

**UNEA Bureau Retreat
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Discussion Paper: Global Environmental Governance

- (a) Securing buy-in from political leaders to become engaged in, and implement the Assembly's resolutions and making the Assembly more visible to a worldwide public audience and its outcomes more relevant to the lives of the planet's population*
- (b) Ensuring that UNEA outcomes resonate within the UN system, including at the High Level Political Forum*
- (c) Effectively impact other ministries beyond the environment (finance, energy, infrastructure, health, transport, etc.)*

For the UN Environment Assembly to establish itself as an influential global authority that sets the environmental agenda and takes the lead in tackling emerging environmental challenges, its outcomes must be credible and have visibility and relevance in the international community, including at global, regional and national levels, through ownership by Member States and actively supported by the UN Environment secretariat.

The outcomes adopted at the Environment Assembly should therefore have a well-founded, powerful and focused message that resonates with policymakers, as well as with people on the ground. The message should contain solutions aimed at addressing particular challenges, raising public awareness and triggering their action, whether that action is as simple as not using plastic shopping bags or as complex as ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change. The messaging can be strengthened by emphasizing how the Environment Assembly outcomes are drivers of development that underpin the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and by closely involving major groups and stakeholders, who are best positioned to take the message back and mobilize diverse constituents.

The high number of resolutions adopted at the Environment Assembly on a wide range of environmental issues is surely a testament to the trust that Member States place on the UN Environment Programme. However, it may be worth considering limiting the number of resolutions either to those that pertain to pivotal emerging issues that are not already addressed through the existing programme of work of the UN Environment (this would require allocation of resources through the resolution); or those that cause persistent environmental degradation, yet have not yet captured adequate international attention despite continuous work by the UN Environment. The fewer the number of resolutions, the stronger would be the commitment to implement them.

Such criteria would save delegates much time and resources from revisiting issues that are already addressed through ongoing activities. The Environment Assembly Bureau and the Committee of Permanent Representatives – the subsidiary intersessional body of the Environment Assembly – can be entrusted to monitor the work underway on those issues that

are embedded in the UN Environment's medium-term strategy, the programme of work and/or the formerly adopted governing body decisions and resolutions.

Member States participating in the Environment Assembly are encouraged to move away from heavy focus on resolution negotiation to the development of a concrete message that the Environment Assembly – and its Environment Ministers – can bring to the broader sustainability table, as well as to the lives of ordinary people. In order to make this happen, close engagement of Member States and their capitals is critical and the Environment Assembly Bureau could play an important facilitating role in that respect (by promoting Member States' understanding and commitments).

The role of Member States grows larger when it comes to ensuring that the outcomes of the Assembly are effectively communicated to other relevant forums and processes; and this commitment to outreach depends on the level of ownership that Member States have of the Assembly's outcomes, which the UN Environment must do more to promote. At the 2016 sessions of the Economic and Social Council and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which took place in July 2016 in New York, the importance of environmental protection was emphasized in their joint ministerial declaration but no reference was made to the recently concluded second session of the Environment Assembly (23-27 May 2016).

During the Economic and Social Council/High-level Political Forum negotiation process, several delegations, including the Group of 77 and China and the European Union, proposed and supported language to recognize the work of the Environment Assembly in the outcome document. However, these proposals did not reach consensus due to the following reasons:

- Absence of a ministerial outcome from the second session of the Environment Assembly;
- Political difficulties experienced at the second session in relation to issues such as *common but differentiated responsibilities* and occupied territories (which was also a challenge in the context of the Economic and Social Council/High-level Political Forum); and
- Several delegations and UN entities who argued that a reference to the Environment Assembly would necessitate an “across the board” reference to other intergovernmental bodies that deal with economic, environmental and social challenges.

In this context, efforts should be made to guard against politicizing environmental issues and to arrive at a concrete ministerial outcome at each session of the Environment Assembly. More efforts should also be made, both by Member States and the UN Environment, to articulate a clear message for the world that they can take back home and to other political processes at national, regional and global levels. In this respect, the unique nature of the Environment Assembly being the only universal forum of Environment Ministers should be emphasized. The UN Environment can help by mobilizing its regional and sub-regional offices to not only link up with regional environmental meetings and ministerial forums, but also to provide training, especially for those Member States that are not based in Nairobi, on ways to package and communicate the Environment Assembly outcomes.

The message from the Environment Assembly should be placed in the context of contributing to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to the strategic objectives of other key platforms, such as the Group of 20, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean. Following up on the Environment Assembly's resolutions as part of the overall global sustainable development trajectory would result in greater buy-in and help reduce implementation, monitoring and reporting burdens for Governments and other partners. A detailed mapping of the Environment Assembly outcomes against the Sustainable Development Goals, in terms of how the former contributes to fulfilling various Sustainable Development Goals targets directly or indirectly, may help engage other line Ministries (health, planning, finance, agriculture, etcetera). Ensuring synergy and coherence with other UN agencies, major groups and stakeholders is also essential to promoting integrated approaches to the environment.

The Environment Assembly is an intergovernmental forum consisting of Member States, with the UN Environment providing secretariat support; as such, Member States should be empowered to proactively integrate the Environment Assembly outcomes into other sustainable development processes, first by developing a simple and powerful message from the Environment Assembly and second by actually disseminating this message to their national constituents and to relevant regional and international forums. On its part, the UN Environment should endeavor to bring the Environment Assembly outcomes to the attention of other partner organizations, including within the UN system, and develop a systematic approach to monitor, review and communicate the actual impact of the work of the Environment Assembly to the international community.

Drafted by the Law Division

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