

## TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE UNEP GOVERNING COUNCIL/GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM: 16-20 FEBRUARY 2009

The 25th session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC-25/GMEF) opens today at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, and will continue until Friday, 20 February 2009. Ministers will discuss emerging policy issues under the themes: "Globalization and the environment: global crises: national chaos?" and "International Environmental Governance and United Nations reform: help or hindrance?"

The GC-25/GMEF will also consider reports on: strengthening the scientific and financial base of UNEP; the Global Environment Outlook (GEO); chemicals management, including mercury and waste management; small island developing states (SIDS); support to Africa in environmental management and protection; South-South cooperation in achieving sustainable development; updated UNEP water policy and strategy; budget and programme of work for the biennium 2008-2009; long-term strategy on engagement of young people in environmental issues; future and current programmes for the development and periodic review of environmental law; and the outcome of the *ad hoc* intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES).

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNEP GC/GMEF

As a result of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the UN General Assembly (GA), in its resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 1972, officially established UNEP as the central UN node for global environmental cooperation and treaty making. The resolution also established the UNEP Governing Council (GC) to provide a forum for the international community to address major and emerging environmental policy issues. The GC's responsibilities include the promotion of international environmental cooperation and the recommendation of policies to achieve it, and the provision of policy guidance for the direction and coordination of environmental programmes in the UN system. The GC reports to the GA, which also elects the GC's 58 members for four-year terms, taking into account the principle of equitable regional representation. The GMEF is constituted by the GC as envisaged in GA resolution 53/242. The purpose of the GMEF is to institute, at a high political level, a process for reviewing important and emerging policy issues in the field of the environment.

**GC-19:** The session convened in two parts from 27 January-7 February 1997 and from 3-4 April 1997 at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates adopted the Nairobi Declaration on

the Role and Mandate of UNEP, which expanded the mandate to include: analyzing the state of the global environment; assessing global and regional environmental trends; providing policy advice and early warning information on environmental threats; and catalyzing and promoting international cooperation and action, based on the best scientific and technical capabilities available.

**GC-20:** This session took place from 1-5 February 1999, in Nairobi, and adopted over 30 decisions on a range of topics, including: the Environment Fund, administrative and budgetary matters; linkages among and support to environmental and environment-related conventions; and policy issues, including the state of the environment, coordination and cooperation within and outside the UN, UNEP governance and emerging policy issues.

**GCSS-6/GMEF:** The sixth Special Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum took place from 29-31 May 2000, in Malmö, Sweden. Ministers adopted the Malmö Ministerial Declaration, which agreed that the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) should review the requirements for a greatly strengthened institutional structure for IEG.

**GC-21/GMEF:** This meeting took place from 5-9 February 2001, in Nairobi. Delegates established the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives (IGM) to undertake a comprehensive policy-oriented assessment of existing institutional weaknesses, as well as future needs and options for strengthening IEG. They also adopted decision 21/7, which requests the UNEP Executive Director to examine the need for a strategic approach to international chemicals management (SAICM).

**GCSS-7/GMEF:** This meeting was held from 13-15 February 2002, in Cartagena, Colombia. In its decision SS.VII/1, the GC/GMEF adopted the IGM report, which contains recommendations aimed at strengthening IEG, including through: improved coherence in international environmental policy-making; strengthening the role and financial situation of UNEP; improved coordination among and effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs); and capacity building, technology transfer and country-level coordination. Delegates also adopted decisions related to, *inter alia*, SAICM at the global level.

**WSSD:** The WSSD was held from 26 August-4 September 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) sets out a framework for action to implement the commitments originally agreed at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The JPOI, among other things, emphasized that the international community should fully implement the outcomes of decision SS.VII/1 on IEG.

**GC-22/GMEF:** This meeting took place from 3-7 February 2003, in Nairobi. Delegates adopted more than 40 decisions on issues relating to IEG, post-conflict environmental assessment, UNEP's water policy and strategy, SAICM, a mercury programme, support to Africa, production and consumption patterns, and the environment and cultural diversity.

**GCSS-8/GMEF:** This meeting took place from 29-31 March 2004, in Jeju, Republic of Korea. At the conclusion of the ministerial consultations, delegates adopted the "Jeju Initiative," containing the Chair's summary of the discussions and decisions on: SIDS; waste management; regional annexes; and the implementation of decision SS.VII/1 on IEG.

**GC-23/GMEF:** This meeting took place from 21-25 February 2005, in Nairobi. Ministers considered the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, and adopted decisions on, among other things: the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building; IEG; chemicals management; UNEP's water policy and strategy; gender equality and the environment; poverty and the environment; and strengthening environmental emergency response and developing disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and early warning systems.

**2005 WORLD SUMMIT:** The 2005 World Summit was held at UN headquarters in New York from 14-16 September. Delegates recognized the need for more efficient environmental activities in the UN system, through, *inter alia*, enhanced coordination, improved policy advice and guidance, and strengthened scientific knowledge. They further agreed to explore the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework, including a more integrated structure, building on existing institutions and internationally agreed instruments, as well as treaty bodies and UN specialized agencies.

**ICCM:** The International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) was held from 4-6 February 2006, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, immediately prior to GCSS-9/GMEF. At the ICCM, delegates completed negotiations and adopted the SAICM, including a high-level declaration, overarching policy strategy and global plan of action.

**GCSS-9/GMEF:** This meeting was held from 7-9 February 2006, in Dubai. Ministerial consultations addressed, *inter alia*, policy issues relating to energy and environment, chemicals management, and tourism and the environment. The plenary discussion on environmental governance, outcome of the 2005 World Summit, and GC universal membership did not produce an agreed outcome, and delegates decided that the report of the meeting should reflect the divergence of views expressed.

**GC-24/GMEF:** This meeting convened from 5-9 February 2007, in Nairobi. Delegates adopted 15 decisions on issues relating, *inter alia*, to: chemicals, including a provision to establish the *Ad Hoc* Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) to Review and Assess Measures to Address the Global Issue of Mercury; the world environmental situation; IEG; South-South cooperation; waste management; 2010-2020 UN Decade for Deserts and the Fight Against Desertification; UNEP's updated water policy and strategy; and support to Africa in environmental management and protection.

**GCSS-10/GMEF:** This meeting convened from 20-22 February 2008, in the Principality of Monaco. Ministerial consultations addressed the emerging policy issues of mobilizing finance to meet the climate challenge, and IEG and UN reform. The GC/GMEF adopted five decisions on: the UNEP Medium-term Strategy 2010-2013; chemicals management, including mercury and waste management; the GEO; sustainable development of the Arctic region; and the International Decade for Combating Climate Change.

## INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

**INFORMAL CONSULTATIVE PROCESS:** The UN GA at its 60th session established the Informal Consultative Process on the Institutional Framework for the UN Environmental Activities. The process seeks to strengthen the current system of IEG by focusing on questions related to: UNEP; improvement of cooperation within the UN and among the MEAs; as well as funding mechanisms and partnerships.

On 14 June 2007, following year-long consultations with UN member states, Co-Chairs Amb. Claude Heller (Mexico) and Amb. Peter Maurer (Switzerland) presented an Options Paper, which identifies seven building blocks to strengthen IEG: scientific assessment, monitoring and early warning capacity; inter-agency coordination and cooperation; MEAs; regional presence and activities at the regional level; the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building, information technology, partnerships and advocacy; and financing. In addition, the Paper addresses the future IEG system, including the possibility of transforming UNEP into a UN Environment Organization (UNEO). Based on the feedback of the previous two years, in May 2008 the Co-Chairs drafted a proposal for a GA resolution aimed at translating the Options Paper and subsequent input received into legislative language. On the basis of comments received, the Co-Chairs prepared a revised draft resolution, which was discussed on 12 September. Delegations proposed specific amendments. The Co-Chairs subsequently recommended that, given the difficulties in finding consensus and the opposing views on fundamental issues, all interested parties should make the best use of upcoming intergovernmental meetings to continue consideration of the matter.

**SECOND OEWG MEETING ON MERCURY:** The OEWG convened from 6-10 October 2008 in Nairobi, Kenya. The OEWG discussed a future mercury framework. Delegates agreed on text to be used as a basis for UNEP GC discussions that contains the elements of a comprehensive mercury framework, and narrowed down the list of implementation instruments, one legally-binding and three voluntary options, for the consideration of the GC.

**ICCM PREPARATIONS:** The first meeting of the Open-ended Legal and Technical Working Group (OELTWG) of the ICCM and informal discussions on preparations for the second meeting of the ICCM (ICCM-2), was held from 21-24 October 2008, in Rome, Italy. The OELTWG discussed the rules of procedure for the ICCM, but did not complete its work. These discussions will continue at ICCM-2. The informal discussions included preparatory dialogue on issues to be considered at ICCM-2 including *inter alia*: financial and technical resources for SAICM implementation, including evaluating the performance of financing of SAICM; and the relationship between the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) and SAICM.

**AD HOC IPBES:** The IPBES met from 10-12 November 2008, in Putrajaya, Malaysia. Participants exchanged views on the core mandate and functions, focus areas, governance structure, and proposed work programme and budget of an IPBES, as laid out in a concept note based on the follow-up to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) and the Consultative Process Towards an International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB). Participants adopted a Chairs' Summary of the meeting, which highlights areas of agreement and reflects differing views expressed during the meeting.

**THE TENTH SESSION OF THE GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM:** This meeting was held from 14-15 February 2009, in Nairobi Kenya, prior to GC-25/GMEF. Participants addressed: engaging at the GC-25/GMEF; partnerships with major groups and stakeholders for the implementation for the UNEP Programme of Work for 2010-2011; globalization and the environment; and the chemicals agenda. The meeting also included an open dialogue with Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UNEP.

**FORUM OF THE NETWORK OF WOMEN MINISTERS AND LEADERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT: NWMLE)** NWMLE convened on 15 February 2009, in Nairobi, Kenya. Experts and partners discussed emerging gender issues relating to the themes under consideration at GC-25/GMEF and made concrete recommendations for inclusion in the President's summary of the GC/GMEF.