

**UNEA-6 Highlights:
Thursday, 29 February 2024**

As the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) reached its penultimate day, there was an electric mood on the UNEP campus, only hours after delegates left the venue feeling somewhat defeated after work on draft resolutions had not concluded as scheduled on the third day of UNEA-6. Dignitaries, accompanying security, press corps, red carpets and musical performances stood out at the green grounds of UNEP headquarters. The High-level Segment and national statements rolled out the customary prosaic calls for action. In stark contrast to the elegant plenary setting, delegates crowded into cramped and hot rooftop conference rooms in a final sprint to finalize resolutions that could answer the calls for action heard throughout the day. Time is ticking on saving the planet, but even more palpably, time was running out at UNEA-6.

High-level Segment

Leila Benali, UNEA-6 President, emphasized the world is fast approaching the point of no return and called for strengthening environmental multilateralism to deliver critical solutions. She stressed the need for coordinated efforts between the UN system and public and private sectors, increased investment in research and development, and sustainable engagement with local communities. Benali announced her intention to establish an alliance of goodwill environmentalists.

Dennis Francis, President, 78th session of the UN General Assembly, called for unity of purpose to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He underscored that the UNEA-6 outcome must contribute to: the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; multilateral responses to restore balance with nature; and a future that is more equitable, inclusive and resilient for everyone.

Paula Narváez, President, Economic and Social Council, regretted that the pace of progress is insufficient to meet all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. She stressed the need for coordinated and integrated approaches to implement the SDGs, noting co-benefits for implementing health and agricultural targets will off-set the costs and boost gross domestic product. She looked forward to UNEA's inputs to the deliberations of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, who provided recorded remarks, urged delegates to accelerate the just transition from fossil fuels to renewables and to protect and restore ecosystems. He said national governments should, *inter alia*: set their targets for the Global Biodiversity Framework; mobilize the Loss and Damage Fund; adopt an international plastics treaty; and deliver the proposed SDG Stimulus.

Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, called for standing together as a global family and to push back against the triple planetary crisis. She echoed her message since the start of gatherings last week beseeching Member States to show the "Nairobi spirit" and conclude their hard work at UNEA-6 by passing the resolutions and decisions in the strongest form possible.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization, said if the planet were a patient, it would be admitted into intensive care as its vital signs are alarming: it has a fever, much of its lifeblood – its water resources – are contaminated, and its condition is deteriorating. Ghebreyesus

highlighted the impacts of this on human health, such as increased cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and called for the agreement on ending plastic pollution to strongly reflect health impacts.

William Ruto, President, Kenya, highlighted the first Africa Climate Summit convened in 2023 and set a new vision for climate-positive economic growth and development. He said the Summit called for reform of the global financial architecture, noting that many African and other developing countries pay up to five times as much as others for their debt. Ruto highlighted how Kenya has banned single-use plastics and is shifting its waste management to a circular economy.

Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, President, Botswana, highlighted efforts to transition from coal-fired power plants to renewable energy, with a goal to increase renewables from 2% to 30% by 2030. He also noted efforts to develop a waste management value chain road map to contribute to a circular economy; encouraged the private sector to play its part in supporting water and sanitation targets in Africa; and called for support for land-locked developing countries.

Ismail Omar Guelleh, President, Djibouti, underlined that inactivity in the face of the triple planetary crisis is not an option as it destroys multilateralism. He described some of his country's efforts in this vein, including increased investment in solar, wind and geothermal energy projects, the launch of the Ethiopia-Djibouti electricity interconnection project, and the establishment of multiple protected areas.

Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, President of the Transition, Head of State, Gabon, described his country's environmental protection achievements, such as 88% forest cover and protection of 20% of the maritime territory. He called for greater justice in global environmental governance, urging for the creation of preconditions for economic valuation of natural capital.

Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President, Somalia, reported that his country is banning plastic bags this year. He called for action on climate financing, stressing that the international financial climate architecture is not fit for purpose.

Musa Al Koni, Vice President of the Presidential Council, Libya, noted efforts to strengthen investments in technology and capacity building for water management. He called for proper resourcing of the Loss and Damage Fund.

Kembo Mohadi, Second Vice-President, Zimbabwe, described his country's environmental protection measures, including adoption of a national climate change response strategy, creation of a network of national parks and protected areas, and the implementation of a community-based conservation programme. He invited all participants to the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, to be hosted by his country in July 2025.

Gervais Ndirakobuca, Prime Minister, Burundi, recalled his country's vision of becoming an emerging country by 2040 and a developed country by 2060. He described Burundi's fight against plastic pollution, such as through the 2018 ban on plastic bags and other plastic packaging.

Russell Mmiso Dlamini, Prime Minister, Eswatini, noted national efforts to increase the percentage of areas under conservation. He said that his country looks forward to the full implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, and welcomed the restructuring of the Global Environment Facility.

Édouard Ngirente, Prime Minister, Rwanda, stressed the importance of the multilateral system for overcoming

environmental and other shocks. He highlighted the role of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution in the plastics treaty negotiations, called for targets to reduce plastics, and supported developing a fund to support implementation.

Leadership Dialogue: Super-highway or still in slow-motion: Are science, data and digitalization really speeding our transition to a sustainable future?

Salina Abraham, Chief of Staff and Advisor to CEO, CIFOR-ICRAF, moderated this session, which sought to engage diverse leaders from science, policy, and society to grapple with the question of how to move from data and analysis towards impactful actions. The session drew insight from the UN Secretary-General's Early Warning for All (EW4All) initiative to explore the concept of Early Warning for the Environment to forestall and minimize slow and rapid-onset risks to the planet.

In her keynote address, Yasmine Fouad, Minister of Environment, Egypt, shared how shifting the scientific narrative to the economic costs of action and inaction helped secure high-level political commitment towards new integrated approaches for sustainable development in her country.

Jim Skea, Chair, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said that while the science-policy body has continued to adapt its analysis into actionable language for different audiences, science cannot evoke the necessary action on its own. He challenged policy makers and political leaders to "turn the science we provide into purposeful climate action."

- Interventions from the floor called for:
 - using public infrastructure to "pull" data from diverse sources and crowd in investors, innovators and citizen scientists;
 - improving the integration of data from global science-policy bodies to strengthen synergistic approaches to different multilateral processes;
 - incorporating time-tested Indigenous and local knowledge to ensure marginalized groups are not left behind;
 - strengthening data governance networks by engaging diverse stakeholders in a safe and accessible way; and
 - ensuring that ICT policies respond to generational shifts in science and human capital.

Noting the rapid actions taken to address the COVID-19 crisis, one speaker suggested that slow-onset threats should also be addressed in line with the precautionary principle. Innovative data partnerships highlighted included: applied IPCC climate models assessing city-scale adaptation strategies in Singapore; AI-driven networks to counter invasive species in Saint Kitts and Nevis and restore peatlands in the UK; a Japanese-funded project supporting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries to report on their emissions "with high transparency"; and a citizen-triggered initiative in China that spurred a nationwide air pollution monitoring system, "democratizing" early warning data.

Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue: Partnering for the environment

Speakers at this dialogue emphasized the importance of adopting a whole-of-society approach and listening to diverse voices. They also highlighted the need to combine listening with providing avenues for active participation, such as direct involvement in decision-making.

Leila Benali, UNEA-6 President, highlighted the need for "do" tanks as well as "think" tanks. She also applauded UNEP's efforts to consider how to foster synergies among MEAs.

Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, said the "must do" list for the environment is long and governments need to deliver and step up their commitments.

Representatives from major groups emphasized the need for "infrastructure" and support systems to empower women. They called for recognizing that each major group has different "super powers."

Most Member State representatives stressed that governments cannot and should not bear the burden of environmental challenges alone. Several gave examples of engagement with civil society, such as inclusion on delegations and consultation ahead of negotiations. The importance of stakeholder access to important information, such as on potential conflicts of interest, was emphasized.

The role of innovative partnerships and collaboration, incorporation of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge, and provision of adequate financing was also echoed by many major group representatives.

Informal Consultations

In the morning, following approval by the Committee of the Whole (CoW), informal consultations were facilitated on draft resolutions under: Cluster A on highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs); Cluster B on land degradation, on strengthening ocean and seas governance, and on strengthening water policies; Cluster C on multilateral actions toward climate justice; and Cluster D on environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict. By early evening, some progress was made and draft resolutions on HHPs and water policies were agreed informally.

Cluster A: During informal consultations on phasing out HHPs delegates swiftly cleaned up the text, with main discussions revolving around provisions on recognizing importance of capacity-building support for developing countries and on referencing other governance instruments.

Cluster B: In the negotiations on the draft resolution on halting land degradation, negotiations stalled on two operative paragraphs: on expressing the importance of respecting and protecting Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge; on which ecosystems should be referenced under this draft resolution; promoting "integrated" approaches to sustainable land management; and agreed text on resource mobilization. Negotiations continued into the evening, with little prospect of being resolved by early evening.

On strengthening ocean and seas governance, despite almost two weeks of intensive work on this draft resolution, some delegations were calling for the deletion of language that was previously agreed upon; delegations expressed their frustration that now is not the time to regress on progress. In the preamble, delegates struggled to agree on proper language regarding the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and mentioning non-parties to it. On operative paragraphs, major debate revolved around the operative verb directed at Member States. Consultations continued into the evening.

On water policies, two delegations introduced a reference to global water cycle in one of the operative paragraphs, previously agreed *ad ref*, as a compromise on the preambular text where this reference was withdrawn. Following bilateral consultations, the discussion was resumed, and after much debate on the potential risks of referring to the term "global water cycle," which includes many complex aspects, proponents of the phrase agreed to delete "global" and only retain reference to the water cycle.

Cluster D: An informal consultation on the draft resolution on environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict addressed the two outstanding issues proposed in a Co-Chairs' non paper for the draft resolution. Regarding the preambular reference to how armed conflict can affect people in vulnerable situations, delegates agreed to include a footnote that includes a list of such people, and people under occupation and other groups.

Regarding the operative provision encouraging UNEP's collaboration with other UN Agencies and stakeholders to provide environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict, delegates agreed to make this subject to the requests of UN Member States or members of UN specialized agencies.

In the Breezeways

"Get with the Programme!" was the rappers' call and response during the morning cultural performance. Although High-level Segment participants were reserved in their initial response, true to the political nature of high-level representatives, when the time came for bold and dramatic calls for action at UNEA-6 to address the triple planetary crisis, statements did not disappoint. Perhaps in response to this ramped-up aspiration for what UNEA can do for a better future, delegates did not waver in their commitment to finalize the highest number of UNEA resolutions to date. Whether the quantity of resolutions was matched by quality and ambition was a matter of debate, and depended in part on the conclusion of the final night of negotiations.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of UNEA-6 will be available on Monday, 4 March 2024 at enb.iisd.org/unea6-oepr6