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.

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
Introduction

The 21st session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council (GC 21) and Second Global Ministerial Environment Forum took place from 5-9 February 2001, at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Meeting was attended by approximately 900 participants, including ministers and senior government officials from over 100 countries, together with representatives of United Nations agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business and civil society.

The first three days of the meeting dealt with policy issues and administrative matters including UNEP’s work programme and budget for the biennium 2002-2003.

Ministerial discussions on the 8 and 9 February focused on issues such as renewable energy, the linkages between environment, health, and poverty, the increased intensity and frequency of natural and man-made disasters, the specific needs of Africa, UNEP’s contribution to the second Earth Summit and international environmental governance.

Delegates met in Plenary sessions and a Committee of the Whole (COW) throughout the week.

The Council concluded its work by adopting over 30 decisions on topics including global governance, environmental law, desertification, biosafety, climate and atmosphere. A selection of these is printed on pages 115-121.

Opening of the Session

The outgoing President, László Miklós (Slovakia), formally opened the meeting. He noted some significant achievements since the Council’s 20th session in 1999 and said that the decisions adopted there had led to a number of positive resolutions by the UN General Assembly. He added that the Malmö Declaration had made a significant contribution to the UN Millennium Summit on Sustainable Development, scheduled for 2002 in South Africa (see also last issue at page 2).

Shafqat Kakakhel, UNEP Deputy Executive Director, read a message from the UN Secretary-General. The Secretary-General said that the World Summit on Sustainable Development should take concrete action, and urged efforts to achieve ratification of the Kyoto Protocol by 2002. He noted that strong financial support is necessary to address environmental threats, and called for ongoing partnerships among governments, civil society and the private sector.

In his opening address, UNEP Executive Director Klaus Töpfer identified major global environmental challenges, including the loss of cultural diversity, energy concerns in Africa, the debate on genetically-modified organ-