

## **Turning the Tide on Plastic Pollution**

“The resumed session of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of UNEA (UNEA 5.2) opened on 28 February 2022, and ended on 2 March 2022.

UNEA-5 made history by delivering significant landmark resolutions. It was endorsed as the most successful UNEA to date.

On 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022, UNEA 5.2 President (Espen Barth Eide, Norway) opened the meeting, and reflected on the past 50-years of achievement of environmental protection since the [Stockholm conference on the Human Environment](#). He cited UNEP’s supporting role in combating ozone depletion, climate change, pollution among other crises. He appealed to delegates to use diplomacy for the common good and urged them to deliver on the noble mission to end plastic pollution.

On her part, the UN Executive Director, Inger Andersen, drew delegates attention to the 3 planetary crises facing the globe: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, and highlighted the need to urgently address plastic pollution.

The delegates welcomed member states agreement on the following draft resolutions and declaration:

- Animal welfare-environment and sustainable development nexus,
- Sustainable nitrogen management; and the Future of the Global Environment Outlook,
- Establishment of an intergovernmental committee (INC) on plastic pollution titled ‘End plastic pollution: Towards an international Legal Binding Instrument (LBI)’.

The approved resolution was preceded by lengthy and intense negotiations between member states that saw their representatives burning the midnight oil well into the wee hours of the morning.

Following complex and protracted discussions on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022, the delegates agreed on a game-changing draft resolution on a Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste, and to prevent pollution and also on the environmental aspects of minerals and metals management.

The delegates also agreed on contested texts of various draft resolutions and approved a total of 11 resolutions, and one decision on the date and venue of UNEA-6, to augment efforts to enhance UNEP’s voice on the global stage.

A high-level segment, the Leadership Dialogue with Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), also took place and was chaired by the CEO/Chair Person, Global Environment Facility (GEF), Manuel Rodriguez.

Among other things, leaders stressed the following:

- Need to enhance coherence and collaboration across all levels, and the need to align public and private funding, policy coherence and collaboration,
- Multilateralism works when “we make it work,” and there was need for stronger leadership towards fostering better responses through international coordination and collaboration,
- Domestic efforts were needed for strengthening national coordination between MEAs, and enhancing engagement with stakeholders, as well as national reporting and information sharing with MEAs,
- Need for policy coherence in international environmental governance
- Crucial role of biodiversity-related conventions,
- The need for delegates to do more by bringing environmental values into political decision-making,
- Important role of the GBF in setting the scene for global conversation action,
- Need to strengthen the mainstreaming of biodiversity, chemicals and waste, and climate change across the MEAs,
- Simplifying reporting by parties in order to measure the impact of agreements, and follow up on their implementation,
- Need for developed countries to fulfil their financial commitments and to translate political commitment into action,
- Russia’s invasion of Ukraine posed a threat to the lives of civilians as well as the environment.

A multi-stakeholder dialogue also took place, and it provided an opportunity for member states representatives to engage in an open and interactive exchange with stakeholders about how to work together in building back greener in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Delegates also listened to National statements throughout the day.

Draft resolutions endorsed by the Committee of the Whole (COW) for recommendation to the assembly for adoption included: environmental aspects of minerals and metals management; enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production; sustainable and resilient infrastructure; nature-based solutions on supporting sustainable development; biodiversity and health; and an environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery.

Delegates approved the decision to hold the sixth session of UNEA (UNEA-6) at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi Kenya, from 26 February – 1 March 2024.

2 March 2022, marked the last day of the resumed UNEA-5.2 which ended on a celebratory note.

Delegates celebrated the week’s achievements by participating in a high-level segment convened under the theme, ‘Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)’.

In his opening statement, UNEA President *E.B Eide* observed that the day was historic, and commended delegates for the raft of resolutions approved, including a solid treaty on plastics, and a science-policy panel on chemicals, waste, and pollution.

The high-level segment was followed by a leadership dialogue themed ‘Strengthening Action for Nature to Achieve the SDGs’. The dialogue showcased examples of concrete initiatives that people, governments and organisations around the world are taking to heal humanities broken relationship with nature, whilst contributing to the achievement of several SDGs.

During the closing plenary, UNEA-5 adopted 13 resolutions and the Ministerial Declaration, and further endorsed the Political Declaration of UNEA’s Special Session to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of UNEP (UNEP@50).

Delegates adopted the following resolutions:

- Animal Welfare-Environment-Sustainable Development Nexus (UNEP/EA.5/L.10/Rev.1)
- Sustainable Nitrogen Management (UNEP/EA.5/L.12/Rev.1)
- Future of the Global Environment Outlook (UNEP/EA.5/20/Rev.1)
- Sustainable Lake Management (UNEP/EA.5/L.8)
- Nature-based Solutions for Sustainable Development (UNEP/EA.5/L.9))
- Biodiversity and Health (UNEP/EA.5/L.11)
- Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste and Pollution (UNEP/EA.5/L.14)
- Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure (UNEP/EA.5/L.15)
- Enhancing Circular Economy (UNEP/EA.5/L.17)
- Environmental Aspects of Minerals and Metals Management (UNEP/EA.5/l.18)
- Due Regard to the Principle of Equitable Geographical Distribution (UNEP/EA.5/L.19)
- End Plastic Pollution: Towards an International Legally Binding Instrument (UNEP/EA.5/L..23/Rev.1)

The adoption of the resolution: “End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument’ received an extended standing ovation. This sentiment resonated with the declaration by UNEP Executive Director, Inger Andersen, that “this agreement on plastic pollution is the most significant agreement since Paris!””

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*Report on the Resumed 5<sup>th</sup> Session Of The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5), UNEA-5.2 (28<sup>th</sup> February To 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022), written by Beatrice Oluoch (on behalf of the S.I. Nairobi team) 11/5/2022.*