Comments on behalf of NGOs – West Asia Region On the Working Documents for OEWG-3.2 (UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/6, .3/7, and .3/8) Date: May 28, 2025

Context

As NGOs from the West Asia region, we speak on behalf of communities who continue to bear the brunt of environmental degradation and toxic exposure—particularly women, youth, and people living in areas affected by war and protracted conflict.

In our region, armed conflict, political instability, and weak environmental governance have exacerbated the impacts of chemical pollution, hazardous waste, and plastic contamination. Toxic exposure is not only an environmental issue—it is a humanitarian and human rights issue, affecting health, livelihoods, food security, and the intergenerational wellbeing of millions. Women and youth are disproportionately affected due to their roles in caregiving, informal work, and their limited access to decision-making spaces.

We emphasize that the development of the Science-Policy Panel must prioritize those who have been historically excluded and most heavily impacted, including frontline communities in war-torn and environmentally degraded regions of West Asia.

Local and Traditional Knowledge in Conflict-Affected Contexts

Communities in West Asia—despite displacement, environmental destruction, and conflict—continue to uphold valuable traditional knowledge and local practices that help safeguard natural resources, recover from crises, and rebuild ecosystems.

This knowledge, passed through generations, is essential for environmental monitoring, resilience-building, and pollution reduction, especially in the absence of institutional support. It must be respected, protected, and included in the panel's assessments, alongside formal scientific expertise.

We are concerned that in current drafts of the working documents (e.g. UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/6), community-based knowledge is often minimized or overlooked, seen only as a complement to Western science rather than an integral contributor to science-policy discussions. This must change.

Meaningful Inclusion and Representation

If this panel is to serve global communities equitably, it must not replicate the structures that have excluded war-affected, marginalized, and under-resourced regions like ours.
We therefore call on the ad hoc open-ended working group to:
Ensure that the Science-Policy Panel centers the voices of communities impacted by armed conflict and environmental degradation, including women and youth from affected areas of West Asia.
Affirm the value of traditional, local, and experiential knowledge in all assessments, ensuring it is treated with respect and included in decision-making processes with appropriate safeguards and consent.
Provide financial and logistical support for the participation of civil society experts from conflict zones and fragile states, ensuring that participation is not only nominal but effective and sustained.
Include equity, justice, and conflict sensitivity in the guiding principles of the Panel—recognizing that pollution and environmental harm are not experienced equally, and that remediation must reflect this reality.

Conclusion
For West Asia and other conflict-affected regions, pollution is not a distant or future threat—it is a daily reality. Our communities, particularly women and youth, live with the toxic legacies of war, poor governance, and extractive development. They also hold the solutions and lived knowledge necessary for recovery and sustainability.
We urge Member States and UNEP to ensure that the Science-Policy Panel does not only serve the scientifically privileged, but amplifies the voices of those at the frontlines of pollution and environmental injustice.
Justice, inclusion, and conflict-aware science must guide the future of this panel—so no region or community is left behind.

Statement on behalf of all NGOs in West Asia

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