

UNEA-3 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2017

The High-Level Segment of the third session of the United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA-3) opened today in Nairobi, Kenya. The plenary was officially opened by President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, and follow up remarks were delivered by Presidents David Granger of Guyana and Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona of Trinidad and Tobago.

Delegates then convened in four consecutive thematic Leadership Dialogues, with plenary sessions to present national statements continuing in parallel.

Committee of the Whole (COW) informal group consultations also continued throughout the day, adopting the remaining three decisions and resolutions in the closing plenary in the evening.

In the evening, the “Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on People and Pollution” took place.

OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

In his opening remarks, UNEA-3 President Gutiérrez-Espeleta, highlighted that we have created a world where consumers’ rights outstrip human rights, and added that ignorance can do great damage to the environment. Referencing the draft ministerial outcome document, he stressed that “each of us must take responsibility for everything we make, buy, use and throw away.”

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director Erik Solheim highlighted environmental actions being undertaken by governments in various parts of the world. He mentioned UNEP’s cooperation with Israel and the State of Palestine on an assessment of the environmental situation in the latter.

Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya, welcomed delegates to Kenya and UNEA-3. He underscored the importance of the ban on the manufacture, sale and use of plastic bags in the country. He announced that Kenya plans to host a conference on the blue economy in the first quarter of 2018. Reiterating his government’s support for UNEP, he added that it would increase its financial contribution, and called on other nations to do so. He then declared the Assembly officially open.

David Granger, President of Guyana, highlighted efforts by Guyana to become a “green state,” including by setting aside 15% of its land as protected areas. He emphasized the importance of public education and support from international organizations to achieve this objective.

Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, President of Trinidad and Tobago, said that his participation at UNEA-3 demonstrated a commitment to building bridges over borders, commenting that “now is not the time to walk backwards.” He highlighted the importance of educating children to advocate for the environment and to “save adults from themselves.” In speaking on the detrimental impacts of pollution on seas, he said that there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050, and called for the prioritization of waste reduction and management, as well as education on pollution.

LEADERSHIP DIALOGUES

Taking place for the first time at UNEA-3, the Leadership Dialogues aimed to provide participating delegates with an opportunity to intensify engagement and discuss contributions towards a pollution-free planet by providing strategic direction and setting the foundation for acceleration.

SCIENCE, EVIDENCE AND CITIZENS’ AWARENESS FOR CHANGE: Opening this Dialogue, Moderator Dominic Kailashnath Waughray, World Economic Forum, highlighted its aim to provide a forum for ministers, CEOs, top scientists and other high-level representatives to share their experiences and ideas on how to communicate science, enhance public awareness, and galvanize action towards a pollution-free planet.

The Gambia emphasized the importance of science and technology in monitoring environmental change, including on: water and air quality; bushfires; prevention of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; dumping of toxic waste; and forest cover and biodiversity. The World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted a WHO map displaying exposure to pollution per country with expected related health costs. She underscored that the health benefits of combatting pollution can offset the costs of climate change mitigation. Japan underscored the importance of sound scientific information and stressed the need for a precautionary approach.

Discussing specific national experiences, India said that science and technology have the “solutions for everything,” but consideration must be given to how they are applied. He underscored the value of social movements to mainstream solutions to address pollution and called for coordination among ministries of health, science and technology, and environment to improve governance.

The Netherlands shared examples of successful civil society engagement, such as the use of citizen-collected data to complement official data, and highlighted the establishment of the Global Centre of Excellence on Climate Adaptation.

Discussing the role of science and technology in addressing pollution, IBM said that science is the foundation of technology and innovation. He added that advanced tools to address pollution exist, highlighting best practices from his company that use data to create solutions.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature, highlighting that 22% of species are under threat from pollution, explained that we are better equipped to deal with environmental challenges when we have access to more data. She pointed to the collaboration with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on the Global Register of Introduced and Invasive Species.

The CBD Secretariat called on ministers to implement the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

The National Institute for Processing Empty Containers, Brazil, explored the importance of traceability in supply chain management as an opportunity to reduce emissions and increase recycling.

The Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the private sector can support science and research by identifying emerging issues and providing funding.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS, INSTITUTIONS AND THE RULE OF LAW TO ADDRESS POLLUTION: This Leadership Dialogue, moderated by Beatrice Marshall, Anchor, China Global Television Network, Africa, explored the role of legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks in the context of pollution and how they can – and have been – used to empower governments, the private sector, civil society and individual citizens in the successful transition towards a pollution-free planet.

The EU called for transparency within legal frameworks in order to empower citizens to better understand challenges and solutions to addressing pollution.

Norway reported on the his country's experience in overcoming large-scale marine pollution, without compromise to livelihoods, underscoring the need for regulation to catalyze actions from the private sector, along with strong rule of law for enforcement.

Kenya spoke on the recent ban on plastic bags, sharing positive results as well as challenges yet to overcome, such as the need for further engagement with manufacturers to utilize natural alternatives and create job opportunities.

France affirmed the need for strong political decisions and legal tools to define the society “we want to live in.” He shared an update on the development of the Global Pact for the Environment, highlighting principles such as “non-regression” where each state would pledge that any future change to environmental legislation will not lead to an overall reduction in existing protection.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat explained that laws are necessary to translate agreements into action.

Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions Secretariat highlighted the importance of national mechanisms, guidelines, stakeholder engagement to address pollution on the ground.

Ecuador called for funds to address pollution in developing countries. In explaining that current laws are insufficient, he highlighted the impact of the lack of enforcement of EU laws to punish vehicle enterprises that committed fraud regarding emissions levels.

The Ozone Secretariat highlighted best practices from the Montreal Protocol, including, *inter alia*: clearly defined targets with flexibility; financial mechanisms for developing countries; and public-private partnerships.

The UN Economic Commission for Europe mentioned five MEAs that are helping to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and decrease pollution.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International highlighted an example from the Galapagos Islands where community concern triggered political will and private sector engagement, resulting in improved technical capacity and cleaner environment.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment drew attention to how pollution interferes with human rights, saying that “preventing pollution is a legal and moral obligation,” and encouraging Member States to continue to provide safe spaces for those speaking out against pollution and environmental degradation.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS FOR A POLLUTION-FREE PLANET: This Dialogue, moderated by Zain Verjee, former Anchor CNN, highlighted innovative solutions to prevent and reduce air, land and soil, and marine and coastal pollution, as well as manage chemicals and waste.

The US highlighted the importance of access to accurate data, communication and partnerships, citing the example of bike paths to reduce air pollution.

KCB Group shared experiences in Asia, identifying the challenges of understanding and communicating the economic costs of pollution, such as in retrofitting infrastructures designed for “dirty” sources of energy.

MoBike highlighted her company's use of science and technology to increase the usability of bikes, such as GPS tracking and solar-powered widgets on bikes. She noted that these efforts help citizens to participate in environmental protection.

Cuba highlighted his country's experience in establishing a register of contaminated sources. He underscored the importance of citizens' commitment, explaining that incentives and sanctions are insufficient.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) drew attention to the significant costs to farmers, especially small-scale farmers, in implementing environmentally-safe alternatives. He emphasized the need to “de-risk” such investments through insurance and financial instruments.

The World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) cited the annual loss of 75 billion tons of soil, underscoring the need for policies that are underpinned by scientific evidence. The Ramsar Convention Secretariat noted that freshwater wetlands serve as a pollution mitigation and management solution by filtering wastewater. She encouraged Member States to use and conserve their wetlands as a pollution strategy.

Marchica Med drew attention to a project led by his organization to rehabilitate a lagoon in the north of Morocco, which allowed for water treatment and the return of fish and birds.

Israel shared national efforts to: increase the price of fresh water to incentivize use of wastewater; and preserve fresh water resources by using wastewater in agriculture.

Singapore discussed overcoming public perception that processed water is not clean or hygienic, underscoring the need to safeguard resources with weather resistant technologies considering the impending threats from climate change.

Finland highlighted tools his country used to move to a circular economy and encourage innovation in the private sector, including, *inter alia*: guidance on public procurement in building projects; and the use of Green Deals.

Belgium spoke on citizen engagement in environmental issues, including: involving the private sector from the beginning, stakeholder engagement, and youth education.

Morocco spoke on her country's 10-year plan for domestic waste, noting it also serves as a job creation strategy.

Estonia reported that 95% of the population currently declares their taxes electronically, demonstrating how electronic governance can continue to provide services while reducing air pollution from reduced travel.

Sri Lanka reviewed initiatives to increase bioremediation to process wastewater by planting trees around the plus 43,000 reservoirs in the country.

Reflecting on a question raised regarding the need for countries to align in efforts due to transboundary issues of pollution, the African Union talked about the need to “bridge the gap” and attract young people to participate in sustainable agriculture.

FINANCING AND INNOVATION TO COMBAT POLLUTION: This Dialogue, moderated by Axel Threlfall, Editor-at-Large, Reuters, discussed how the public sector can leverage private investment flows through transformative business models and technologies to remove the “traditional litany of pollution and contaminants.”

South Africa highlighted steps taken to scale-up green initiatives, explaining how the country prioritized consultation with stakeholders and finance to do so.

Speaking about pollution and health, the World Bank said that evaluations are done to inform policy dialogue during multilateral processes such as UNEA, yet most do not consider them. She added that governments often are unaware of the cost of pollution to their countries, not only on health but also on economic growth.

Luxembourg urged governments to “lead by example,” sharing experiences reorienting financial flows to support sustainable development, drawing attention to engagement through working groups and support for capacity building as ways to improve success of innovative instruments and overcoming the challenge of policy coherence.

Canada named specific drivers of change housed in government capacity, such as: taxation, either to deter bad behavior or incentivize good behavior; regulation; and procurement.

Germany discussed the use of feed-in electricity tariffs in his country, which encourages the development of renewable energy, and results in its increased accessibility in areas of the world where energy was previously absent.

BNP Paribas called attention to the Tropical Landscapes Finance Facility, a collaborative initiative with UNEP, ICRAF and ADM Capital, noting it receives support, but not funding, from the government of Indonesia. He explained that the initiative is based on the realization that no single institution can solve all environmental problems, and that the private sector is also necessary. He added that the role of the government is to give support to private sector mechanisms to steer behavioral change.

The World Bank Group highlighted the challenge of “self-selection,” whereby mostly companies that already subscribe to the International Finance Cooperation’s standards choose to partner with it.

Slovakia emphasized the importance of communicating with different actors; the potential of using EU Emissions Trading System revenues for climate-friendly investments; and collaboration with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to help leverage private finance.

The European Commission highlighted the EU External Investment Plan, which will invest €44 billion by 2020 in the EU’s neighboring countries and Africa for environmental protection and a low-carbon, green economy. He noted a forthcoming proposed initiative on promoting green bonds and sustainable finance in the EU and beyond.

Indonesia discussed efforts to leverage innovative financing dating back to the early 1990s, including the internalization of environmental sectors into the banking sectors, and through the renewal of her country’s environmental protection and management act. She stressed the importance of fiscal incentives in directing stakeholder behavior towards sustainable development.

The Major Group for Children and Youth emphasized the role of young people in offering “fresh, innovative solutions,” and aligned itself with the draft UNEA-3 resolution on investing in innovative environmental solutions for implementation of the SDGs.

The Global Solar Council underscored the need for education systems that prepare the next generation of workers for a green economy.

Stressing his country’s commitment to the green economy, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) highlighted its green economy strategy; the Dubai Declaration of financial institutions in the UAE on sustainable finance; and the launch of two green funds.

Canada noted the importance of involving broader society and regular progress monitoring.

N Finance, an affiliate company of Alibaba, highlighted its mobile wallet function, whose environmental scheme has already led to the planting of 10 million trees in China’s desert.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE ON PEOPLE AND POLLUTION: Convening in the evening, this session was moderated by Felix Dodds, International Ambassador for the City of Bonn. The session aimed to build on the #BeatPollution campaign and UNEA-3 Leadership Dialogues to focus on root causes of different aspects of pollution, including their connections to poverty, rule of law, and human rights.

The discussions took place in two rounds, with representatives of civil society highlighting problems and solutions, followed by reactions from ministers and high-level representatives of government and international institutions.

Marie Chatardová, President, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) stressed that pollution impacts us all on a personal level and looked forward to the presentation of key messages from UNEA-3 to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), especially the proposed resolution on contributions of UNEA to the HLPF.

Opening the first discussion round on challenges, Halima Hussein, Natural Justice, highlighted the impacts of pollution on Kenyan communities, describing most development projects as “egregious and unnecessary.” Among other examples, Olga Speranskaya, Co-chair of the International Persistent Organic Pollutants Elimination Network, discussed the impacts of mercury

poisoning in gold mines in western Kenya. Sascha Gabizon, Co-Facilitator, Women Major Group, discussed her personal experience with pollution and stressed that many of its causes can be addressed through more sustainable solutions.

In response, South Africa challenged all states to continue efforts and “join hands” to ensure that pollution is not just alleviated, but eradicated. WWF International reiterated that pollution transcends the environment to touch on the economy and security. The Plastic Pollution Coalition questioned whether individual consumer action can address the “heart of the problem,” and explained that preventing the manufacture of plastics would be more effective. Estonia shared a successful action organized by citizens to clean illegal waste dump sites, thereby attracting support from the private sector and government to further process the collected waste.

In the second discussion round on solutions, Eritai Kateibwi, Young Champion of the Earth for Asia Pacific, highlighted how he had addressed water contamination with filtration systems in his home nation of Kiribati. Kaya Dorey, Novel Supply Co., spoke on her sustainable apparel line, including designing with the end in mind and donating scrap fabric.

In their responses, ministers and high-level country representatives from Finland, Norway, Kiribati, Belgium, Canada, the US, as well as NGO representatives highlighted the: need for green public procurement, and to link UNEA with the 2030 Agenda and the HLPF; asymmetrical effects of pollution on vulnerable groups; importance of capacity building, engaging stakeholders, including indigenous populations; and negative effects of pollution on wildlife and human health. In speaking about fossil fuel subsidies, one CSO representative said “if we really want to solve pollution, we should consider ending funding to it in the first place.”

CLOSING OF THE COW

In the COW, delegates heard report-backs from informal consultations held during the day to finalize the decision on provisional agenda, date and venue of the next UNEA session (UNEA/EA 3/L.16), as well as two outstanding resolutions, on: environment and health (UNEA/EA 3/L.8); and consolidation of UNEP headquarters. All three draft texts were approved by the COW and forwarded to UNEA for adoption. The CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP proposed education as a theme for UNEA-4. The NGOS MAJOR GROUP called for additional forms of pollution, such as that of intensive agriculture, to be considered in future meetings.

Delegates also approved the report of the rapporteur, with Chair Matuszak noting that titles and document numbers remained to be verified by the Secretariat. In closing, Member States, and UNEP Deputy Executive Director Ibrahim Thiaw on behalf of the Executive Director, expressed their thanks to Chair Matuszak for his facilitation of the Committee’s work.

IN THE BREEZEWAYS

On the penultimate day of UNEA-3, it was perhaps inevitable that means of implementation popped up in various conversations around the UNEP grounds. During the fraught late-night COW the previous evening, a few delegates remarked that this year’s Assembly did not leave space to consider the traditional agenda items around the programme of work and budget, leaving some to wonder if this would have an impact on the implementation of the decisions and resolutions adopted at this session. Wanting to bring the gravity of the situation home, the Secretariat presented a note highlighting the implications of hosting UNEA and related meetings on the regular budget, stressing that this has not evolved in line with the demands of Member States. With more than a dozen decisions and resolutions due to be adopted by the Assembly on Wednesday, the exchanges in the day-long Leadership and Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues could offer some direction on the way ahead.

ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of OECPR3-UNEA3 will be available on Saturday, 9 December 2017 at <http://enb.iisd.org/unep/ocpr3-unea3/>



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