



**Governing Council  
of the United Nations  
Environment Programme**

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Items 4 (a), (c) and 6 of the provisional agenda\*\*

**Policy issues: state of the environment**

**Policy issues: coordination and cooperation with the United Nations system on environmental matters**

**Implementation of the programme of work of the United Nations**

**Environment Programme and the relevant decisions of the Governing Council**

**State of the environment and contribution of the United Nations  
Environment Programme to addressing substantive environmental  
challenges**

**Report of the Executive Director**

*Summary*

The present report contains a summary of issues emanating from the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the area of assessment, monitoring and early warning. It covers several key aspects of the work performed by UNEP in keeping under review the world environmental situation and describes the multifaceted environmental challenges that face the United Nations and its Member States. At its twenty-fourth session, the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum has before it a large and significant body of assessment findings which represent challenges with potential implications for Member States. Many of the challenges are described in more detail in related documents, to which reference is made in the present report. While it is incumbent upon the Executive Director to look back and report to the Governing Council on past activities and accomplishments, it is also his responsibility to look forward at new and innovative ways of tackling the substantive challenge of reporting on the environmental state of our planet.

The present report also contains background information on the amendment of the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility (GEF), as approved by the third GEF Assembly held in Cape Town, South Africa, on 29 and 30 August 2006, to provide greater flexibility to the GEF Council with respect to the planning of its meetings.

\* Re-issued for technical reasons.

\*\* UNEP/GC/24/1.

## I. Suggested action by the Governing Council

1. The Governing Council may wish to consider the adoption of decisions along the lines suggested below:

### A. 24/[...] World environmental situation

*The Governing Council,*

*Pursuing* its functions and responsibilities as outlined in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) including to keep under review the world environmental situation in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance are prioritized and receive appropriate and adequate consideration by Governments and to promote the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information,

*Recalling* its decision 22/1 on early warning, assessment and monitoring and decision 23/6 on keeping the world environmental situation under review,

*Recalling* General Assembly resolution 61/222 of 20 December 2006 on oceans and the law of the sea,

*Noting* the findings contained in the many environmental assessment reports and publications released after its twenty-third session, in particular those prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme in cooperation with partners,

1. *Urges* Governments, United Nations agencies, financial institutions, the private sector and civil society to consider the following environmental challenges, in the light of the growing awareness of the complexity of those challenges:

(a) Sixty per cent of the ecosystem services examined as part of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment are being degraded or used unsustainably and their degradation could grow significantly worse before 2050 due to rapidly growing demands for food, freshwater, timber, fibre and fuel. The changes that have been made to ecosystems have contributed to substantial net gains in human well-being and economic development, but this has been at the cost of the growing risk of sudden and unexpected environmental changes, the exacerbation of poverty for some groups of people and a substantial and largely irreversible loss in biological diversity;

(b) The ability of aquatic ecosystems to provide critical services has been weakened due, among other things, to agricultural run-off, industrial and municipal discharges and unsustainable use of freshwater and living resources, as confirmed in the final report of the Global International Waters Assessment, *Challenges to International Waters: Regional Assessments in a Global Perspective*;

(c) The vulnerability of desert environments, particularly in their marginal areas, has increased, as highlighted in the *Global Deserts Outlook*, the first thematic assessment report in the Global Environment Outlook series of the United Nations Environment Programme;

(d) As pointed out in the *Global Environment Outlook Yearbook 2006*, indoor air pollution from solid fuel use may be responsible for between 800,000 and 2.4 million premature deaths each year, the long-range transport of energy-related air pollution leads to acidification in some parts of the world due to rising sulphur dioxide emissions, ecosystems are being damaged due to increased emissions of nitrogen and the deposition of pollutants such as mercury and persistent organic pollutants and there is emerging scientific evidence of the impact of climate change on food production;

(e) The publication *One Planet, Many People: Atlas of Our Changing Environment* clearly documents scientific evidence of global environmental change as a result of natural processes and human-induced activities;

(f) As revealed in the Scientific Assessment of Ozone Depletion: 2006, prepared by the Scientific Assessment Panel of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, combined stratospheric abundances of ozone-depleting gases show a downward trend from their peak values in the late 1990s, although a decrease in stratospheric bromine has not yet been identified, the Antarctic ozone hole is expected to persist for another two decades and large ozone losses are likely to continue to occur in cold Arctic winters during the next 15 years;

(g) Globalization and new developments in nanotechnologies present both challenges and opportunities for environmental governance, as identified in the *Global Environment Outlook Yearbook 2007*;

2. *Notes with concern* that the documented environmental degradation and loss of ecosystem services is a barrier to the attainment of internationally agreed development goals and that the environmental governance infrastructure of developing countries and countries with economies in transition needs to be strengthened through capacity-building and technology support with the assistance of a coherent United Nations presence at the national level;

3. *Calls* on Governments and intergovernmental organizations to continue to cooperate, among other things through multilateral environmental agreements and by promoting synergies between those agreements in efforts to mitigate and adapt to environmental change, and in doing so to enhance the knowledge base for more integrated and responsive environmental governance, including by using economic instruments and market mechanisms to regulate and manage the environment, ecosystems and their services where appropriate;

4. *Welcomes* General Assembly resolution 60/30 of 8 March 2006 on oceans and the law of the sea, in which the General Assembly decided to establish a regular process under the United Nations for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, to be jointly implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization;

5. *Urges* Member States in a position to do so and financial institutions such as the Global Environment Facility to contribute financially to the start-up phase of the regular process, the “assessment of assessments”, in accordance with the workplan and budget approved by the Ad Hoc Steering Group established by the General Assembly in resolution 60/30;

6. *Calls* on Governments and experts to contribute to the finalization of the fourth Global Environment Outlook report, in accordance with the process outlined during the global intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultation on the report, held in Nairobi on 19 and 20 February 2005, by, among other things, reviewing the summary for decision makers in 2007, participating in the second global intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultation in September 2007 and supporting outreach activities relating to the fourth Global Environment Outlook report;

7. *Requests* the Executive Director to present the relevant findings of the fourth Global Environment Outlook report to the Governing Council at its tenth special session so as to facilitate consideration of these findings and their potential implications, for example for the strategic direction of the programme of work of the United Nations Environment Programme and for the performance of the functions of the United Nations Environment Programme in the United Nations system and in the provision of services to Member States.

## **B. 24/[...] Amendment to the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility**

*The Governing Council,*

*Recalling* its decision SS.IV/1 of 18 June 1994 on the adoption of the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility,

*Recalling* its decision 22/19 of 7 February 2003 on the adoption of amendments to the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility to include land degradation, primarily desertification and deforestation, and persistent organic pollutants as new focal areas of the Global Environment Facility, as approved by the Second Global Environment Facility Assembly,

*Recalling* the decision of the Third Global Environment Facility Assembly, held in Cape Town, South Africa, on 29 and 30 August 2006, on the amendment of the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility,

1. *Decides* to adopt the amendment to the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility related to the location of meetings of the Council of the Global Environment Facility, as approved by the Third Global Environmental Facility Assembly;

2. *Requests* the Executive Director to transmit the present decision to the Chief Executive Officer/Chair of the Global Environment Facility.

## II. Keeping the world environmental situation under review

2. The present report is being submitted to the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its twenty-fourth session to update the Council/Forum on current developments in the global environmental situation and on the various activities and processes being undertaken to keep the state of the global environment under review and to facilitate informed discussion and action. It responds to various decisions of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum and relates to UNEP activities in environmental assessment and early warning.

3. The report highlights the findings of the *Global Environment Outlook Yearbook 2007*, the *Global Biodiversity Outlook 2* and the *Global Deserts Outlook*. In addition, it reviews the progress of global and sub-global assessments which are under way, such as the fourth Global Environment Outlook report, the fourth report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development and the regular process under the United Nations for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/141 of 12 December 2002 on oceans and laws of the sea. Furthermore, it builds on recently completed assessments such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the Global International Waters Assessment, which were reported in more detail at the ninth special session of the Governing Council, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from 7 to 9 February 2006, in document UNEP/GCSS.IX/10. The present report highlights some of the services provided by UNEP to Member States and other stakeholders at the global and sub-global levels, relating, among other things, to integrated environmental assessment and reporting, environmental data and information and environment, conflict and cooperation. It also outlines relevant activities in the context of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building.

4. The current work of UNEP is informed by the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which was adopted at the High-level Plenary Meeting of the sixtieth session of the United Nations General Assembly, held in New York in September 2005. It is also informed by the progress being made in the implementation of the goals of the Millennium Declaration and other internationally agreed development goals and targets.

5. The aim of the present report is to provide a basis for the deliberations of the Council/Forum under agenda item 4 (a): Policy issues: state of the environment and agenda item 6: Implementation of the programme of work of UNEP and the relevant decisions of the Governing Council. It should be noted that, at its twenty-fourth session, the Council/Forum has before it a large and significant body of assessment findings. The potential implications of these findings are reflected in chapter VI and more explicitly in the suggested action by the Governing Council contained in the present report. It should also be noted that the Council/Forum has before it a report by the Executive Director on strengthening the scientific base of UNEP through the Environment Watch proposal (UNEP/GC/24/3/Add.2), which aims for improved coherence between and effectiveness in activities for keeping the environment under review. It also has before it a related information document providing an overview of regional and national environmental information networks (UNEP/GC/24/INF/13).

## III. Findings of recent assessments

### A. Global Environment Outlook Yearbook

6. The *Global Environment Outlook Yearbook 2007* is presented in document UNEP/GC/24/INF/2. It is the fourth annual survey of the changing global environment produced by UNEP, as mandated by the Governing Council in its decision 22/1 IB.

7. The *2007 Yearbook* provides the Council/Forum with recent findings and identifies opportunities and risks relevant to the state of environment. It contains an overview section of global and regional events and issues in 2006, a feature focus section on the environment and globalization, an emerging challenges section on nanotechnologies and a global environmental trends indicator section.

8. The feature focus section was prepared in support of the deliberations of the Council/ Forum at its twenty-fourth session. The opportunities and risks examined in the section are considered with a dynamic and interactive approach, highlighting how, through responsible management, risks can be

defused or even transformed into opportunities. The section also examines the risks that are posed to such opportunities by an absence of management or by mismanagement. In addition, the feature focus section contains the information which was used for the preparation of the background paper for the ministerial level consultations relating to globalization and environment (UNEP/GC/24/11).

9. Nanotechnology is an emerging issue that could have profound effects on industry, technology, social and economic development, human health and the environment. Although nanotechnologies have the potential to deliver environmental benefits, foreseeing the environmental impact of the widespread use of these technologies is much more difficult because of the complex physical, chemical and biological interactions that will enter into play under real-life conditions. To harness the many new possibilities for social and economic development in the short and long terms, a balanced approach in the use of such technology is required to maximize benefits while minimizing risk.

## **B. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment**

10. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, supported by UNEP and other partners, assessed the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being. It responded to requests for information from Governments through four international conventions (the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals), as well as to the needs of other users, including the business community and indigenous people. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's overall synthesis report, as well as synthesis reports on biodiversity, desertification, wetlands and water and business and industry, were released in 2005.<sup>1</sup>

11. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre has initiated various activities to follow up the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. For example, it has produced a synthesis report on the assessment's findings on marine and coastal ecosystems and human well-being and has worked with Greenfacts and other non-governmental organizations to produce a summary of the assessment's synthesis report on biodiversity. The World Health Organization (WHO) has prepared an additional synthesis report, on health.

12. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's technical assessment volumes were published in English only, in early 2006. These examine current state and trends, scenarios, policy responses and multi-scale assessments. A summary report, containing the summaries for decision makers of the four technical assessment volumes, was also released. All the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment products are being distributed widely and the synthesis reports and the summary report of the technical assessment volumes are in the process of being translated into other official languages of the United Nations.

13. The main findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment include:

(a) Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in history, largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fibre and fuel;

(b) The changes that have been made to ecosystems have contributed to substantial net gains in human well-being and economic development, but these gains have been achieved at the cost of the increasing degradation of many ecosystem services, growing risks of non-linear changes, including accelerating, abrupt and potentially irreversible changes, and the exacerbation of poverty for some groups of people. Unless they are resolved, these problems will substantially diminish the benefits that future generations gain from ecosystems;

(c) The degradation of ecosystem services could grow significantly worse during the first half of this century and represents a barrier to achieving the goals of the Millennium Declaration and other internationally agreed development goals and targets.

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<sup>1</sup>

Available at: <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/products.aspx>.

## C. Global International Waters Assessment

14. The Global International Waters Assessment<sup>2</sup> project, carried out with support of partners such as GEF, was scheduled to end on 30 June 2005. Since that date, however, and with the support of the Governments of Finland and Sweden, the University of Kalmar in Sweden, the Swedish International Development Agency and selected experts, assessment reports have been published for eight of the 66 subregions identified for the assessment, focusing on countries eligible for GEF funding. The eight subregions are Mekong River, the Sea of Okhotsk, the Oyashio Current, the Caribbean Sea, the Humboldt Current, the lakes of the East African Rift Valley, the Eastern Equatorial Pacific and the Caspian Sea. The reports have been distributed to the subregions and were presented at an event to celebrate World Water Week held in Stockholm in August 2006.

15. The final report of the Global International Waters Assessment confirms the widespread concern that pressures from human activity have weakened the ability of aquatic ecosystems to perform critical functions. According to the report, transboundary pollution is considered a priority concern in 20 of the 66 subregions. Furthermore, the regional causal chain analysis conducted as part of the Assessment revealed that agricultural run-off and municipal and industrial discharges are the most prevalent pollution sources. The unsustainable use of freshwater is the priority transboundary concern for the largest number of regions and the unsustainable exploitation of fish and other living resources is a priority concern in 17 regions. Habitat modification has reduced biodiversity and changed community structures in many regions, causing significant social and economic losses.

## D. Global Biodiversity Outlook 2

16. Pursuant to paragraph 8 of decision VII/30, adopted by the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity at its seventh meeting, the Convention secretariat, with the assistance of the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of UNEP and other relevant international organizations, prepared the *Global Biodiversity Outlook 2* prior to the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties following peer review and review by the Subsidiary Body of the Conference of the Parties on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice. Many bodies participated in the preparation of the report, including United Nations agencies, government agencies, international non-governmental organizations, and research institutes, including relevant centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. In addition, many Governments provided comments on the draft.

17. The report was prepared with the financial support of the Governments of the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Community. It assesses the current status and trends of biodiversity and the key drivers of biodiversity loss and provides a powerful case for the importance of biodiversity to human well-being. The report contains a succinct overview of the status of the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the progress towards the Convention's target of achieving by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss and its contribution to the achievement of the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

18. The report indicates that biodiversity is being lost at all levels and that, while protected areas cover about 13 per cent of the world's land area, these are unevenly distributed, with only two-fifths of the world's ecological regions reaching the 10 per cent benchmark set out in the provisional framework for the 2010 biodiversity target of decision VII/30 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Habitats, such as forests and river systems, are being fragmented, affecting their ability to maintain biological diversity and deliver ecosystem services. The average abundance of species is declining, showing a 40 per cent loss between 1970 and 2000. Species in rivers, lakes and marshlands have declined by 50 per cent. The threats causing biodiversity loss are generally increasing, and these include an increase in invasive alien species, over-exploitation and nitrogen-loading, which leads to "dead zones" in marine systems. While the policies of the Convention on Biological Diversity are sufficient to meet the 2010 biodiversity target, wide application in all relevant sectors is critical to achieve conservation and sustainable use. Biodiversity concerns should be integrated into trade agendas and poverty reduction strategies. Tools for the valuation of biodiversity should be developed as a priority.

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<sup>2</sup> All GIWA reports are available at: <http://www.unep.org/dewa/giwa>.

19. The report was launched in Curitiba, Brazil on 20 March 2006, during the opening session of the eighth meeting of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was welcomed by the Conference, notably through decision VIII/7 on the Global Biodiversity Outlook, in which the Conference encouraged Parties and international organizations to disseminate the report widely and invited UNEP to use it in the preparation of further editions of the Global Environment Outlook. Other decisions also made reference to the report, most importantly: decision VIII/14 on national reporting and the next Global Biodiversity Outlook; decision VIII/6 on the Global Initiative on Communication, Education and Public Awareness; decision VIII/9 on implications of the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment; and decision VIII/15 on the framework for monitoring implementation of the achievement of the 2010 target and integration of targets into the thematic programmes of work.

## **E. Global Deserts Outlook**

20. By its resolution 58/211 of 23 December 2003, the General Assembly established 2006 as the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. In response to this initiative, UNEP, in collaboration with a number of partner institutions and individual experts, prepared the *Global Deserts Outlook*, which was the first thematic assessment report in the Global Environment Outlook series.

21. The *Global Deserts Outlook*, which was launched on 5 June 2006 (World Environment Day), in Algiers, assessed the state of the world's deserts, including their location, extent, uniqueness, vulnerability, biodiversity and natural resources. Among other findings, the report states that the impact of changes in precipitation and temperature patterns due to global climate change is likely to be felt hardest in desert margins and in desert montane areas. Deserts and desert margins are particularly vulnerable to soil moisture deficits due to droughts, which have increased in severity in recent decades. Such drought episodes are projected to become even more intense and frequent in the future.

## **F. Stratospheric ozone**

22. The executive summary of a joint scientific assessment of ozone depletion prepared by the Scientific Assessment Panel of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and released by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and UNEP in August 2006. The summary is based on a full report prepared pursuant to the provision of the Montreal Protocol that requires the Parties to the Protocol to base their future decisions on the updated scientific, environmental, technical and economic information that is assessed through panels drawn from worldwide expert communities. The full report, prepared by over 250 scientists, is the sixth in the series and will be published in early 2007.

23. The assessment shows that the total combined abundance of anthropogenic ozone-depleting gases in the troposphere continues to decline from the peak values reached in the 1992–1994 period. Shorter-lived gases such as methyl chloroform and methyl bromide continue to provide much of the decline in the total combined effective abundance of anthropogenic chlorine-containing and bromine-containing ozone-depleting gases in the troposphere. By 2005, the total combined abundance of anthropogenic ozone-depleting gases in the troposphere had decreased by 8–9 per cent from the peak value observed in the 1992–1994 period. The overall magnitude of this decrease is attributable to the estimated changes in emissions and is consistent with the known atmospheric lifetimes and the understanding of transport processes.

24. The combined stratospheric abundances of ozone-depleting gases show a downward trend from their peak values of the late 1990s, which is consistent with surface observations of these gases and a time lag for transport to the stratosphere. Stratospheric bromine has increased in line with its tropospheric trends in preceding years. A decrease in stratospheric bromine has not yet been identified. Bromine continues to play a major role in stratospheric ozone depletion.

25. New scientific understanding indicates that equivalent effective stratospheric chlorine at mid-latitudes (30°–60° north and south) should return to pre-1980 levels by 2049, five years later than anticipated by the previous assessment, conducted in 2002. Over the Antarctic, equivalent effective stratospheric chlorine is projected to return to pre-1980 levels by around 2065, more than 15 years later than for mid-latitudes. Severe Antarctic ozone losses are expected to continue for at least the next 10–20 years. Large ozone losses will likely continue to occur in cold Arctic winters during the next 15 years.

## IV. Continuing assessment processes

26. 2007 will be a very busy year, with the launch of many major global environmental assessment reports, including the fourth report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; the Human Development Report on Environment, Energy and Climate Change; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Environmental Outlook report; the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development report; the Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture report; and the World Energy Outlook report. The fourth Global Environment Outlook report, which will be published in 2007, five years after the publication of the third report in 2002, will be the UNEP contribution to efforts to keep the world environment situation under review. With all these and other reports, the risk of conflicting messages to policymakers cannot be over-emphasized.

27. To minimize such a risk, UNEP is liaising with the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Energy Agency and other partners to ensure that the assessment activities are complementary. Although the findings of these different assessments can only enhance the accessibility of up-to-date information on the state and trends of the environment as well as the outlook for the future, the multiplicity of environmental assessments emphasizes the need for a more coherent and complementary assessment landscape. The proposed Environment Watch framework, which is discussed in more detail in document UNEP/GC/24/3/Add.2, provides an opportunity for stakeholders in environmental assessments to be more strategic in the periodicity of and in developing synergies between assessments and contributes to global understanding of environmental challenges.

### A. Fourth Global Environment Outlook report

28. The Global Environment Outlook is the flagship of integrated environmental assessment and reporting within UNEP. Pursuant to Governing Council decisions 18/27 on Earthwatch (May 1995), 20/1 on the Global Environment Outlook (February 1999), 22/1 on early warning, assessment and monitoring (February 2003) and 23/6 on keeping the world environmental situation under review (February 2005), UNEP has organized a series of regional stakeholder consultations and expert meetings and the global intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultation on the fourth Global Environment Outlook report to define the scope and objectives of the report. The report is aimed at analysing the role of environment for development in relation to environmental and social changes that have taken place since the publication in 1987 of the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future*.

29. More than 200 scientists across the globe have been invited by UNEP to research and draft the 10 chapters of the fourth Global Environment Outlook report. The Global Environment Outlook collaborating centre network, which has been the backbone of the Global Environment Outlook since its inception in 1995, continues to be a critical part of the process, providing input on issues of both regional and global relevance. In addition, about 200 experts nominated by more than 50 Governments have participated in the preparation of the report in different capacities: in expert groups focusing on individual chapters, in the peer review process and as editors. The Global Environment Outlook fellowship programme, launched in 2005, continues to provide young scientists, mainly from developing regions, with the opportunity to participate in the different expert groups and to contribute to the preparation of the report through research and drafting activities. About 40 young scientists are taking part in the preparation of the fourth Global Environment Outlook report.

30. In 2006, UNEP invited over 1,000 experts to participate in a comprehensive peer review of the first draft of the report. More than 6,000 comments were received. In addition to the peer review process and in response to Governing Council decision 23/6, UNEP convened regional consultations in 2006 in six regions to review the first draft and to strengthen the regional environmental data and information.

31. A new feature of the assessment process is the establishment of strong links between the Global Environment Outlook and institutions of the multilateral environmental agreements in order to facilitate and enhance policy analyses across the chapters of the report. In addition, a high-level consultative group has been established to provide strategic policy support to the assessment process.

32. UNEP has developed a comprehensive outreach and strategic engagement strategy which is designed to disseminate and strengthen the use of the findings of the fourth Global Environment Outlook report. Strategic engagement activities will culminate in a Global Environment Outlook forum, in the form of a series of launch events including an intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder

consultation to consider the findings. The report will be published in September or October 2007, in line with the new five-year reporting cycle requested by the Governing Council in its decision 22/1 I B.

33. The assessment will feed into discussions of the Governing Council and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum and the UNEP programme of work, including with regard to the definition of priority issues and focal areas.

## **B. United Nations global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment**

34. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 60/30 of 29 November 2005 on the regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects, the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Steering Group established by the General Assembly in that resolution took place in June 2006 in New York with representatives of the following Member States of the United Nations: Australia, China, Iceland, India, Japan, Mexico, Namibia, Philippines, Spain and Uganda. They were joined by representatives of the following United Nations bodies and related international organizations: FAO, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, the International Maritime Organization, the International Seabed Authority, UNEP and WMO. The Ad Hoc Steering Group adopted targeted decisions on substantive agenda items relating to the “assessment of assessments”, the start-up phase of the regular process for the global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment. Those decisions covered, among other things, key questions such as the scope of and process for the assessment and the related budget, implementation plan and time-schedule.

35. The “assessment of assessments” will: assemble information about past or current assessments relevant to the global marine assessment; carry out a constructive appraisal of existing marine assessments, including coastal assessments; identify gaps and uncertainties in scientific knowledge and current assessment practices; assess how these assessments have been communicated to policy makers at the national, regional and global levels; and produce a framework and options for the regular global marine assessment process. The initiative will take place over two years.

36. To this end, the General Assembly adopted resolution 61/222 of 20 December 2006 on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which included Chapter XII on the regular process for global reporting and assessment of the state of the marine environment, including socio-economic aspects. Among other things, the resolution invites Member States, the Global Environment Facility and other interested parties to contribute financially to the “assessment of assessments”, taking into account the workplan and budget approved by the Ad Hoc Steering Group, in order to complete the “assessment of assessments” within the specified period.

## **C. International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development**

37. The International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development is undertaking one global and five sub-global assessments of the role of agricultural knowledge, science and technology in reducing hunger and poverty, improving rural livelihoods and facilitating equitable, environmentally, socially and economically sustainable development.

38. Following a consultative process carried out between 2001 and 2003, a multi-stakeholder steering committee recommended that such an assessment was needed and that it should have an intergovernmental structure but a multi-stakeholder advisory bureau and a secretariat based at the World Bank. The steering committee also recommended that the assessment should be co-sponsored by other relevant United Nations agencies. Consequently, the assessment has a multi-stakeholder base, including FAO, GEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNEP, UNESCO, WHO, the World Bank and representatives of Governments, civil society, the private sector and scientific institutions from around the world.

39. As part of the assessment, a framework has been developed for conducting integrated agricultural assessments at the local, national, regional and global scales, based on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment framework. It consists of a global assessment as well as sub-global assessments in sub-Saharan Africa; Central and West Asia and North Africa; East and South Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; and North America and Europe. Summaries for decision makers and a synthesis report will also be prepared. The six assessments are due to be finalized by the third quarter

of 2007 and the findings will be submitted for final approval, adoption and acceptance by Governments during an intergovernmental plenary meeting which will be held at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi in November 2007.

## **D. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change fourth assessment report**

40. Preparation for the fourth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change started in 2003 with the Panel's approval of outlines of three working group reports, which will form part of the assessment report, and the selection of lead authors. The report will assess new knowledge on climate change since the publication of the third assessment report in 2001 and will focus on regional issues and cross-cutting themes such as the integration of adaptation and mitigation strategies and sustainable development. In accordance with the timelines approved by the Panel and with the Panel's procedures, three working groups have already prepared drafts which have been reviewed by Governments and experts, and they are currently preparing the final drafts for the Panel's approval. The Panel is expected to approve the three working group reports in February 2007, April 2007 and May 2007 respectively. All three working group reports are expected to be accepted by the Panel at its twenty-sixth session, in May 2007.

41. In addition to the three working group reports, the fourth assessment report will include a synthesis report that summarizes and provides an overview of the information contained in the working group reports and special and methodology reports on specific issues prepared at the request of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or its Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice. It will be written in non-technical style suitable for policy makers and will address a broad range of policy-relevant but policy-neutral questions. The Panel is expected to approve and adopt the synthesis report in November 2007 and will present it to the Conference of the Parties at its thirteenth meeting, to be held in December 2007. The report will provide the most up-to-date and reliable information on issues related to climate change for negotiations on the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol. To date, the Panel has provided the Conference of the Parties with three such comprehensive assessment reports. It has also provided special and methodology reports on specific issues. The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technical Advice acts as a link between the Conference of the Parties and the Panel, and a joint working group of the bureaux of the two bodies meets regularly to enhance coordination between them.

## **V. Providing services to Governments and other stakeholders**

### **A. Sub-global assessments**

42. The second Africa Environment Outlook report was launched by the Prime Minister of Congo at the ministerial segment of the eleventh session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, held in Brazzaville in May 2006. Ministers at the session adopted a decision on the Africa Environment Outlook and the Africa Environment Information Network and a declaration which, among other things, gave the Africa Environment Outlook process a fresh mandate and requested the Executive Director of UNEP to support the preparation of the third report for launch in 2010. In addition, Governments were requested to mainstream the findings of the report into their national sustainable development planning processes.

43. The underlying theme of the report is environment for development. It highlights the opportunities presented by the region's natural resource base to support the development agenda of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The report also highlights some of the emerging challenges in the region that may require policy changes on the part of African Governments. The emerging challenges examined in the report include genetically modified crops, chemical stockpiles and alien invasive species. The report also discusses how the environment can contribute to peace and regional cooperation. It challenges the myth that Africa is poor by pointing out that its vast natural wealth can, if sensitively, sustainably and creatively managed, form the basis of an African renaissance that meets and goes beyond the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals. The report is available at [http://www.unep.org/dewa/africa/aeo2\\_launch/index.asp](http://www.unep.org/dewa/africa/aeo2_launch/index.asp).

44. UNEP, together with Global Environment Outlook collaborating centres in respective subregions, is implementing integrated environmental assessment reporting processes in three subregions (Central Asia, Greater Mekong and South Asia), with the participation of member countries

and other partners. All the subregional integrated environmental assessment processes have reviewed the state and trends of the environment and have analysed the interlinkages and inter-relationships between development opportunities and future environmental challenges.

45. The findings and recommendations of the Central Asia integrated environmental assessment report were presented to the Central Asia Inter-State Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Development, held in November 2006 in Turkmenistan. Reports for the Greater Mekong and South Asia subregions will be finalized in 2007.

46. In the Asia and the Pacific subregion, UNEP has provided technical support to a number of member countries using integrated methodologies for environmental assessments at both the national and city levels. South-South cooperation in sharing experience gained at the global and sub-global levels is an important feature in national integrated environmental assessment processes.

47. In Europe, UNEP is working closely with the European Environment Agency in the development of the Pan-European Report on the State of the Environment ("The Belgrade Report") for the pan-European Ministerial Conference on the Environment that will be held in Belgrade, Serbia, in October 2007. This close collaboration ensures efficient and effective use of resources in preparing the Belgrade Report and the European aspects of the fourth Global Environment Outlook report. UNEP is also guiding the preparation of a Global Environment Outlook-type report for the Carpathians region, known as the Carpathians Environment Outlook, involving many experts from the seven countries of this mountain and plateau region (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine). Initiated in early 2004, the report will be finalized, published and launched in 2007.

48. During 2006, several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean completed or initiated national environmental assessment processes using the Global Environment Outlook approach, which saw the launching of national Global Environment Outlook reports in Argentina, Peru and Chile. An outstanding development in these three countries is that the reports have been adopted as the national state of the environment reports, helping the countries fulfil specific mandates established in their national environmental laws.

49. In 2006, at the request of the Governments of Belize, Ecuador and Uruguay, Global Environment Outlook country assessments were initiated and will be completed in 2007. A second country assessment was launched for Cuba. Also in 2006, the Government of Brazil launched a comprehensive effort to develop a series of Global Environment Outlook reports at the country level, focusing on high-priority thematic areas such as forests, water resources and marine and coastal zones.

50. At the regional level, the third Global Environment Outlook assessment process for Latin America and the Caribbean was initiated in 2006. The final report of the assessment will be presented during the sixteenth meeting of the Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean in November 2007. The Global Environment Outlook Amazonia process started in February 2006, through a cooperation agreement between the Amazonian Cooperation Treaty Organization and the UNEP regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean.

51. In 2006, UNEP produced a report on environmental indicators for North America. The purpose of the report was to determine the current status of environmental indicators being used in Canada and the United States of America. The report provides an introduction to environmental indicators, including examples of a variety of indicator types and the role of indicators and their limitations. It further describes four recently published environmental indicator reports and looks at three bilateral ecosystem reporting initiatives in North America. The fundamental goal of the report is to help state of the environment professionals in North America to inform decision-makers through the use of environmental indicators.

52. UNEP continued to support the preparation of national state of the environment reports in Bahrain, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen are in the process of finalizing their reports and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi is scheduled to launch its report in November 2006. UNEP also provided support to the Regional Organization for the Protection of Marine Environment for the revision and enhancement of national guidelines for the preparation of the state of the environment report for the regional organization's sea area. In addition, UNEP coordinated and supported the continuing work on the Arab Millennium Ecosystem Sub-global Assessment to be published in 2007.

## **B. Environmental data and information**

53. UNEP is preparing regional data portals in developing regions to provide improved access to detailed environmental data in support of integrated environmental assessment and reporting activities in the regions. The regional portals are modelled on the Global Environment Outlook data portal,<sup>3</sup> which is an authoritative source of data sets used by UNEP and its partners in the comprehensive Global Environment Outlook reports and yearbooks and in other integrated environmental assessment processes and publications. It is also used by other groups. The continually updated and upgraded online database holds more than 450 different variables, as national, subregional, regional and global statistics or as geospatial data sets (in the form of maps), covering a wide variety of environmental, social and economic themes such as freshwater, population, forests, emissions, climate, disasters and health.

54. The Africa Environment Information Network of UNEP, within the framework of the Africa Environment Outlook, aims to strengthen national capacities in information management in countries in the region. The network has played a key role in developing harmonized tools for both data management and information dissemination.

55. The designation of a Carpathians Environment Outlook centre for data collection, integration and analysis, based at the Global Resources Information Database in Warsaw, will strengthen the Carpathians Environment Outlook assessment. It will allow for the pooling of knowledge about the unique ecology and related environmental and human problems of the Carpathians, create an operational network of experts within and among the seven Carpathian countries for environmental reporting purposes and provide environmental decision-makers in the region with better information.

56. The UNEP initiative on sustainable development indicators for Latin America and the Caribbean has made notable progress since its launch in 2003 at the request of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is based on a set of 38 core indicators encompassing environmental, economic, social and institutional themes.

57. UNEP has completed the first phase of the Global Environment Outlook West Asia data portal and has completed the comparative study on regional and global data sources. In addition, it has developed a map server for West Asia, which provides geographic information systems data at the regional and national levels and downloadable remote sensing data.

58. UNEP convened a meeting of focal points on environmental information networks in Gulf Cooperation Council countries on 3–4 June 2006 and an expert group meeting on environmental information networking in the West Asia region on 12–13 September 2006, in the framework of its initiative to pilot environmental information networking in the regions.

## **C. Training resources for capacity-building**

59. Under the Global Environment Outlook integrated environmental assessment initiative, UNEP and the International Institute for Sustainable Development, in collaboration with over 40 experts from around the world, have prepared a new Global Environment Outlook resource book for use in training workshops and post-training support for sub-global assessment processes. The resource book training package consists of eight modules, focusing on: the Global Environment Outlook approach to integrated environmental assessment; impact strategy; national Global Environment Outlook process design and organization; monitoring, data and indicators; integrated retrospective state and trends and policy assessment; scenarios and ex-ante analysis of policy options; creating physical outputs of the assessment; and process monitoring, evaluation and learning.

## **D. UNEP partnership with Google Inc. on the visualization of environmental changes**

60. One of the highlights of 2006 was the establishment of a partnership between UNEP and the internet search engine giant Google Inc., leading to the creation of a new tool for providing environmental data and facilitating the visualization of changes in environment. Google has uploaded into Google Earth and other Google products and services satellite photographs for 100 of the environmental hotspots contained in the UNEP atlas *One Planet, Many People: Atlas of our Changing Environment*.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://geodata.grid.unep.ch/>

61. The partnership with Google Inc. is providing UNEP with unparalleled global outreach as Google Earth software is already being used by over 100 million users around the world. The Google Earth website allows users to zoom in on any location of a satellite-based, colour, three dimensional depiction of the planet. By overlaying the photographs taken from the UNEP atlas, it enables a vast number of users to view images illustrating some of the world's most extreme areas of environmental degradation, in most cases, over a 30 year time span. Visualizing environmental changes makes them more comprehensible and meaningful and the time sequencing clearly shows the global changes that are not easily distinguishable in the shorter term.

### **E. Global Environment Outlook Cities project**

62. UNEP continues to expand its Global Environment Outlook Cities project in the regions. In 2006, in Africa, a process to prepare Africa Environment Outlook for Cities reports was launched in Dakar, Nairobi and Lusaka. The activity is being implemented in collaboration with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

63. At present, over 30 cities in the Latin America and the Caribbean region have joined the cities project assessment network. Two metropolitan areas, Lima and Callao (Peru) and the Metropolitan Area of central Costa Rica completed and launched their assessments in 2006. Four other cities, Rosario (Argentina), Cobija (Bolivia), El Alto (Bolivia) and Cartagena (Colombia) also started their assessment processes in 2006.

### **F. Activities for young people**

64. The Global Environment Outlook for Youth report was launched at the eleventh session of the African Ministerial Conference for the Environment, held in Brazzaville in May 2006. The report, the preparation of which involved more than 46 young people's networks, was commended by ministers and its continued support by UNEP was recommended. The report has been distributed widely in Africa. A network to facilitate the participation of young people in further Africa Environment Outlook processes has been established with support from the Norwegian Peace Corps.

65. In 2005–2006, achievements of a Global Environment Outlook for Youth project initiated in 1999 in Latin America and the Caribbean to promote the participation of young people in activities for sustainable development included the completion of assessments for Cuba and the start of processes for Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico (Morelos and Veracruz), Panama, Peru (Lima and Callao) and Uruguay. A subregional assessment has been completed in Central America and is under way for the English-speaking part of the Caribbean. Since 1999, more than 50,000 young people in Latin America and the Caribbean have participated in the project. A strong focus on capacity-building is what makes the project stand out among various Global Environment Outlook processes. Special capacity-building activities are being implemented in Argentina, Mexico and Peru. Representatives of the project took active part in the fourth World Water Forum that was held in March 2006 in Mexico City.

### **G. Global Earth Observation System of Systems**

66. UNEP has a longstanding involvement with different global Earth observation systems and processes. For example, it is a sponsor of the Global Terrestrial Observing System, the Global Oceans Observing System and the Global Climate Observing System and a partner in the Integrated Global Observing Strategy. The Integrated Global Observing Strategy partnership seeks to provide a comprehensive framework to harmonize the common interests of the major space-based and *in situ* systems for the global observation of the Earth, including climate and atmosphere, oceans and coasts and land. For all the above, UNEP seeks to ensure that the needs of users of environmental data are reflected in strategies, programmes and projects of the observing systems. These global observing systems have been established as central partners in the operational delivery of the 10-year plan adopted by the Group on Earth Observations at the third Earth Observation Summit in 2005 to implement the targets of the Global Earth Observing System of Systems.

67. UNEP is actively supporting the plan for the implementation of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems, which is articulated around nine social benefit areas.<sup>4</sup> The vision and objectives of plan are complementary to those of UNEP, in particular with regard to building the institutional, human and technical capacity of developing countries to ensure the effective monitoring and assessment of the state of the environment and to provide early warning of emerging environmental issues and trends.

68. UNEP participates in several of the committees linked to the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (including those on science and technology, user interface and capacity-building and outreach), and is in the process of linking the System of Systems initiative to early warning and data activities in the context of the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building. It is important that Governments around the world are in a position to gain maximum benefits from data and other services once these become available through the System of Systems. In this context, UNEP has proposed that the secretariat of the Group on Earth Observations should jointly develop and implement a partnership to build national capacity for environmental observing systems data and information sharing, with the broad participation of interested Governments (members of the Group on Earth Observations) and international and national organizations.

## H. Environment, conflict and cooperation

69. The UNEP Initiative on Environment and Conflict Prevention is carrying out three regional assessments (one in Africa, one in Asia and the Pacific and one in Latin America and the Caribbean) to analyse the role of the environment in cooperation, trust and peace building. Through the study of subregional cases – conducted with the support of a group of experts from the different regions – the assessments highlight issues that are both representative of the regions concerned and which can serve as examples to policy-makers of lessons learned. The assessments and their conclusions will be published in a combined assessment report in 2007.

70. The Environment and Security Initiative is a partnership between UNEP, UNDP, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has joined the initiative as an associate member through its Science for Peace and Security Committee. The initiative provides a multi-stakeholder based analysis of environment and security risks and support for a process whereby the identified risks are systematically addressed through strengthening policies, institutions and capacities. The initiative has published assessment reports and developed work programmes for Central Asia, South Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine). Further assessments are planned for the Eastern Caspian and Amu Darya water basins in Central Asia and the frozen conflict zones in the Southern Caucasus.

71. The Post-Conflict Branch extends the work of UNEP to areas of the world where the natural and human environment has been damaged as a direct or indirect consequence of conflict. It conducts environmental assessments in post-conflict countries and strengthens national environmental management capacity by building institutions, promoting regional cooperation, providing technical legal assistance, promoting environmental information management and integrating environmental concerns into reconstruction programmes.

72. UNEP is participating in a joint needs assessment for Somalia, led by the World Bank and the United Nations Development Group. UNEP is the lead agency responsible for identifying and reporting on environmental issues in Somalia. In addition, UNEP is providing support to other agencies and is assisting in identifying cross-cutting environmental issues relevant to other sectors. Due to the protracted civil war in Somalia, up-to-date environmental data is scarce. The joint needs assessment is a first step towards gathering current environmental information to form the basis of a Somali environmental information centre.

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<sup>4</sup> The social benefit areas are: (i) Reducing loss of life and property damage due to natural and human-made disasters; (ii) Understanding environmental factors affecting human health and well-being; (iii) Improving management of energy resources; (iv) Understanding, assessing, predicting, mitigating and adapting to climate variability and change; (v) Improving water resource management through a better understanding of water resources; (vi) Improving weather information, forecasting and warning; (vii) Improving the protection and management of terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems; (viii) Supporting sustainable agriculture and combating desertification; and (ix) Understanding, monitoring and conserving biodiversity.

73. In 2005, UNEP participated in a joint needs assessment for Sudan, carried out by 17 United Nations agencies, the World Bank, the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. In 2006 UNEP conducted environmental screening of sector and regional plans for the United Nations country team. The environment features prominently on the development agenda adopted following the joint needs assessment, reflecting the importance of natural resources in Sudan, which have historically been used to fund the conflict. Following the assessment, UNEP conducted a post-conflict assessment of the environment in Sudan between November 2005 and October 2006. Various fact finding and technical missions to Sudan have been conducted to facilitate discussions between key United Nations agencies and Government stakeholders.

## **I. United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation**

74. UNEP is responsible for providing support for the effective conduct of the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, which was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 913 (X) of 3 December 1955 to review exposure to ionizing radiation and its effects on human health and the environment. While this support has been essentially administrative in the past, UNEP and the Scientific Committee secretariat are increasingly improving information sharing and collaboration at the technical level. Of particular relevance to the work of UNEP, the Scientific Committee is presently updating its assessments of global and regional exposures of the public to sources of ionizing radiation (including from natural radiation, fallout of nuclear weapons tests, discharges from nuclear facilities and other industries and accidents); reviewing the latest scientific knowledge of radiation effects on non-human species; and updating its assessment of the radiological consequences of the Chernobyl accident.

## **VI. Conclusions and potential implications of key assessment findings for Governments**

75. The assessment reports finalized in the period between the twenty-third and twenty-fourth regular sessions of the Governing Council collectively represent substantial financial investment by the international community and reflect in-kind contributions from Governments and thousands of experts worldwide. They bring forward an unusually large and significant number of findings, which have implications for Governments and for the UNEP programme of work. Accordingly, the Executive Director has taken these findings into account in implementing the programme of work for 2006–2007 and in preparing the programme of work for 2008–2009. Governments may also wish to consider the key findings highlighted above and identify appropriate ways to deal with them individually or collectively, through appropriate international mechanisms, including the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its twenty-fourth session. The suggested action by the Governing Council captures the main findings of the various assessment processes and is presented for the consideration of the Council/Forum.

## **VII. Amendment to the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility**

76. The Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility, adopted by the Governing Council in its decision SS.IV/1 of 18 June 1994, provides, in its paragraph 34, the following procedures for the amendment of the Instrument:

“Amendment or termination of the present Instrument may be approved by consensus by the Assembly upon the recommendation of the Council, after taking into account the views of the Implementing Agencies and the Trustee, and shall become effective after adoption by the Implementing Agencies and the Trustee in accordance with their respective rules and procedural requirements.”

77. In the ten years since the adoption of the Instrument, experience has shown that, with regard to the logistical planning of the meetings of the GEF Council, it is not always practical nor feasible to adhere to provisions in the Instrument providing for the scheduling or location of such meetings. Therefore, the Third GEF Assembly, held in Cape Town, South Africa, on 29 and 30 August 2006, approved by consensus an amendment to the Instrument to provide greater flexibility to the Council with respect to the planning of Council meetings.

78. Paragraph 17 of the Instrument provides that the Council shall meet at the seat of the GEF secretariat. The Council has met at the seat of the secretariat in Washington D.C., on all but three occasions. For purposes of the Council meetings associated with the three GEF Assemblies, the Council agreed that those meetings should be held in the same location as the Assembly: the first in New Delhi, the second in Beijing and the third in Cape Town.

79. Experience has shown that there have been other occasions on which the Council would have liked to hold their meetings in a place other than the seat of the secretariat, but it felt constrained by the provisions of the Instrument from doing so.

80. The location of periodic meetings of an organization's governing body is the type of logistical arrangement that is frequently left to the discretion of the governing body itself. For example, rule 2 of the rules of procedure for the Executive Board of UNDP provides:

“1. The regular sessions of the Executive Board shall be held at the United Nations until such time as the premises of the headquarters of UNDP/UNFPA are rendered possible to accommodate such meetings.

“2. Unless the Executive Board decides to meet elsewhere, annual sessions shall be held alternately at United Nations Headquarters and at the Geneva Office of the United Nations.”

81. In addition, rule 4 of the rules of procedure for the Governing Council of UNEP provides that regular sessions shall be held at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme, unless otherwise decided by the Governing Council at a previous session.

82. The Third GEF Assembly therefore agreed that paragraph 17 of the Instrument should be amended to read:<sup>5</sup>

“The Council shall meet semi-annually or as frequently as necessary to enable it to discharge its responsibilities. **The Council shall meet at the seat of the secretariat unless the Council decides otherwise.** Two-thirds of the members of the Council shall constitute a quorum.”

83. Such an amendment maintains the presumption that Council meetings will be held at the seat of the secretariat. The Council would, however, have the flexibility to decide to hold a meeting elsewhere if circumstances justify such a decision, as has been the case on the occasion of the GEF Assemblies.

84. Attention is drawn to a letter from Ms. Monique Barbut, Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the Global Environment Facility, dated 13 September 2006, to the Executive Director of UNEP, requesting him to undertake the necessary steps to facilitate the adoption of the amendment of the GEF Instrument by the Governing Council (document UNEP/GC/24/INF/13). The Council may wish to adopt a decision on this matter in line with the suggested action provided in Chapter I of the present document.

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<sup>5</sup> Amended text is shown in bold.