

**First meeting of the Consultative Group  
of Ministers or High-level Representatives  
on International Environmental Governance**  
Belgrade, 27 – 28 June 2009

**Speaking points**  
**President of the UNEP Governing Council, Mr. Oliver Dulić**

Agenda item 1: Opening ceremony  
*09.30-10.30 a.m. Delegates Area*

## **<Welcome>**

Honourable Ministers;

Distinguished delegates;

Mr. Dragan Djilas, Mayor of Belgrade;

Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP;

Mr. Bill Infante, United Nations Resident Coordinator;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the President of UNEP's Governing Council, I would like to warmly welcome you to Belgrade and thank you for coming to this first meeting of the consultative group of ministers or their high-level representatives established by the UNEP Governing Council at its twenty fifth regular session in February.

In particular I would like to welcome Ministers from eight countries who have been able to join this meeting, and the High-Level representatives from another thirty countries.

I would also like to thank the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Achim Steiner for all of the assistance that his team in UNEP has provided in the preparations for this meeting, and for making the time to spend the next two days with us as adviser to the Consultative Group.

We have a very busy but exciting few days ahead of us and I can assure you that everything has been done that can be done to create the best conditions possible for an open, constructive and productive meeting.

## **<Context of meeting>**

The debate about international environmental governance (IEG) reform has been ongoing for a decade or more and there are a number of documents that point to the shortcomings of the current system.

While the Executive Director will take you through some of the history, I will draw from my own more recent experience of the rich discussions that took place during the twenty fifth regular session of the UNEP Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum back in February of this year in Nairobi, which included delegates from 147 countries, including 110 ministers or deputy ministers.

In doing so I will draw from the President's Summary of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, recognizing that it reflects ideas presented and discussed rather than a consensus view on all points raised by participants.

Referring to the title of the session, Ministers at the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (the GMEF) in February stated that "IEG is neither a help nor a hindrance – it is an imperative."

Ministers also said that "the status quo [of IEG] is not acceptable and [that] there is a necessity to demonstrate boldness and to think big on the issue of international environmental governance reform".

At the same time, the report of the co-chairs of the "Informal consultations of the General Assembly on the institutional framework for the United Nations' environment work" of 10 February called upon the twenty fifth session of the UNEP Governing Council to "take stock and debate the course of action...to find a political compromise and entrust their delegations in New York with pragmatic, creative and constructive proposals, which allow improving the current system."

Highlighting the general support of member states for strengthening IEG, the report mentioned in particular the need for further discussions about the weight [given] to sustainable development; the scope of UNEP's mandate; the extent of cooperation between MEAs and their interaction with UNEP; the work of the Environmental Management Group in the context of the Chief Executive Board; the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan; and secure and sufficient financing of environmental activities.

Coupled with the outcomes of the Ministerial Consultations on IEG it led to GC decision 25/4, which forms the basis upon which we have come together today.

Our meeting is not meant to simply repeat the existing series of gatherings and documents on IEG reform; rather, as Ministers stated at the GMEF, "we must rethink the whole IEG process and have a shared vision of IEG: we must think big, we must make a difference," the time has come to explore more ambitious steps."

This meeting, and any subsequent meetings, will provide you with a platform to discuss those big ideas and ambitious steps.

In particular, Ministers meeting in Nairobi, identified a number of impediments to the functioning of the current IEG system, as were reflected in the President's Summary, which include:

- the way financial resources flow through the system;
- the lack of coherence in current international environmental governance - this is felt strongly at the national level and affects the coherence of countries' own national governance. A reformed system of IEG should [therefore] be more responsive to, and better assist in improving, national environmental governance;
- the lack or inability of the current IEG system in meeting the development challenges that we face today – this is particularly apparent in the disconnect of economic and social policies with environmental policies and the lack of consideration of the environment as the foundation for economic and social activity;
- high transaction costs due to the incoherence and complexity of the IEG system - this can discourage in some cases participation in the system by developing countries and countries with economies in transition;
- And, last but not least, the lack of trust between developed and developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

In light of these challenges and the history of previous efforts of reforming the IEG system, I would like to refer to the proposals made by our distinguished colleague, H.E. Mr. Marthinus van Schalkwyk, then Minister for Environment and Tourism of South Africa, through his keynote address delivered at the last GMEF.

On that occasion, he suggested that the way forward in the reform process – and here I am quoting him directly - was that "**Form must follow function.**[...] Only once we are clear where we want to go, should we ask the institutional questions relating to format and structure. If we start with a polarised institutional debate rather than seeking consensus on principles and objectives, we run the risk of yet another inward-looking dialogue and potentially a weaker mandate for the environment and sustainable development across the UN system." – End of quote.

#### <Objective of meeting>

Over the course of the next two days we thus propose to focus on the functions we require the IEG system to perform in order to serve our needs both at the international and national level rather

than engage in debates about institutional arrangements and structures at this stage, which can be a topic for the next meeting.

The reason for taking such an approach is that we require political buy-in and political momentum if we are to reform the IEG system.

A new generation of thinkers needs to be inspired, to make a fresh start, set clear milestones and bring back high-level political guidance into the IEG discussion.

“The current IEG system either cannot meet – or has problems in meeting – the development challenges we face today.

Reform should be built on broadening the mandate of IEG to include sustainable development at its core; reforms should strengthen the integration of environment into the broader development agenda and the ability of countries to meet both their environment and development objectives.”

Today’s discussion is therefore a political rather than a technical debate, in line with the requirements of GC decision 25/4, to establish a ministerial or high-level consultative group.

Given the political nature of the process, I thought it appropriate to take a lead in initiating the implementation of this decision in my role as the President of the Governing Council. I discussed my role in this matter with the GC Bureau, and was given its full support.

The meeting has been organized in the following manner:

After the organization of our work later this morning, I will hand over to the co-Chairs who will lead the process from thereon.

Discussions will take place on two different topics; each to be introduced and facilitated by the co-Chairs. The co-Chairs may call upon the Executive Director for further inputs.

The first discussion, entitled ‘Addressing multiple sustainability challenges and emerging opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’, will start this morning and continue into the early afternoon.

The purpose of this session is to map out what we all believe is at stake here, in terms of environmental change and its impact on human well-being and development. It will also address emerging opportunities to realize development opportunities, such as investment in green technologies and green jobs.

The second discussion, starting this afternoon, will focus on the role of the United Nations system in addressing multiple sustainability challenges and emerging opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It will be supported by a presentation of Mr. Steiner in his role as adviser to the consultative group on possible elements for moving forward with developing a set of options to improve IEG.

Discussions in this session will focus on the functions the United Nations system should provide that will assist countries to meet the current and future environmental challenges and help them to capture opportunities.

Again, the discussion will be carried over to tomorrow to provide an opportunity for reflection.

Under GC decision 25/4 the Consultative Group is requested to present a set of options on improving the IEG system to the next special session of the GC/GMEF for transmission to the General Assembly, for it is the General Assembly that is responsible for taking decisions on IEG reform.

The substantive discussions will therefore be followed by two sessions that will enable the group to decide on how to move forward and what to move forward.

For both sessions, I have provided you with advance documents that recognize the political nature of the meeting.

The basis for discussion of the first session is a draft roadmap that sets out the components of the process, as provided by GC decision 25/4 up to the eleventh special session of the Governing Council, scheduled for 24-25 February 2010 in Bali.

It also stipulates the various action points necessary to achieve each step that will require further attention. It will also incorporate details on whether, and if so how, the Group may want to engage with the Committee of Permanent Representatives, senior officials, experts or the United Nations system, in carrying this process forward. It is a draft to assist you in determining the structure of your work.

The basis for discussion of the second session is a set of draft conclusions and recommendations from the meeting that may take the form of a 'Belgrade Statement'. The word "statement" is used, but we could equally insert the word "principles" or even refer to it as the 'Belgrade Roadmap', incorporating the draft roadmap that has been prepared for the meeting.

As you can see, it presently provides a preambular section which draws heavily on recently agreed language and the scaffold for an operational part, which we hope to populate as we progress with our substantive discussions.

If you as a Group would prefer not to take the time to express yourself in the form of collective language, then an alternative option is to record the outcomes of the meeting in the form of co-Chairs conclusions. Whatever approach is adopted to capture the outcomes of the meeting, the draft 'Belgrade Statement' with its suggested principles, milestones and guidance may still serve as a useful foundation for recording the outcome of our deliberations.

What is important is that we make progress during the course of this meeting in setting the agreed direction for the manner in which we will take this work forward.

The outcomes of this first meeting of the Group are intended to be endorsed during tomorrow's sessions, but this is obviously a matter for the Consultative Group itself to finally decide upon.

#### **<Procedural aspects of meeting>**

Let me also say a few words about the procedural aspects of this meeting. As GC decision 25/4 stipulates, the Consultative Group will work under the lead of two co-Chairs, one from a developing country and one from a developed country. Nominations have been received and elections will take place during the following session dealing with organizational matters.

The session will also provide an opportunity for the introduction of ministers and high-level representatives and foresees the adoption of the agenda, as well as a decision on the organization of the work of the group. Given the short time we have for this meeting we have kept this session intentionally brief and will rely on your collaboration to deal with the issues at hand.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that we have organized this meeting in such a way as to provide a platform for you, the owners of this process, to exchange among yourselves ideas, concerns, and suggestions on the IEG system.

#### **<Wrap-up>**

Before I pass the word on to Mr. Steiner, I would like to thank you again for coming to Belgrade on this occasion.

As the President of the 25<sup>th</sup> UNEP Governing Council I feel privileged to be able to initiate this process in my home country.

Given the history of the IEG debate, I am aware of the challenges that lie ahead of us. But I believe that, if there is a right moment to face them, it has come now, for unprecedented challenges also provide unprecedented opportunities.

For the first time in many years there is a chance to make headway on international environmental governance as part of the ongoing climate change negotiations and the count-down to a possible Rio+20 in 2012.

Yet, without wanting to sound too sentimental, I would like to emphasize the need for a collective effort, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and the rebuilding of trust between developing and developed countries. We can do this.

The ultimate success of this initiative lies in our hands, in fact, Ministers at the GMEF said that “the engine of change will come from the national level”.

As President of the Governing Council, I will do everything within my power to help create and nurture an atmosphere of trust and goodwill that will enable us to move towards a successful outcome from the process.

Thank you.