



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

Distr.: General
23 March 2004

Original: English



**Eighth special session of the Governing Council/
Global Ministerial Environment Forum**
Jeju, Republic of Korea, 29–31 March 2004

Policy statement of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The eighth special session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum comes at a time when the international community continues to develop tools for and approaches to the implementation of the outcomes of the various recent international conferences that started in the year 2000 with the Millennium Summit of the United Nations¹ and included the International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002), the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (Doha, Qatar, 9-14 November 2001) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Taken together, the outcomes of these conferences represent a multi-faceted and coherent set of objectives, processes and targets that constitute a road map for achieving sustainable development.

2. It has become clear that the imperative of implementing existing international agreements constitutes the major challenge for the international community in this, the first decade of the new millennium.

¹ By resolution 53/202 of 12 February 1999, the United Nations General Assembly designated its fifty-fifth session the “Millennium Assembly of the United Nations” and provided for the convening of a “Millennium Summit of the United Nations” during the course of the Millennium Assembly. By resolution 54/254 of 15 March 2000, the General Assembly decided that the Millennium Summit would be held from 6 to 8 September 2000 in New York under the overall theme “the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century”.

3. In this regard, the Secretary-General in his progress report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session (Progress towards and challenges and constraints to the achievement of the major development goals and objectives adopted by the United Nations during the past decade) observed: “The focus of the development efforts of the international community at the present time should be on the full and effective implementation of the outcomes and commitments of the United Nations Millennium Declaration² and the global conferences and summits. The Millennium Development Goals³ and other goals of the conferences provide a concrete agenda for development in the new millennium. However, the progress achieved in the first quarter of the current decade in almost all fields is less than what is required to achieve all the development goals and targets established in recent years. Extraordinary efforts and measures are required on the part of the international community and Governments in all parts of the world to revitalize development.”

4. The challenge before the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at this session, therefore, is clearly to identify what must be done to implement the environmental dimension of sustainable development and to generate the necessary political will and direction to guide the organization in that direction.

II. Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development

5. In the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Commission on Sustainable Development has been given a multi-year programme of work that defines a clear timetable to review and give guidance to further efforts to move forward on the Summit’s Plan of Implementation⁴. This year, the Commission on Sustainable Development will review progress in the areas of freshwater, sanitation and human settlements. In line with established practice, the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum will contribute to that review by providing its assessment of progress and required implementation measures from the environmental perspective.

6. In particular, the targets against which progress must be measured in the fields of water and sanitation include:

(a) In the field of water:

- (i) To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water;
- (ii) To develop integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans by the year 2005, with support to developing countries;
- (iii) To stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources by developing water management strategies at the regional, national and local levels that promote both equitable access and adequate supplies;
- (iv) To promote effective coordination among the various international and intergovernmental bodies and processes working on water-related issues, both within the United Nations system and between the United Nations and international financial institutions;

(b) In the field of sanitation:

- (ii) To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of people who do not have access to basic sanitation;

² General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000.

³ A/56/326.

⁴ *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum) (A/CONF.199/20), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

- (iii) To ensure, by the year 2025, adequate sanitation in all rural areas;
- (iv) In the field of human settlements:
- (v) To achieve, by the year 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers (a Millennium Development Goal reaffirmed in Johannesburg);
- (vi) To improve access to adequate shelter and services, including water and sanitation, land and property.

7. The Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum can provide an essential environmental input to this discussion; a background paper for the ministerial-level discussion (UNEP/GCSS.VIII/4) raises a number of issues for this purpose. It is proposed that the Council/Forum identify and recommend, for wide application by local and national communities, practical measures and workable approaches based on actual experience that can enhance the implementation of a selected number of the relevant commitments and targets under the Millennium Declaration and the World Summit on Sustainable Development commitments and that can be replicated on a large scale. The outcome of the current session of the Council/Forum will provide an environmental implementation framework on water and sanitation and their relation to human settlements for the forthcoming session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and other international forums, programmes and policy processes.

III. State of the environment

8. In the coming years, UNEP will make special efforts to strengthen its work in the core area of its mandate for environmental assessment and early warning in the clear recognition that sound science is the foundation of sound policy and effective implementation.

9. As a result of the international environmental governance process, it has been recognized that the increasing complexity of environmental degradation requires an enhanced capacity for scientific assessment, monitoring and early warning. A consultative process at the expert and intergovernmental levels has taken place and its outcome is currently before the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum for its consideration (document UNEP/GCSS.VIII/5, Add.3 and Add.4). It constitutes an excellent basis upon which the Council/Forum can further strengthen the scientific capacity of UNEP.

10. Further, in response to Governing Council decision 22/1 I B of 7 February 2003, planning has started on a review of the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) process to ensure that the 2007 GEO report will benefit from the best possible preparatory process. This year, the Council/Forum will have before it the first in a series of annual GEO yearbooks.

11. The GEO review has involved, among other things, an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the UNEP network of collaborating centres, the need for, and possible ways of achieving, strengthened involvement of the scientific community in various aspects of the process, improving the capacity of stakeholders, particularly those in the developing regions, and determining ways of making the GEO series more responsive to the needs of policy makers. The findings of the initiative on strengthening the scientific base of UNEP will feed into the GEO-4 process. As a result of the extended timeline for the global GEO report series, UNEP is placing increasing emphasis on the development of regional, subregional, national and city-level environment outlook reports to provide a more complete information base for the development of the global reports. Meanwhile, GEO capacity-building activities will focus on strengthening the participation of developing country institutions in the GEO process.

12. In 2003, UNEP published a GEO report for Latin America and the Caribbean, *GEO Andes*, and several national and municipal environmental outlook reports. UNEP has also published, together with the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, *African Environment Outlook, Case Studies: Human Vulnerability to Environmental Change*. Emphasis is also being placed on the regular production of the Africa Environment Outlook report and the establishment of the Africa Environment Information Network. The second Africa Environment Outlook report, to be published in 2006, will focus on issues highlighted in the Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. UNEP will continue to play a key role in the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative.

13. Work is also continuing on the preparation of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. The first product of the assessment, "Ecosystems and Human Well-being – A Framework for Assessment", was released in 2003, and the full assessment report will be peer reviewed in 2004, with the final assessment reports and syntheses to be completed in early 2005. We expect that the completed report will provide a definitive assessment which can be taken into account by the high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in 2005 to review the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. We also expect that the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment will contribute to further strengthening scientific understanding of interlinkages among multilateral environmental agreements and the clustering approach to environmental data.

IV. Environment for development

14. In the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, heads of State reaffirmed that "managing the natural resources base in a sustainable and integrated manner is essential for sustainable development." They further stated that "to reverse the current trend in natural resource degradation as soon as possible, it is necessary to implement strategies which should include targets adopted at the national and, where appropriate, regional levels to protect ecosystems and to achieve integrated management of land, water and living resources, while strengthening regional, national and local capacities."⁵ They also requested that States should "take immediate steps to make progress in the formulation and elaboration of national strategies for sustainable development and begin their implementation by 2005."⁶

15. The World Summit on Sustainable Development provided specific time-bound socio-economic and environmental targets and goals, including those stated in the Millennium Declaration and Agenda 21⁷, that countries have made a commitment to meet. The task ahead is to enable countries to meet their commitments made at the Millennium Summit, the World Summit on Sustainable Development and several other international conferences. The world, however, is currently lacking a clear operational understanding of how the goals on environmental sustainability can be achieved. A robust framework of implementation is required to address the problem at the global, regional and national levels; it is necessary both to implement recommendations and provide the means by which to measure progress.

16. In response to such challenges, the World Summit on Sustainable Development had some success in refocusing global attention on these critical issues, while more clearly linking environmental sustainability to poverty reduction. The Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development explicitly commits Governments to responsible and equitable management of the earth's resources as part of the broader effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It also highlights the critical role of the private sector and public-private partnerships in addressing key environmental challenges ranging from biodiversity protection to renewable energy. Many of these partnerships are now being put into practice, providing models for future action.

⁵ *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum) (A/CONF.199/20), chap. I, resolution 1, annex, para. 24.

⁶ A/CONF.199/20, chap. I, resolution 2, annex, para. 162(b).

⁷ *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1) vol. I: Resolutions adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex II.

17. Successful partnerships have been developed in the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and the Regional Seas Programme, and in particular the development of the White Water to Blue Water Partnership, which links upstream and downstream environmental management of water and fosters greater cooperation to promote the protection of watershed and marine ecosystems. Partnership activities for technology support through the International Environmental Technology Centre of UNEP, based in Japan, is also proceeding with the support of the Japanese government. The Great Apes Survival Project, in cooperation with major international conservation organizations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, has been successful in raising awareness and catalyzing action for the protection of the great apes. Since the World Summit, UNEP has also moved ahead on important initiatives related to health and the environment. In a follow-up to health and environment ministerial meetings supported by the Government of Canada, a joint secretariat of UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO), with the support of the Government of Canada, has been established for the Health and Environment Linkages Initiative (HELI), which is designed to develop key interventions for developing countries in the field of health and environment. UNEP and WHO are also continuing to pursue the Healthy Environment for Children Alliance with major non-governmental organizations, the private sector and Governments to develop responses to major environmental threats to children's health. The cleaner fuels partnership with developing countries and the private sector has also yielded considerable success, particularly concerning the phase-out of lead.

18. In response to Governing Council decisions 22/1 IV and 22/1 V of 7 February 2003 concerning the strengthening of the ability of UNEP to assess environmental impacts in post conflict situations, work has continued on finalizing a project on the clean-up of environmental hot spots following the Kosovo conflict. Further, following a post-conflict assessment of Afghanistan released in January of 2003, a second capacity-building phase has been launched to build the environmental management capacity of that country's Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources and Environment through the provision of training and technical assistance. UNEP has also undertaken the environmental component of the United Nations system-wide needs assessment for Iraq and Liberia, and is making preparations for assessments to be carried out in Africa.

19. Over the past year, UNEP has taken several measures to enable it to respond to the need to locate environmental policy and action clearly in the context of development. In 2003, UNEP joined the United Nations Development Group and strengthened its capacity to take part in the system-wide coordination of operational activities with a view to integrating environmental consideration into the field level activities of the United Nations. We have started to contribute to the development of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and poverty reduction strategy papers using primarily the available capacity of our regional offices. Urgent measures are being explored to substantially enhance our capacity in this area. Cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is an important part of this, and we are currently engaged in a discussion with UNDP aimed at developing a more effective collaboration based on our respective competencies. In the meantime, we will continue to further develop our conceptual and operational bases to address poverty and the environment in a consistent manner throughout our programme of work.

V. International environmental governance

20. The outcome of the Cartagena meeting of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum on international environmental governance as endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development continues to constitute a major policy direction for the organization. Considerable progress has been made in implementing the series of decisions emanating from Cartagena, and an overview of progress on international environmental governance (UNEP/GCSS.VIII/5) is currently before the Council/Forum. The overview contains sections relating to the following issues:

- (a) Universal membership for the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum;
- (b) Strengthening the scientific base of UNEP;
- (c) An intergovernmental strategic plan for technology support and capacity-building;
- (d) Strengthening the financing of UNEP;
- (e) Multilateral environmental agreements;
- (f) Enhanced coordination across the United Nations system and the Environmental Management Group.

21. With respect to the question of universal membership for the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the views expressed by member States at this session will be forwarded to the Secretary-General to enable him to prepare a report for the forthcoming session of the General Assembly, which is charged with the responsibility of further reviewing this matter.

22. A comprehensive report on the outcome of expert and intergovernmental consultations on strengthening the scientific base of UNEP is also before the Council/Forum for its consideration. The findings of and experience gained in this process will assist UNEP in prioritizing and strengthening the scientific base of its programmatic activities, particularly in the area of environmental assessment, monitoring and early warning, and in facilitating interaction between scientists and policy makers.

23. An extremely important issue before the Council/Forum is the need to put in place an open-ended process for the development of an intergovernmental strategic plan for technology support and capacity-building. A report containing proposed elements for such a process is before the Council/Forum (document UNEP/GCSS.VIII/5/Add.1), and the establishment of a working group will allow for a comprehensive approach involving all relevant partners to be put in place in line with the central importance of the theme of implementation that runs through all aspects of this session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

24. The pilot phase of the implementation of the voluntary indicative scale of contributions is under way, and a report on progress is before the Council/Forum for its consideration (UNEP/GCSS.VIII/INF/12*). Early indications point to a very successful introduction of the voluntary indicative scale, which has resulted in a substantial broadening of the donor base as well as an increase in the total contributions to the Environment Fund. The Council is expected to review the pilot phase at its next session in 2005.

25. The document containing the overview of progress also highlights a number of issues relating to multilateral environmental agreements. The tenth meeting of multilateral environmental agreements was held in March 2004.

26. A report concerning the work of the Environment Management Group (UNEP/GCSS.VIII/5/Add.2) is also before the Council for its consideration. Pursuant to decisions taken in Cartagena on international environmental governance, the Environment Management Group secretariat was made fully operational in mid-2003 with the establishment of its offices in Geneva, Switzerland.

VI. Conclusion

27. At last year's session, the Council/Forum had before it an ambitious work programme, which was to develop its response to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the outcome of the other international conferences of the preceding years. At this session, the challenge before the Council/Forum is to provide a substantive environmental perspective on the implementation of the environmental pillar of sustainable development in the fields of water, sanitation and human settlements as well as to sustain the momentum of implementation required to meet the goals and targets of the Millennium Declaration and the World Summit on Sustainable Development and implement various measures related to international environmental governance. We must at this session adopt focused and targeted decisions that will allow the organization to maintain its impetus in the coming year.

28. The international community will come together in 2005 at a high-level event of the General Assembly to review progress in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. A review of progress in the implementation of the goal of environmental sustainability will be an important part of this discussion. We should keep in mind the importance of this coming event and ensure that we are in a position to contribute to a successful conference.
