Organization of the Work of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives for the Period April-December 2001*

Note by the secretariat

A. Introduction

1. The Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in its decision 21/21 of 9 February 2001 on international environmental governance, established an Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives to undertake a comprehensive policy-oriented assessment of existing institutional weaknesses as well as future needs and options for strengthened international environmental governance, including the financing of the United Nations Environment Programme, with a view to presenting a report containing analysis and options to the next session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum*. 2. To this end, the Council requested the Executive Director of UNEP to elaborate a report to be submitted to the Intergovernmental Group at its first meeting. The report of the Executive Director on international environmental governance was tabulated at the first meeting of the Group as document UNEP/IGM/1/2.

3. The outcome of the first meeting of the Group has been distributed as a report of the Chair, and is before the second meeting as document UNEP/IGM/1/3.

B. Meetings of the Intergovernmental Group

4. During the debate on international environmental governance at the twenty-first session of the Governing Council, delegations were of the view that to ensure the cost-effectiveness of the work of the Intergovernmental Group and to maximize attendance by ministers, meetings should be held on the margins of ministerial meetings already scheduled to take place.

5. In pursuance of this objective, the first meeting of the Group took place in New York on 18 April 2001 immediately prior to the high-level segment of the ninth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. At that meeting the President and the Bureau of the UNEP Governing Council were requested to consult further with a view to establishing a schedule of future meetings and venues.

6. In order to take the process forward, a joint meeting of the bureaux of the UNEP Governing Council, the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives and the Commission on Sustainable Development at its tenth session took place in Stockholm on 23 May 2001, on the margins of the Conference of Plenipotentiaries convened to adopt the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

7. After consultation with the other two bureaux, the Bureau of the Governing Council decided that the schedule of future meetings of the Group and their venues would be as follows:

(a) 17 July 2001 – on the margins of the resumed sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – Bonn, Germany.

(b) 9 and 10 September 2001 – Algiers, Algeria (in response to an offer by the Government of Algeria to host one of the meetings of the Group).

(c) 1 December 2001 – after the conclusion of the Intergovernmental Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities – Montreal, Canada.

8. The Bureau further decided that an additional meeting may be held in New York in January 2002, immediately prior to the second session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the preparatory body for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in order to form all delegations to the Preparatory Committee of progress made in this process.

C. Inter-sessional activities

9. In decision 21/21 the Governing Council also requested the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP, as the subsidiary body of the Council, to provide its due contribution to this process. The report of the Committee on its activities in pursuance of this objective is before the second meeting of the Group as document UNEP/IGM/2/3.

10. The Council also decided that the process should benefit from incorporating the views and perspectives of other United Nations entities, international financial institutions, expert institutions, major groups and individuals outside the United Nations system. To this end, a number of meetings with secretariats of multi-stakeholder consultative meetings, with regard to international environmental governance, is before the present meeting in document UNEP/IGM/2/2.

11. The Executive Director also convened a meeting of representatives of independent expert institutions and individuals from developed and developing countries in Cambridge, United Kingdom on 28 and 29 May 2001. Their views are also contained in document UNEP/IGM/2/2.

12. Representatives of various United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes and convention secretariats participated in the second meeting of the Environmental Management Group which was held on 15 June 2001 in Geneva with the objective of providing their perspectives. Representatives of international organizations at the present meeting will be invited to provide their views under agenda item 3 (d).

13. A number of meetings continue to take place on issues related to international environmental governance, sponsored by various actors within and outside Governments. The UNEP secretariat will attempt to ensure that all relevant information concerning such meetings is provided to the Group in the form of information documents or briefings.

D. Outputs of the Intergovernmental Group

14. In decision 21/21 the Council also decided that the next session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum should undertake an in-depth discussion of the report of the Intergovernmental Group with a view to providing its views under agenda item 3 (d).
to 15 February 2002, after which its input will be provided to the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory body for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which is scheduled to take place in New York from 25 March to 5 April 2002.

16. The report of the Executive Director on international environmental governance (UNEP/IEM/12/2) is intended to remain the basis for discussion. As agreed at the first meeting of the Group on 18 April 2001, it will become a "living document" and is expected to undergo a process of refinement and reorientation following each meeting, reflecting issues raised in the Group and the consensus as it emerges. The report will be updated for the third meeting of the Group, in accordance with the views expressed at the second meeting, taking into account the documents and reports tabled at that meeting. In addition to an updated report, at its third meeting the Group will also be provided with a proposal from the Chair outlining possible areas of consensus in the Group and policy orientations around which agreement could emerge. The Group may decide to focus its further consultations on this proposal with a view to finalizing a consensus document for presentation at the seventh special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

Questions Raised on International Environmental Governance*

1. The establishment of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum with universal participation at the ministerial level has resulted in a renewed focus for high-level environmental policy discussion.

   – Is there a need to further strengthen the Global Ministerial Environment Forum and enhance its relationship with other intergovernmental environmental forums to assist in developing policy coherence?

2. The fragmentation of the institutional structure for environmental decision-making and the loss of policy coherence and missed opportunities for synergistic cooperation have been identified as major problems.

   – Is there a need to develop a clustering approach to multilateral environmental agreements?
   – Should such a clustering approach take place at the functional or the issue level?
   – What would need to be done to develop the necessary authority and linkages to pursue such an approach?

3. There is general consensus on the need for inter-agency coordination and an authoritative role for the Environmental Management Group.

   – Is there a need to further strengthen, define and provide authority to the role of the Environmental Management Group?
   – How could that be achieved?
   – If a clustering approach to multilateral environmental agreements is agreed, could the Group be the instrument to achieve that?

4. There is general agreement that the need for increased and stable financing for the international environmental agenda is required.

   – Is there a need to establish a system of assessed contributions to the Environment Fund of UNEP?
   – What should be the relationship between UNEP as the principal environmental policy body and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) as the principal environmental financing body?
   – What would be required to translate the positive sentiments expressed by Governments into real financial contributions?

5. The question of the status and authority of UNEP has been underscored.

   – Is it a realistic and effective approach for UNEP to become a specialized agency of the United Nations?
   – Are there other ways to strengthen UNEP’s authority?
   – What should be the relationship between UNEP and other entities dealing with the environment?

6. There is a clear consensus on the need to strengthen the Nairobi headquarters as the location of UNEP and UNCHS (Habitat), as underlined in General Assembly resolution 53/42.

   – Is there a need to strengthen UNEP’s work in the area of capacity-building and technology transfer?
   – What should be the relationship between different environmental activities in capacity-building and technology transfer?
   – Is there a need for increased cooperation between UNEP and operational bodies of the United Nations?

8. There is a consensus that international environmental governance should be addressed in the context of sustainable development.

   – Is there a need to strengthen the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) and to increase the United Nations regular budget contribution to UNON and UNEP?
   – How can the headquarters location of UNEP be better utilized?
   – It is increasingly clear that the implementation of international environmental policy will require substantial progress in terms of strengthening international cooperation and increased provision of the means of implementation to developing countries.
   – Is there a need to better define the sustainable development objectives for the environmental work of the United Nations system?
   – Should UNEP and the multilateral environmental agreements integrate cross-sectoral issues into their work?
   – How should this exercise relate to sustainable development governance?

* UNEP/IGM/ICRP/1. See also page 194.