

UNITED NATIONS ACTIVITIES

UNEP

High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials – Last Session –

The fifth meeting of the High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials, established by the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme in its decision 19/32 of 4 April 1997, was held at Nairobi, on 4 February 2001.

Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of UNEP, addressed the Committee and described its mandate, as identified in GC decision 19/32, as follows:

- to consider the international environmental agenda and to make reform and policy recommendations to the Governing Council,
- to provide guidance and advice to the Executive Director on emerging environmental issues between sessions of the Governing Council to enable UNEP to make a timely response,
- to enhance the collaboration and co-operation of UNEP with other multilateral bodies as well as with the environmental conventions and their secretariats,
- to support the Executive Director in mobilising adequate and predictable financial resources for UNEP for the implementation of the global environmental agenda approved by the Governing Council.

Klaus Töpfer recalled how all the previous meetings of the Committee had been cordial and had offered valuable guidance to the Executive Director and the secretariat. The General Assembly had adopted resolution 53/242 on 28 July 1999 on the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements. The resolution welcomed the proposal to institute an annual, ministerial-level, global forum, with the Governing Council of UNEP constituting the forum in the years that it met in regular session and, in alternate years, with the forum taking the form of a special session of the Governing Council, in which participants could gather to review important and emerging policy issues in the field of the environment. In that key resolution, an important achievement had been realised in the frequency of the policy-level meetings and the holding of high or ministerial-level meetings at the same time. In keeping with the resolution, the inaugural and successful Global Ministerial Environment Forum/sixth special session of the Governing Council had been held in Malmö, from 29-31 May 2000 (see EPL 30/4 (2000) p. 160-165). It was in the light of the above that the Committee would review the report in the documents before it.



Consideration of the Future of the High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials

Under this agenda item, the Executive Director introduced his report as contained in document UNEP/HLC/5/2. He provided a brief overview of the background and history of the recent development of the governing structures of UNEP, with regard not only to the High-level Committee but also the Committee of Permanent Representatives, in keeping with the ongoing process of the reform of the United Nations. The secretariat looked forward to receiving the guidance and advice of the meeting to review the governing structures of UNEP, in particular, the future of the High-level Committee.

Klaus Töpfer expressed his most sincere appreciation to the members of the Bureau of the Committee, who had been working so closely with the secretariat and providing valuable guidance with regard to the work of the Committee. He particularly thanked Philippe Roch of Switzerland, who had been a member of the Bureau since the inception of the Committee. In conclusion, he invited the Committee to decide on its own recommendation to the twenty-first session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum. The High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials had done well so far, and had no doubt accomplished its mission. Having done so, it would not shy away from taking a lead, if it deemed it right and proper that the Committee should be honourably wound up. That was the task before the current meeting.

During the debate, general appreciation was expressed for the work of the HLCMO over the past three years. It was observed that it had successfully fulfilled its mandate with respect to providing oversight of the governance of UNEP, lending stability during a sensitive period of reform and change of the organisation, and giving high-level policy input on substantive issues. Likewise, there was general commendation of the role played by the members of the Bureau of the Committee.

One representative, speaking on behalf of a regional economic integration organisation, expressed particular gratitude for the efforts of Bureau member Philippe Roch. It was pointed out that in the period since the inception of the HLCMO, there had been a positive evolution in the governance structure of UNEP: as a result of Governing Council decision 19/32, the Committee of Permanent

Representatives had been given a redefined mandate in reviewing the implementation of Council decisions. It was necessary to ensure its continued strengthening and functioning as an effective intersessional body and as a means of providing links to member States' capitals.

The opinion was held that *ad hoc* meetings and working group and expert meetings evolving from General Assembly resolution 53/242 offered a further opportunity for governments to provide inputs and guidance to the secretariat. The meetings of freshwater experts represented a good example of such interaction, and it was suggested that UNEP might consider setting up such groups for other substantive topics.

The view was widely expressed that, because of the favourable evolution in the structure of UNEP, particularly the inception of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the HLCMO no longer had a definite role to play in the governance of the organisation. Indeed, it was noted that a second Ministerial-level intersessional mechanism could represent an unnecessary duplication.

Concern was expressed that, while there might be some duplication in the roles of the HLCMO and the Global Forum, discontinuation of HLCMO might lead to a reduction in the contacts and dialogue between governments

and the Executive Director of UNEP. Care should be taken not to reduce or weaken the political backing of UNEP, particularly when General Assembly resolution 53/242 specifically called for the strengthening of the organisation.

The suggestion was made that, if the HLCMO were to be discontinued, it might be necessary to review the governance structure that remained, in order to see whether useful HLCMO functions could be given to other components. It was suggested that the membership of the Bureau of the Governing Council could be increased from five to ten, and that more frequent meetings of the Governing Council Bureau and of the Committee of Permanent Representatives should be held.

Following the discussion, the fifth meeting of the HLCMO adopted a decision, for transmission to the twenty-first session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, recommending that the Committee be discontinued.

The decision adopted by the Governing Council on UNEP Governance and the implementation of General Assembly resolution 53/242 (see page 118), calls, *inter alia*, for the dissolution of the High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials. (MJ)

