stressing the need for synergies between MEAs and ensuring that no one is left behind.

HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco, via video, highlighted past successes, noting that progress cannot conceal current ecosystem degradation. He urged for economic models based on recovery rather than irresponsible exploitation and stressed the need to resort to science to inform political decisions.

Zuzana Čaputová, President of Slovakia, via video, highlighted UNEP's main mission to be the environmental consciousness of the world, and emphasized UNEA-5 successes, particularly the resolution on plastics.

Mohammed Mokhber, Vice President, Iran, expressed hope that UNEP would be able to strongly pursue its mandate in the coming years. He drew attention to challenges experienced resulting from "inhumane sanctions," which, he said, are impeding timely actions for protecting the environment.

Via video message, Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, Prime Minister of Namibia, congratulated UNEP for reaching a landmark milestone, pointing to this as an opportune moment for the global environmental community to reflect the past and envisage the future. Magdalena Andersson, Prime Minister of Sweden, via video message, recalled the 1972 Stockholm conference as ushering in a new era for the environment and the subsequent establishment of UNEP as the first and only UN headquarters in the Global South. She stressed that there is no excuse for inaction, science has provided all the evidence, and UNEP's work is more important than ever. In a video address, Nayok Rattamontri Rathha, Prime Minister of Thailand, called for enhancing the role of UNEP in collaboration of the MEA secretariats, through UNEP regional offices in order to tackle environmental crises internationally.

Djatougbe Aziaka, Welfare, Togo, for the MAJOR GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS, issued a statement on the "UNEP We Want," and called for: strengthening the role of environmental governance and access to justice; transparency in corporate funding; addressing environmental equity and justice; enhancing UNEP support for a clean and healthy environment; and following recommendations on UNEP engagement with stakeholders.

Report on the science-policy interface

Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, presented the Secretariat note on the progress on enhancing the science-policy interface of UNEP (UNEP/EA.SS.1/2). Highlighting the annex "Reflecting on the Past and Imagining the Future," she reported a persistent lag between scientific evidence generation and policy action, noting that any successes achieved in MEAs so far was evidence of the power of multilateralism to bolster policy into action. Presenting recommendations, she mentioned the need to: close the time gap between science and policy through real-time information on threats and solutions; put solutions at the forefront of the science-policy interface; engage with all types of information sources including Indigenous and traditional knowledge; and accelerate digitization as an accelerator for communication and engagement. Delegates took note of the report.

Stakeholder report on "The UNEP We Want"

Yugratna Srivastava, Major Group for Children and Youth, said the UNEP We Want report is an epitome of the strength and diversity of views of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) on how UNEP can be more effective in delivering upon its mandates in the future. She reminded delegates that, "time is ticking, we do not have the next 50 years to solve the environmental crisis."

Stephen Stec, Scientific and Technological Community Major Group, summarized the report's message in three key words: diversity, equity, and recognition. Stec explained that the report has been an incredible example of intergenerational cooperation. He called for recognizing the diversity of interests represented by MGoS, who have often been forced to speak in one voice. He urged for a more effective engagement of UNEP with the grassroots and actors at the local level.

National Statements

TANZANIA, commended UNEP for a range of multilateral initiatives, adding that although the task ahead is/seems daunting, it is not insurmountable if everyone commits to working together.

Democratic Republic of Congo, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, noted, with great pride, the role of the region in setting up the model for caring for the environment under UNEP, and highlighted the important role of women and local communities in solving environmental problems. The EU recalled the important role of UNEP in enabling environmental multilateralism and noted that the consensus reached in its halls is a testament to the international solidarity for addressing environmental harm.

Colombia, on behalf of the G-77/CHINA, reiterated the significance of regional representation at UNEP, which has shaped the contours of the international environmental agenda and its implementation, and urged the reinvigoration of commitments to multilateralism under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Chile, for GRULAC, underscored UNEP's past achievements and highlighted the success of UNEA-5.2, particularly the resolution on plastic pollution and the political declaration as a way to addressing challenges and opportunities.

Oman, on behalf of the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, celebrated UNEP@50, pointing to the need for future joint efforts to address the triple planetary crisis towards a sustainable future. The LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES underscored UNEP's achievements and stressed the need to implement the SDGs, calling for additional attention to poor and vulnerable countries.

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO drew attention to the invaluable ecosystem services of the Congo Basin, calling for additional efforts for its effective protection. ZIMBABWE noted the opportunity to reflect on successes and challenges to date and stressed the need to fight against the triple planetary crisis in close partnership with UNEP. ALGERIA, via video, highlighted national efforts to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and desertification.

FINLAND underscored UNEP's remarkable achievements, including the reversal of the depletion of the ozone layer, stressing that it is time for member states to take urgent action to fulfil their commitments towards a sustainable and inclusive future.

For more national statements, please see <https://www.unep.org/events/unep-event/unep-50>

In the Breezeways

Pomp infused a colourful, musical extravaganza in and outside the plenary hall on Thursday, as delegates celebrated UNEP's half centenary, on the back of a successful UNEA-5.2. Fifty years of environmental stewardship, in the form of guidance, and advice on matters environmental law and governance. Speaker after speaker commended the "the global environmental hub" for standing firmly as the ecological pillar of the world.

While recognizing that the road ahead is riddled with unprecedented threats and daunting tasks, many expressed confidence in UNEP's ability to step up and guide the way, as it has in the past. Many speakers took the opportunity to recount the half century of successes that have allowed progress in multilateralism and diplomacy for environmental protection, as well as brought the environment into the hearts and minds of decision-makers and people across the world. One delegate commented that even though there have been hurdles along the way, "we are looking back to help us visualize our abilities to handle the daunting challenges of our world today and into the future."

As the music rang out through the halls and delegates made their way to UNEP's big birthday party, some were more reflective. "I wish we had a crystal ball to see where we will be at 100," mused one, "but it is clear that we are better off now than when we first began!"

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of this meeting will be available on Monday, 7 March 2022, at enb.iisd.org/unea5-oepr5-unep50