English Translation

The 167th Quarterly Meeting
of the Committee of Permanent Representatives
12 September 2024

Statement of the Arab Group

Mr. Chair,
Madam Executive Director,
Excellencies, colleagues,

I am honored to deliver this statement on behalf of the Arab Group.

At the outset, the Arab Group would like to thank the United Nations Environment Programme, the Executive Director, the Deputy Executive Director, and the Secretariat for the efforts exerted in preparing for this important meeting and in preparing the relevant working papers, including the quarterly report.

With regard to the quarterly report,
the Group extends its sincere thanks to the Executive Director, Ms. Inger Andersen, for the briefing regarding the report and the activities of the Environment Programme during the period from April to June, and wishes to present some observations and questions, hoping to receive responses in this regard.

Mr. Chair,
the Arab Group welcomes the celebration of World Environment Day, which this year focused on the themes of land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience, especially given that land degradation directly affects half of

the world's population, including the global gross domestic product (amounting to USD 44 trillion).

The Arab Group also welcomes the Third Arab Forum for the Environment, which was co-organized by the United Nations Environment Programme in Riyadh last June, and which focused on the challenges of land degradation in the Arab region, in addition to sub-themes such as food and water security, environmental compliance, and initiatives for the restoration of terrestrial ecosystems. We hope that the sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will constitute an opportunity to take the necessary measures and actions to reduce the desertification crisis.

Mr. Chair,
for decades, the environment in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has faced degradation and pressures that have affected its ecosystems as a result of wars and repeated attacks, rapid urban expansion crises, high population density, and political conditions, in addition to its location in a highly fragile area that is severely affected by the challenges of climate change.

We would like to welcome the preliminary assessment report on the environmental impacts of the war on the Gaza Strip issued by the United Nations Environment Programme on 18 June of this year, in response to the request of the State of Palestine. We commend all the teams involved and the efforts exerted in its preparation. We emphasize the importance of enriching this report in light of the continued military aggression against the land of Palestine, including the Gaza Strip, which has exacerbated the massive environmental damage resulting therefrom and the destruction of the environmental system and biodiversity.

Accordingly, we submit a request for clarification regarding the measures taken and the current working mechanisms envisaged by the Programme—in light of the continued aggression on the Gaza Strip—in order to enrich the preliminary report with in-depth data to address environmental damage, pending a ceasefire and the improvement of security conditions to allow international experts to conduct field visits and the necessary examinations in order to prepare the anticipated final, accurate, and comprehensive analytical assessment.

In this regard, the Arab Group inquires about the measures that the Secretariat intends to take to conduct a specialized, scientifically based assessment to reduce long-term environmental impacts and mitigate the resulting damage. Are there any possible ways to prevent further contamination of soil, air, freshwater, and groundwater layers?

The Group would also like to learn about the measures taken by the United Nations Environment Programme with regard to coordinating its efforts with other United Nations agencies to integrate the results of the assessment into humanitarian response, recovery, and early recovery plans.

Mr. Chair,
with regard to the Programme of Work and the Medium-Term Strategy of the United Nations Environment Programme:

The Arab region faces many environmental challenges that hinder the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and various forms of pollution, in addition to desertification, drought, land degradation, floods, and sand and dust storms, which

negatively affect water availability and food security, leading in some cases to crises of a humanitarian nature.

Accordingly, we call upon the United Nations Environment Programme to integrate these challenges into the Programme's plans, programmes, and strategies, and not to limit them to the three environmental crises, and to use terminology established by multilateral environmental agreements. We also urge the Programme to expand its programmatic framework and to enrich the reports of the Executive Director and the foresight reports issued by the Programme to include assessments of the implementation of projects it supervises in the Arab region.

Within the same framework, the Group emphasizes the importance of providing means of implementation that enable Arab countries to overcome the challenges mentioned above and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including environmental financing, technology transfer and development, and capacity building, in a manner that allows for the acquisition of the necessary expertise to benefit from all available frameworks with transparency.

In conclusion, as the Arab Group, we look forward to strengthening cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme and all partners, enhancing effective participation in the preparation of the roadmap and strategy, and engaging in all programmes for the protection of the environment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.