



UNITED
NATIONS

UNEP/EA.7/2(II)



United Nations
Environment
Programme

Distr.: General
1 September 2025
Original: English

United Nations Environment Assembly
of the United Nations Environment Programme
Seventh session
Nairobi, 8–12 December 2025
Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

International environmental policy and governance issues

Priorities for advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet

Report of the Executive Director: part II

I. Introduction

1. **The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is entrusted with the responsibility of keeping the global environmental agenda under review.** The present document is the second part of a report traditionally submitted by the Executive Director for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP in advance of its sessions, and is intended to contribute to the reflections of the Assembly on the status of the world's environment and the collective actions needed to enhance environmental stewardship.
2. **Now more than a decade old, the Environment Assembly has evolved into a critical platform for environmental governance.** In line with the UNEP mandate, the present report contains reflections on lessons learned and an exploration of the future potential of the Assembly in an increasingly complex environmental governance landscape. In part I,¹ five emerging and urgent environmental issues were highlighted that Member States may wish to consider as they develop resolutions: the global hydrological cycle; critical energy transition minerals; the use of nutrients; protection of the stratosphere; and the environmental footprint of artificial intelligence. As Member States determine the content of resolutions and the future of the Assembly, it is hoped that the present report will provide helpful reflections of the UNEP secretariat regarding future directions.
3. **A turbulent time.** Amid unprecedented global turbulence, with escalating conflicts, economic instability and growing inequality, the world faces the compounding threats of the three planetary environmental crises: climate change; biodiversity loss and desertification; and pollution and waste. Those crises are deeply intertwined with immediate human concerns such as poverty, conflict, hunger and health.
4. **A stable environment is the foundation of stable societies and economies.** Addressing those environmental crises is important not only to preserve ecosystems; it is equally critical for peace, human dignity and prosperity. From the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, to the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 and the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, the global community has repeatedly affirmed that environmental sustainability is the foundation of societal and economic

* UNEP/EA.7/1.

¹ UNEP/EA.7/2(I).

resilience. While progress has been made in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals in areas such as reducing extreme poverty and child mortality, growing access to electricity, and the fight against certain diseases, the environmental dimension remains critically off track. The Goals are organized into 169 targets with 247 indicators, and 92 of the indicators relate to the environment. Only 16 per cent of the Goals, however, are on track to be met by 2030, with nearly all environmental Goals lagging behind.²

5. **Planet Earth is under escalating pressure.** Greenhouse gas concentrations are the highest in human history, with an 80 per cent likelihood that global temperatures will breach the critical threshold of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels within the next five years.³ Biodiversity loss is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. One million species, including one quarter of all mammal species, are at risk of extinction, many within decades, as a result of human activities.⁴ Land degradation affects nearly 40 per cent of the world's land area, impacting almost half of the global population, and the trend is worsening.⁵ Deforestation in tropical zones continues at a rapid rate, with tropical primary forest loss in 2023 estimated at 3.7 million hectares.⁶ Without urgent action, projections suggest that 70–90 per cent of coral reefs will disappear in the coming decades.⁷ Contaminants, such as microplastics, nanomaterials and persistent organic pollutants, along with pesticide overuse, pose risks to both ecosystems and human health, many of which are only now coming to light. Municipal solid waste, for example, is projected to rise sharply, from 2.1 billion metric tons in 2023 to 3.8 billion metric tons by 2050, underscoring the urgent need for transformative changes in production, consumption and waste management practices.⁸

6. **Despite the many challenges, there is progress to build on, and solutions are at hand.** The cost of renewable energy has plummeted over the past two decades, and more than three quarters of the renewable energy capacity added in 2023 was cheaper than fossil fuel alternatives.⁹ While still far short of the target of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of 30 per cent by 2030, the global coverage of protected areas has reached 17.6 per cent of terrestrial areas and 8.4 per cent of marine and coastal areas.¹⁰ The historic Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, adopted in 2023 after more than 16 years of efforts to protect biodiversity beyond national boundaries, facilitates the expansion of marine protected areas in international waters.¹¹ Solutions, in other words, are possible, but they need political will, scientific underpinning, planning and collective action.

² Jeffrey D. Sachs, Guillaume Lafortune and Grayson Fuller, *The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future: Sustainable Development Report 2024* (Dublin, Dublin University Press, 2024).

³ World Meteorological Organization, “Global temperature is likely to exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial level temporarily in next 5 years”, press release, 5 June 2024. Available at <https://wmo.int/news/media-centre/global-temperature-likely-exceed-15degc-above-pre-industrial-level-temporarily-next-5-years>.

⁴ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (Bonn, 2019). Available at <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>.

⁵ United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, *Global Land Outlook*, 2nd ed., *Land Restoration for Recovery and Resilience* (Bonn, 2022).

⁶ M. Weisse, E. Goldman and S. Carter, “Forest Pulse: The Latest on the World's Forests” (Washington, D.C., World Resources Institute, 2025).

⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Summary for Policymakers”, *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 3–24.

⁸ United Nations Environment Programme, *Global Waste Management Outlook 2024: Beyond an Age of Waste – Turning Rubbish into a Resource* (Nairobi, 2024). Available at <https://www.unep.org/resources/global-waste-management-outlook-2024>.

⁹ International Renewable Energy Agency, *Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2023* (IRENA, Abu Dhabi, 2024).

¹⁰ World Conservation Monitoring Centre and International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, *Protected Planet Report 2024* (Cambridge, 2024).

¹¹ The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, also known as the High Seas Treaty, adopted on 19 June 2023.

II. The Environment Assembly: more than a decade of advancing global environmental cooperation

A. A bold vision for global environmental governance

7. **1972 – a groundbreaking year for environmental governance.** The historic decision to establish the United Nations Environment Programme was the critical outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972. Later that year, by resolution 2997 (XXVII), the General Assembly formally established UNEP as the United Nations body for global environmental cooperation and treaty-making. By the same resolution, the UNEP Governing Council was also established, with the primary objectives of providing policy guidance to UNEP, oversight of its programming and budgeting, and a forum for the international community to address major and emerging environmental issues.

8. **Crafting modern environmental multilateralism.** Over the years, the UNEP Governing Council played a pivotal role in the establishment and/or administration of key multilateral environmental agreements and environmental platforms. Two early agreements, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES, 1973) and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979) were, like UNEP, products of the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment, and UNEP was subsequently requested to host their secretariats. UNEP Governing Council decisions or UNEP science also resulted in the establishment of a number of other landmark environmental agreements and panels, many of which are UNEP-hosted, including the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985) and its Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (1988)¹² and the three Rio conventions¹³. Added to them are the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal (1989); the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade (1998); the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (2001); and the Minamata Convention on Mercury (2013). While some agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification, are not hosted by UNEP, their beginnings nevertheless lie in reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the UNEP secretariat or the Governing Council and, together with other multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), they remain active participants in the Environment Assembly. In addition, through the UNEP Regional Seas Programme, established in 1974, UNEP proactively coordinates 18 regional seas conventions and action plans,¹⁴ including hosting seven secretariats.

9. **UNEP Governing Council decisions have shaped the global environmental pathway.** Many significant decisions and agreements can be traced to the decisions of the UNEP Governing Council or to published UNEP science from the Governing Council period. The limited membership of the Council, however, comprising only 58 States, meant that its decision-making lacked universal representation, even if the negotiations on the establishment of various instruments were more inclusive.

10. **The creation of the Environment Assembly.** The Environment Assembly was conceived at the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, where Member States reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the role of UNEP as the leading global environmental authority responsible for setting the environmental agenda and raising public awareness on emerging issues. In recognition of the need for a more robust and inclusive global environmental governance framework, in paragraph 88 of the outcome document of the Conference, entitled “The future we want”, the Governing Council was upgraded to an Environment Assembly with universal membership. That transition gave the global environmental governance system a boost by creating a fully inclusive and representative body with the participation of all 193 States Members of the United Nations. The transformation also made the Environment Assembly one of only three bodies with universal membership in the United Nations system – alongside the General Assembly and the World Health Assembly – and the only one

¹² Co-hosted with the World Meteorological Organization.

¹³ The Convention on Biological Diversity (1993), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (1994) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) are collectively known as the Rio conventions.

¹⁴ More information on the Regional Seas Programme is available at www.unep.org/topics/ocean-seas-and-coasts/regional-seas-programme.

headquartered in the global South. It was agreed that the Environment Assembly would convene biennially in Nairobi, solidifying the city's role as the global stage for environmental diplomacy.

11. **Ten years since the first session – lessons for the future.** The Environment Assembly was founded with ambitious objectives: to unify global efforts to address environmental challenges; to provide guidance for UNEP, thereby ensuring that the organization provides relevant, up-to-date, comprehensive, scientifically credible global environmental assessments; to foster the active participation of all stakeholders; and to raise awareness of emerging environmental threats while supporting Member States in their on-the-ground environmental solutions. As such, the Environment Assembly embodies the promise of a new era of bold, inclusive and collective environmental action. Since its first session in 2014, the Environment Assembly has grown in significance, with the sixth session marking a full decade of progress. The tenth anniversary presented an opportunity to take stock of achievements, to reflect on lessons learned, and to identify pathways to ensure that future sessions fulfil their transformative potential to advance global environmental governance.

12. **Developments since the sixth session.** In September 2024, the international community convened at the Summit of the Future at the United Nations Headquarters in New York – a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine the multilateral governance system for a world that is increasingly digitalized and interconnected. At the Summit, world leaders adopted the Pact for the Future, along with its key annexes, the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations. With discussions under the UN80 Initiative reform banner now under way, the time is ripe to seek efficiency, streamlining and alignment across the environmental landscape.

B. A growing platform for multilateral environmental cooperation

13. **A growing platform.** More than 1,200 participants, including more than 150 ministers and Heads of State, attended the inaugural session of the Environment Assembly in 2014, which concluded with 17 resolutions and two decisions on a wide range of environmental issues. Since then, the Assembly's reach and influence have grown, alongside a fivefold increase in participation which meant that the sixth session broke the previous record of nearly 6,000 attendees. The Assembly has adopted 105 resolutions and 20 decisions, reflecting its expanding role in setting policy and shaping global environmental action. Particularly rewarding, and in line with the vision set in 2012, the Assembly has seen growing and broad participation from civil society, Indigenous Peoples, scientists, and representatives of young people, women and the business community. The emergence of the Youth Environment Assembly is another positive development.

14. **Strengthened infrastructure at the United Nations compound in Nairobi.** The ability of UNEP to service the Environment Assembly and the multilateral environmental agreements is also growing in parallel to UNEP influence. The United Nations complex in Gigiri, generously gifted to UNEP by the Government of Kenya following the Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, is also undergoing significant expansion. The United Nations is investing in state-of-the-art conferencing facilities, with construction activities scheduled to begin in 2025 and the overall project aiming at being an exemplar in sustainable design and construction practices. By 2030, the upgraded facilities will accommodate 4.5 times more participants, featuring fully renovated conference rooms and a new assembly hall. The renovations will enhance the ability of UNEP to host larger, more inclusive gatherings in the future, including meetings of the parties to multilateral environmental agreements, further solidifying Nairobi's role as a global hub for environmental diplomacy.

C. The gift of universality

15. **The Environment Assembly's strength lies in its universal membership.** The Assembly, where every voice is heard and each member holds equal standing, is a truly multilateral forum, bringing together all 193 United Nations Member States to discuss, negotiate and adopt shared solutions to common environmental challenges. Civil society participation enriches the discussions and negotiations by providing additional voices, insights and opinions. That broad participation fosters an environment in which diverse perspectives converge, enabling constructive dialogue and collaboration. Despite political and ideological differences across the globe, the Environment Assembly has consistently demonstrated the ability to advance meaningful outcomes. In an increasingly fragmented world, the Assembly stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, where diverse voices come together to shape a more sustainable and resilient future for all.

16. **The seventh session – building on the legacy, but powering forward.** As delegates gather for the seventh session, they will build on the Environment Assembly's strong legacy, empowered to develop innovative approaches to today's most pressing environmental challenges. Nevertheless, delegates also carry the weight of historical expectations, being entrusted with the responsibility to

uphold the Assembly's role as the premier global forum for addressing environmental crises, challenges and opportunities through relevant, forward-looking and impactful decision-making.

D. Shaping the global environmental agenda

17. **The themes of Environment Assembly sessions have provided focus for dialogue, but not for resolutions.** Each of the six sessions of the Environment Assembly has addressed a major environmental theme, including the illegal trade in wildlife, air quality, environmental rule of law, financing the green transition, delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, strengthening the science-policy interface, moving towards a pollution-free planet, and promoting sustainable consumption and production.¹⁵ The themes have framed the high-level dialogues and other events but, in general, do not appear to have given shape or direction to the resolutions that Member States have chosen to present.

18. **Environment Assembly resolutions.** Over the six sessions, many important resolutions have been agreed. One of the most significant milestones was the setting of the stage for a legally binding agreement on plastic pollution and the launch of the intergovernmental negotiating committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, building on a series of related resolutions stretching back to the first session.¹⁶ The Assembly also launched the negotiations towards a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution;¹⁷ a resolution agreeing on the need for a global environmental data strategy to provide data for multilateral environmental agreement reporting, and advanced work on nature-based solutions that provided a basis for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.¹⁸ Other resolutions adopted by the Assembly have advanced global acceptance of the circular economy, favouring more responsible production and consumption, means of reducing global food waste, and addressing issues related to gender, water, lakes, mining and much more. Moreover, a series of three resolutions¹⁹ on the protection of the environment in areas affected by armed conflict laid the groundwork for guidance on documenting, assessing and mitigating the environmental consequences of conflict.

E. A patchwork landscape of environmental action

19. **With just six sessions behind it, the Environment Assembly is still a young institution.** While it has proven to be an essential platform for greater environmental awareness and collective action, it is important to acknowledge that the Environment Assembly remains in its formative stages. Indeed, when it was established, 40 years after the founding of UNEP, the Assembly entered a well-established, albeit fragmented, landscape of existing, critical global environmental agreements, most of which had been established over the decades with the involvement of the Governing Council.

20. **Multilateral environmental agreements and UNEP.** Multilateral environmental agreements are expressions of Member States' determination to address some of the world's most pressing environmental issues at both global and regional levels. They cover a broad spectrum of topics, including atmospheric protection, climate change, the sustainable management of chemicals and waste, regional seas, and efforts to halt biodiversity loss and desertification. Each of the agreements has delivered remarkable and measurable results and UNEP is both proud and honoured to host and administer the secretariat of 17 such agreements and panels. Through their respective conferences and meetings of the parties and plenaries, Member States decide on the priorities on which each agreement or panel should deliver and the commitment that each State chooses to make. As the secretariats of the agreements and panels are, however, with some notable exceptions, not implementing entities, the work of UNEP is frequently framed in such a way as to provide analytical and scientific reports on

¹⁵ The six sessions of the Environment Assembly to date were held under the following themes: first session "Delivering on the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"; second session "Strengthening the science-policy interface"; third session "Towards a pollution-free planet"; fourth session "Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production"; fifth session "Strengthening actions for nature to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals"; sixth session "effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution".

¹⁶ UNEP/EA.5/Res.14, "End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument".

¹⁷ UNEP/EA.5/Res.8, "Science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution".

¹⁸ UNEP/EA.5/Res.2, "Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development".

¹⁹ UNEP/EA.2/Res.15, "Protection of the environment in areas affected by armed conflict"; UNEP/EA.3/Res.1, "Pollution mitigation and control in areas affected by armed conflict or terrorism"; and UNEP/EA.6/Res.12, "Environmental assistance and recovery in areas affected by armed conflict".

matters relevant to their work, as well as supporting Member States in their efforts to fulfil their obligations or commitments under the respective conventions. OzonAction and the UNEP biodiversity, land degradation, chemicals and waste, and climate programmes are relevant examples. UNEP supports the agreements, both in terms of administering the secretariats and on the science and programmatic fronts. One area in which more work is clearly needed, as the orchestra of multilateral environmental agreements is enlarged to address new environmental challenges, is ensuring that the symphony that the agreements play is in tune, non-duplicative and mutually reinforcing. The recent focus on the “Rio Trio”, and specifically the interlinkages between the three Rio conventions, is a reflection of Member States’ discussions in that regard.

21. **Multilateral environmental agreements deliver real results.** Governed by their respective conferences or meetings of parties, multilateral environmental agreements operate as independent entities, with their own decision-making bodies and legal obligations ratified by contracting States. Achievements include the successful work under the Montreal Protocol to phase out ozone-depleting substances and begin the repair of the ozone layer; efforts under CITES to combat the illegal wildlife trade; the work by the joint secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions to implement higher standards on chemicals and waste; the platforms created by the 18 regional seas conventions, achieving joint management of biodiversity within national jurisdiction in shared water bodies; the work under the Convention on Biological Diversity to stem the loss of biodiversity; the efforts under the Convention on Migratory Species to improve the conservation of transboundary wildlife; and the role of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in addressing the scourge of mercury pollution.

22. **A tapestry of environmental governance.** Since the establishment of the Governing Council, multilateral environmental agreements and the governing body of UNEP have been interwoven threads in the broader tapestry of global environmental governance. Each agreement makes a vital contribution to the resilience of international environmental law and the practice of environmental stewardship. Not every environmental challenge, however, requires a unique multilateral agreement to drive solutions, and it is in the gap that remains that UNEP often also works. The overall tapestry is less cohesive than it could be. In some areas, the threads fray, reflecting overlapping mandates or gaps in coordination. In others, they become knotted, leading to inefficiencies, duplication of efforts and institutional silos. That fragmentation can hinder the ambitious, integrated action needed to achieve a stable climate, thriving biodiversity, land and water resources, and a pollution-free planet.

23. **The unique focus of each multilateral environmental agreement is a strength, but it also presents challenges.** Each agreement has developed its own distinct governance structure, implementation mechanisms and reporting systems. While the agreements excel at focusing attention on specific environmental challenges, the fact that each conference of the parties has its own clear mandate can hinder the creation of cross-cutting linkages that address the broader environmental agenda. The system can, in consequence, present a costly and cumbersome approach to addressing shared environmental challenges. The question that the international community might pose, therefore, is how, given the unassailable independence of each multilateral environmental agreement and its conference of the parties, can and should the Environment Assembly provide a platform for seeking deeper synergy and cross-issue integration. The present report argues that it is in precisely that space that the Environment Assembly can offer a platform for dialogue by bringing the various actors together, showcasing the scientific basis for priority actions, and identifying areas of common priorities and concrete collaboration – including at the political, strategic, funding and technical levels. That would constitute an exciting new approach, with an energized Environment Assembly driving effective global environmental governance, operational efficiency and effectiveness.

24. **Taking inspiration from the UN80 Initiative.** Over the past 50 years, Member States have faced many of the growing number of environmental challenges with firm commitment enshrined in multilateral environmental agreements. In the spirit of the UN80 Initiative, Member States may wish – both in the Environment Assembly context, but also in the context of upcoming meetings of the respective conferences of the parties to the multilateral environmental agreements – to take a fresh look at how optimal synergies can be created between and among multilateral environmental agreements. In that respect, Member States may also wish to draw on the experience of the establishment of a combined secretariat for the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, which continue to operate as distinct conventions, while holding their conferences of the parties in parallel, and being managed by that single secretariat.

F. Lessons learned from a decade of the Environment Assembly

25. **Learning lessons.** Not even into double digits in number of sessions, the Environment Assembly is still very much the new kid on the block. In 2024, a decade after its creation, UNEP

organized a reflection on the Assembly's progress to date and its potential for the future. The co-facilitators of the lessons learned exercise for the sixth session provided valuable recommendations, addressing planning, outcomes, preparatory processes, inclusivity, media and outreach and links between the Assembly and regional forums.²⁰ A series of informal lunchtime discussions with Nairobi-based Permanent Representatives provided helpful insights in addition to the more formalized reflections. While not exhaustive, the following were highlighted as areas for improvement:

(a) **Positioning the Assembly better.** The Environment Assembly's credibility is rooted in high-level, inclusive participation. Despite its significance, however, it remains relatively underrecognized globally. The Assembly has the potential to be more visible as the world's foremost environmental forum, but currently it risks being the most important environmental meeting of which many have never heard.

(b) **The themes of Assembly sessions.** Some suggest that assigning more distinctive themes would sharpen the Assembly's focus; however, while themes can help frame discussions, their utility is a legitimate subject of debate. The General Assembly, for example, operates effectively without a formal theme, allowing Member States to raise the most pressing concerns of the moment. In the UNEP context, negotiations on the theme have occasionally taken up considerable time at meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP and in capitals. As mentioned above, while the theme regularly gives shape to the high-level panels and discussions, it has generally played a small role in the focus of resolutions.

(c) **Preparing for the Environment Assembly.** Unlike the General Assembly, which meets all year round and can draw on the near-universal representation of Member States in New York, the Environment Assembly meets for just five days every two years. This makes the preparatory phase before Assembly sessions even more important if the Assembly is to be able to consider and conclude technically complex resolutions. Maximizing that short negotiating period requires the secretariat to provide the necessary documents in good time and keep Environment Assembly focal points (including those not represented in Nairobi) closely informed on the status of preparations. The short preparatory period also means that Member States should demonstrate a degree of restraint when submitting draft resolutions, which should also be submitted as early as possible in order to enable maximum participation in deliberation on them.

(d) **Expanding diplomatic representation in Nairobi.** The diplomatic corps in Nairobi, though growing, represents less than half of the United Nations membership. When UNEP was established in 1972, Nairobi hosted 30–40 diplomatic missions, a figure that had grown to around 85 by the time of the first session of the Assembly and 97 as at the date of the present report. Many Permanent Representatives hold multiple roles, serving as ambassadors to Kenya as well as, in many cases, to several other countries, which frequently places a significant workload on small missions. In some cases, it can limit the ability of a mission to engage deeply with UNEP processes. By contrast, cities like Geneva and Vienna, with longer histories of international diplomatic engagement and larger diplomatic presences (181 and 125 missions, respectively), are well positioned to facilitate more inclusive and comprehensive negotiations. This dynamic poses challenges for the Committee of Permanent Representatives in preparing for meetings of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives, where draft resolutions are discussed. While online connections are well established, it remains harder for capitals not represented in Nairobi to participate fully. Further expansion of diplomatic representation in Nairobi would enhance UNEP governance, promote greater inclusivity, and support more effective environmental decision-making. But such expansion will probably only happen if the overall presence of UNEP and environmental multilateralism in Nairobi is strengthened.

(e) **Forging an impactful ministerial declaration.** By tradition, each session of the Assembly concludes with a ministerial declaration that aims to capture Member States' conclusions and commitments in a concise and impactful text. The declaration should ideally be forward-looking, ambitious, action-oriented, and reflect Member States' priorities in tackling new environmental challenges; it should not simply restate previous agreements or renegotiate language already agreed in other multilateral environmental processes. A bland or generic declaration can diminish the influence of Assembly sessions, while an overly broad declaration, which encompasses unrelated issues, risks diluting its purpose. Keeping a clear vision of a meaningful political declaration is therefore critical to ensuring that the value of the Assembly is upheld. Indeed, should the political declaration lose its significance, Member States may wish to reconsider its utility to avoid undermining the Assembly's credibility and impact.

²⁰ See document UNEP/CPR/168/2, annex.

(f) **Concluding impactful resolutions.** Across six sessions of the Environment Assembly, 125 resolutions and decisions have been adopted, with varying degrees of impact. Many resolutions have tasked the Executive Director with producing reports, though those reports often achieve limited uptake and minimal influence on national-level solutions. Indeed, at its sixth session, the Assembly requested the Executive Director to produce no fewer than 19 such reports. Staff time and resources went into their production, but it is unclear whether the reports will be useful to Member States. Similarly, it is argued that all resolutions may not have driven the transformative change intended. While Member States have the right to propose the resolutions that they deem necessary, negotiation time is frequently consumed by excessive focus on preambular language and superficial details at the expense of substantive discussions on government commitments, budgets and implementation. In addition, some resolutions impose unfunded mandates on UNEP, stretching limited resources and diverting attention from core priorities.

G. Vision for the Assembly over the next decade

26. **Steps to unleash the Assembly's full potential as the world's highest-level global environmental forum and decision-making body.** The Environment Assembly has made significant progress and holds even greater promise, and Member States showed visionary determination when they decided to establish it at the Rio+20 Conference in 2012. The question before us now is how the vision for a strengthened Assembly can be realized by the twelfth session, to be held in 2035. Only through bold, inclusive and science-driven decision-making will the Assembly become more focused, strategic and responsive to emerging environmental challenges. To achieve that vision, the Assembly must evolve to raise the bar on governance and multilateralism, while swiftly adapting to new environmental challenges and a changing world. Based on the science and insights that the UNEP secretariat and the scientific panels and others produce, the Assembly holds the promise of being a "horizon scanner" that identifies the "environmental impact waves" before they reach our proverbial shores and then being the global catalyst for transformative environmental action, uniting nations, businesses and communities to create a sustainable and equitable world. That vision has several facets:

(a) **Science must be front and centre in Assembly decision-making.** Going back to the creation of UNEP, and as reiterated in paragraph 88 of "The future we want", a strong science-policy interface must provide for evidence-based decision-making. Science must play a central role in ministerial discussions and outcomes. Holding a science-policy forum on the sidelines of Assembly sessions, while interesting, does not serve as a sufficient basis for intergovernmental exchange and negotiation.

(b) **Nairobi as the capital of global environmental cooperation.** Nairobi should emerge as the true hub for global environmental governance, supported by broader and deeper representation of Member States. The continued growth in entities basing their global headquarters in Nairobi will strengthen diplomatic presence, enhancing inclusivity and engagement in UNEP governance beyond the Assembly's five-day sessions. Expanding both the number of missions and the diplomatic staff within them will foster more dynamic and diverse environmental diplomacy.

(c) **The theme.** A meaningful theme could guide Assembly discussions. An all-encompassing theme, however, seems to provide very little guidance and may be of limited value. Member States may wish to consider how and whether they wish to engage with the theme and whether continuing the practice of establishing themes for each session is desirable. If not, the Assembly might wish to forego the practice and provide a more open, adaptable approach that prioritizes relevance over thematic coherence.

(d) **Resolutions.** Environment Assembly resolutions and decisions remain the sole prerogative of Member States and are among the most important and relevant outcomes of Assembly sessions, directing and guiding the work of UNEP and offering guidance to all Member States based on the latest science and collective thinking. Nonetheless, the process of identifying, negotiating and concluding resolutions can be improved, including in the following ways:

(i) **Fewer, more targeted and better-informed resolutions.** Member States could focus their time and debate on a smaller number of critical issues needed to direct more impactful change. Since the resumed fifth session, UNEP has provided "technical notes" for each draft resolution, addressing legal alignment with the UNEP mandate, relevance to the medium-term strategy and budgetary implications. Member States are encouraged to use the notes as background information to determine whether a draft resolution remains within the UNEP mandate; is not duplicative of previously agreed resolutions; is not already reflected in the existing medium-term strategy and programme of work; and does not overlap with the mandates of other United Nations

entities. Member States could choose to focus on resolutions that provide: (a) new guidance to UNEP or invitations to United Nations system entities; (b) new commitments for Member States; (c) the definition or clarification of a new global concept; or (d) information on an emerging issue or an urgent matter.

- (ii) **Optimized resolution development process.** The current practice of only dedicating a few weeks to the process of resolution development and review by the Committee of Permanent Representatives has limited the time for meaningful debate. Streamlining proposals and merging resolutions, where appropriate, can help accelerate the process and sharpen decision-making. A key challenge, however, is the limited physical presence of Member States in Nairobi. To address this, virtual participation in discussions that take place prior to meetings of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives is essential, requiring active engagement from capitals. That approach could enable delegations to reach consensus on preambular paragraphs and, ideally, many operative paragraphs before the meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives begins, allowing more time for substantive negotiations during the limited time available.
- (iii) **Better use of technical notes.** Early development of resolutions, as described above, would enable the UNEP secretariat to provide the technical notes at a much earlier date and thereby achieve more meaningful consideration, facilitating smoother and more efficient deliberations at sessions of the Assembly.
- (iv) **Optimal use of regional forums.** Earlier submission of draft resolutions and deliberations within the regional forums would provide the opportunity for early input, as well as for discussion and definition of regional positions in advance.
- (v) **Experienced co-facilitators.** In identifying co-facilitators for the process of deliberating on and drafting of resolutions, it is also suggested that, as well as ensuring regional representation, Member States seek to identify experienced co-facilitators who are familiar with multilateral processes and who can be supported by the relevant UNEP technical experts, where so desired. Such an approach is important to ensure that Member States retain confidence in the process in order to ensure that negotiations are smooth and foster consensus.

(e) **Enhanced dialogue and coherence among multilateral environmental agreements and between such agreements and UNEP.** Since its establishment, the Environment Assembly has made comprehensive calls for coherence with and among the multilateral environmental agreements, including mandating support through UNEP.²¹ Similarly, the Environment Assembly has encouraged the governing bodies of such agreements to consider issues of cooperation falling within their mandates. At the sixth session, a supplementary agenda item was included on cooperation with multilateral environmental agreements. An “MEAs Day”²² was also held, which included two three-hour ministerial dialogues on effective implementation of environmental commitments and strengthening cooperation between the Environment Assembly, UNEP and the multilateral environmental agreements to enhance effective implementation. With many agreements enabled or established by the UNEP Governing Council – as was noted above – it is no surprise that the governing bodies of many multilateral environmental agreements have a long history of inviting

²¹ For example, requests to the Executive Director regarding effective programmatic cooperation with multilateral environmental agreements (resolution 1/12); promoting and enhancing synergies at global, regional and national level, including through UNEP regional offices (resolutions 2/5 and 2/17); fostering mutually supportive programmes of work (resolution 2/18); promoting approaches in line with Convention on Biological Diversity decision 14/30 on cooperation (resolution 4/10); and, more recently, promoting synergies, cooperation or collaboration for national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (resolution 6/4) and fostering national action to address global environmental challenges through increased cooperation between the Environment Assembly, UNEP and multilateral environmental agreements (resolution 6/6).

²² Inclusion of the item highlighted the importance of cooperation with multilateral environmental agreements. “MEAs Day”, devoted to discussion of such agreements, included an opening plenary meeting and two consecutive high-level dialogues and attracted high-level participation by Member States, along with representatives of 13 multilateral environmental agreement secretariats and a number of presidents of their governing bodies. A three-day programme of side events on the agreements held from 28 February to 1 March 2024 and led by the agreement secretariats was open to all participants in the sixth session. An exhibition on display throughout the sixth session showcased cooperation between UNEP and the agreements, between other United Nations entities and the agreements, and among the agreements on cross-cutting topics of interest relevant to the theme of the sixth session. The multilateral environmental agreement exhibition also provided space for networking and knowledge-sharing.

UNEP to cooperate on programmatic matters, requesting UNEP support to Member States in the implementation of their commitments or the provision of deeper scientific study, or analysis. Indeed, UNEP is regularly called on to ensure coherence and mutual support²³ among the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, or close coordination with them.²⁴

(f) **The Environment Assembly – a platform for environmental synergy and alignment?** While respecting the distinct mandates, independence and stand-alone governance structures of multilateral environmental agreements, opportunities do exist to enhance coherence, synergies and efficiency across the broader environmental landscape. The Environment Assembly can play a constructive role by offering a platform to support discussions in the search for greater efficiency, effectiveness, alignment and avoidance of duplication, while properly respecting the unique independence of each conference of the parties. Such discussions could include strengthened consultations with the governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements, their technical and scientific advisory panels, and other relevant United Nations scientific entities. Further, recognizing that not all Member States are parties to every multilateral environmental agreement, the Assembly's universal membership offers a unique platform for bridging gaps and fostering dialogue and collaboration across diverse environmental frameworks without infringing on the independence of each agreement. By serving as a forum for integrated scientific discussions, horizon-scanning and exchange of best practices and tools, the Assembly can contribute to coordinated and effective responses to emerging environmental challenges.

(g) **Strengthening UNEP.** While action in response to paragraph 88 of “The future we want” has gone some way to strengthening UNEP, future sessions of the Environment Assembly can help position UNEP as the multilateral institution that promotes, supports and acts for a stable environment, transitioning from the global authority and voice for the environment that emerged from Stockholm in 1972 to also become an institution, post-Stockholm+50, that acts for a healthy planet for the well-being of all.

H. The future Environment Assembly?

27. **An “environmental General Assembly”?** The question before Member States is whether they wish to envision the Environment Assembly of the future as an inclusive, engaged body, a true “environmental General Assembly” in which debates and dialogue take place across constituencies, including representatives of young people, Indigenous Peoples, civil society, the scientific community, local communities and the private sector; an Assembly that tackles, through meaningful and weighty agreed resolutions, urgent, critical and emerging environmental matters that go beyond requesting UNEP reports, but which ministers and cabinets in capitals – and their populations – desire and will back and implement with the full force of domestic politics, with strong technical and scientific support from UNEP, the scientific panels and the Environment Assembly.

28. **A platform that provides a space for Member States and the broader environmental community to enhance coherence, synergies, opportunities and impact among and between the multilateral environmental agreements?** A further question before Member States is whether they wish to envision the Environment Assembly as the tapestry on which each of the multilateral environmental agreements is embroidered, the strength of which is in its interwoven threads. Each thread is dyed its unique colour, but it is the blending of the colours that brings out the art. Can the Assembly, while respecting the distinct mandates and independence of each conference of the parties, serve as a platform for deeper, albeit informal, dialogue amongst Member States to identify

²³ For example, decisions of the four most recent meetings of the conferences of the parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata conventions contain more than 50 paragraphs referring to UNEP (or the Executive Director), including expressions of support for the implementation of programmatic aspects of decisions, such as capacity-building or technical assistance; welcoming efforts and products of UNEP; and calls for cooperation between multilateral environmental agreements and UNEP or between UNEP and other initiatives or processes.

²⁴ Some governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions, have established cooperation modalities between their respective scientific and technical subsidiary bodies and between the governing bodies themselves to promote information exchange and policy coherence. Mechanisms for cooperation among agreement secretariats initiated by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity include the Liaison Group of Biodiversity-related Conventions and the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions. Party-led processes for building cooperation and coordination across agreements include, for example, consultations among representatives of parties to agreements and secretariats to increase cooperation to support the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in what is known as the “Bern process”, which held its third meeting in Bern, Switzerland, in January 2024.

opportunities, alignment and mutually reinforcing benefits. Doing so would help multilateral environmental agreements achieve more impact with great efficiency.

ADVANCE