

## **Visit to Nairobi and Paris, Debriefing, 15 February 2007**

### **Summary**

The Permanent Representatives of Switzerland and Mexico convened an informal meeting in the General Assembly on 15 February during which they provided feedback to delegations on their recent visits to Paris and Nairobi. They summarized the main issues they regarded as key messages, and indicated that they would welcome written comments from delegations on their recent questionnaire up to the end of March. They also indicated that knowledgeable persons would be invited to address hearings /informal meetings on topical areas such as MEA coordination, environmental financing, etc over the next few months and that they would continue bilateral consultations, after which a paper with proposals / options would be prepared for discussion. They urged delegations to consult with their capitals and colleagues in Nairobi, as messages from the various country delegations were not always consistent.

The main points covered in their briefing were:

The visit to both Paris and Nairobi was seen a very productive, and both occasions were used to interact with individual countries and regional groups. It was clear from both meetings that political leadership was required for meaningful reform of environmental governance. Many delegations were of the view that with a new Secretary General and a new Executive director in UNEP a window of opportunity existed for progress.

There was a clear and growing awareness of the developmental and political relevance of environmental challenges. Addressing the governance structures dealing with the environment was an issue that could not be dealt with by only Environment Ministers, but required the involvement of other Ministries and interest from Heads of State and Government. Gradual progress in reforming environmental governance was broadly viewed in a positive manner and many countries expressed a desire for improvement in the existing institutional framework. Number of delegations expressed their expectation that the GA process would contribute to further clarification of areas of agreement and allow for in depth discussions were necessary.

Although UNEP is widely regarded as the principal environment body of the UN system, many activities were still being undertaken or discussed outside its sphere of influence (i.e. climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystems degradation, etc). Linked to this fragmented approach is the increasing concern that present environmental challenges are of such magnitude that the current governance system can not effectively cope with it. Obvious weaknesses of the present system include insufficient coordination within the UN system, proliferations of MEAs, inadequate implementation of legal and political obligations and unpredictable funding. Positive developments are under way at UNEP and in the IEG system overall, but such developments are seen as insufficient to cope with the fragmentation and inefficiencies of the of the system, of the reform agenda and of the political process.

More coherence is required among the various inter-governmental processes, such as those dealt with in the GA, ECOSOC, the CSD and others. The need for such inter-linkages is especially prudent as the developmental and security aspects of continued environmental degradation are gaining more recognition - it therefore has cross cutting

relevance. Delegations also discussed the potential of new technologies which would enable connectivity and interoperability of the different parts of IEG on a more regular day-to-day basis

Many different approaches have been proposed for changing the institutional structures dealing with the global environment, but it would be valuable to first ascertain what such structures should deliver – i.e. place the functions before the format.

Growing support has been expressed for the strengthening of UNEP, and for its improved scientific capacity and increased funding along more efficient mechanisms. UNEP should become the authoritative environmental voice and an important factor in the early warning, based on sound science and assessment, much as the WHO is the global voice on health. The EDs research strategy 2020 was welcomed by many delegations in this context; it was also mentioned that the creation of a position as Chief scientist could help to strengthen UNEP.

Various proposals have also been made to improve UNEP's coordinating role, and for it to foster better coherence across the UN system - through the EMG (which according to many does not need a new mandate) and also in terms of the MEA's. Some useful proposals for thematic and geographic clustering have been made in regard to the latter. It was also suggested that clusters of MEAs, in cooperation with UNEP, may develop common medium term work plans or reports in a more concise way to state parties. MEAs could also create common administrative structures, back to back meetings of the COPs, common evaluations and coordinate scientific work. Such proposals provide a good basis for moving forward with concrete suggestions. In order to live up to a more prominent coordinating role, UNEP should follow a strategy of strategic presence at key moments of decision making processes (i.e. during negotiations of UNDAFs, PRSPs or in the intergovernmental area during the TCPR).

Support has also been expressed for an increased regional presence and role for UNEP, as well as for it to have a larger role at national level. In this context expanding cooperation with UNDP is a very welcome development, particularly in terms of the integration of environment and development linkages in the UNDAF's and for environmental capacity building in a broader sense (in which UNEP should have a central role). Many delegations have also argued for a stronger role for UNEP in the GEF. In a more generic way number of delegations suggested improving the interface between normative and operational levels.

Strong emphasis was put on capacity building and in this context the implementation of the BSP is seen as the most crucial test for the effectiveness of the IEG system. The access to knowledge, technologies, legislation and methodologies and the creation of a systematic lessons learned/ best practices database are seen as important elements of strengthening the IEG system as a whole.

In this context the repeated support for expanding and intensifying partnerships between states, international organization and science communities, civil society and business were mentioned by many delegations as important elements for a more effective IEG. Some delegations suggested that such partnerships should allow for a new type of international organization for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which would go beyond state representation.

Some issues require more reflection and further discussions among delegations, among them are:

The variety of approaches to possible changes in the institutional framework for the UN's environmental activities. Clarity is required if there should be incremental change, or transformation - and what levels of transformation could be acceptable. In this context the Co-Chairs suggested that delegations reflect on the following questions:

- Why is it so difficult, in the present framework, to implement decisions (Bali, Cartagena)? Why should there be suddenly an area of implementation?
- How would an institutional framework which could ensure better implementation look like and why should the creation of a new institution suddenly provide for better implementation?

Any changes in the institutional framework would also require further discussion on mandates and financing. In this regard, the assessments of the amount of money spent for financing the global environmental challenges differ widely. It should be determined how such funding could be more effectively utilized and what main areas of increased spending would be. With regard to the system of finance (voluntary or assessed) opinions differ but a large number of countries support the concept of indicative scales of assessments.

In this context it was also considered important to evaluate best ways of integrating different sets of legal obligations on the national level into a more coherent IEG system.

There are also differing views on fragmentation, with some viewing it as decentralized specificity and other of the view that it has resulted in widespread incoherence and inefficiencies. It was suggested that positions varied depending on whether more analytical, normative or operational issues were under consideration.

The actual focus of reforms in environmental governance also need more elaboration, i.e. whether it should be targeted at the global, regional or national level, or whether it has to be a combination of these. The questions was discussed how IEG could best contribute to national environmental protection systems.

Various models exist that can be studied to gain more knowledge on how coherence can be increased. The WIPO model provided an example of an umbrella-organization which coordinates the development, implementation and administration of international treaties in a particular area, while the creation of specialized agencies over the past years also hold valuable lessons for transformation.

In the broader discussion on support for capacity building (while widely endorsed in particular in its focus on the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan), a focus must also be on compliance with environmental agreements. The perspectives of the north and south often differed in terms of emphasis on these and a balanced approach should be found to enable the building of environmental capacities to not only meet obligations but also to have a sustained effect at national level.

Finally, it would be important to carefully reflect on strategies for implementing decisions to strengthen IEG and delegations were encouraged to frame their proposals in achievable objectives within short, medium and longer term timeframes.