

## High-Level Committee of Ministers and High Officials

The Fourth Meeting of the High-Level Committee met in Bonn on 1 November, 1999, in keeping with the decision taken at New York on 23 April 1999 by the Bureau of the High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials and pursuant to the mandate issued to the Bureau by the Committee to hold the fourth meeting of the Committee on that day – the day before the high-level segment of the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The Bureau of the Committee was constituted as follows: Chair, Simon Khaya Moyo of Zimbabwe; Vice-Chairs: Maria Julia Alsogaray (Argentina), Wang Zhijia (China), and Jan Szyszko (Poland); Rapporteur: Philippe Roch (Switzerland).

The agenda for the one-day meeting had four main topics:

- The Report of the Executive Director on recent activities of the United Nations Environment Programme
- Contribution of UNEP to the UN medium-term plan for the period 2002–2005
- Implementation of General Assembly resolution A/Res/53/242: Report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements
- Response of the environment to the phenomenon of globalisation
- Election of the Bureau of the High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials for the period 1999–2001

In his opening statement, the Chairman recalled that at the third meeting, delegates had congratulated UNEP's Executive Director on the progress made in restoring confidence and elevating the stature of UNEP.

Today, he said, "we congratulate him for the results achieved from his work on environment and human settlements and to assure him of the continued support of our respective Governments."

The Committee then proceeded to consider the main topics on the agenda.

### Report of the Executive Director

Under this item, the Executive Director informed the Committee of the efforts made by UNEP to implement

the decisions of the Governing Council under the five focal areas of the United Nations Environment Programme (document UNEP/HLC/4/INF/1). Additionally, the Executive Director made a presentation on UNEP activities concerning water.

A statement from the G-77 criticised that it was difficult to implement necessary activities due to a lack of adequate finance. The delegation of Uganda supported the need for more funds, and Germany replied that additional funding was foreseen. Delegates also learnt that meetings in which UNEP had been involved had increased by 200 per cent.

### Contribution of UNEP to the UN medium-term plan

The General Assembly, at its fifty-fifth session in 2000, will review the Secretary-General's proposed medium-term plan (MTP) for the period 2002–2005. The contribution of UNEP to the UN medium-term plan requires preparation in consultation with UNEP governing bodies prior to its submission to the United Nations Headquarters by 1 December 1999. Since the Governing Council will not meet during the preparation period of the medium-term plan, consultations on the plan will therefore be held with the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the High-Level Committee of Ministers and Officials of UNEP.

To assist it in its deliberations, the Committee will have before it the contribution of UNEP to the United Nations medium-term plan as document UNEP/HLC/4/2.

### Implementation of General Assembly resolution 242: Report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements

The Committee had before it the report of the Executive Director on the status of implementation of General Assembly resolution 242 and the Report of the Secretary-General as document UNEP/HLC/4/INF/2. The Executive Director gave an overview of the progress made in the implementation of this resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 28 July 1999 (for details, see article on page 208). In the course of the discussion, it was clear that many delegations hoped that UNEP would become an agency similar in structure to UN/FAO. UNEP will hold a special session next year to consider

all the proposed changes, and both Sweden and Switzerland have offered to host this.

Many delegates congratulated UNEP's Executive Director on the outcome of UN/GA resolution 242.

The Coordinator of the open-ended informal consultations of the General Assembly on the Report of the Secretary-General on Environment and Human Settlements then gave his report (see page 208).

### **Response of the environment to the phenomenon of globalisation**

The Committee held a round-table discussion on this topic. In support of this item, the Committee had before it the report of the Executive Director on the "response of the environment to the phenomenon of globalisation" as contained in document UNEP/HLC/4/3.

### **Election of the Bureau**

The present geographical composition of the Bureau of the High-level Committee is as follows:

Chair: Group of African countries

Vice-Chairs: Group of Asian countries

Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries

Group of Eastern European countries

Rapporteur: Group of Western European and others countries

As this would be the first election of the Bureau of the High-level Committee since its inception, the Bureau of the Committee had agreed that the geographical composition of the new Bureau for the period 1999–2001 be as follows:

Chair: Group of Asian countries

Vice-Chairs: Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries

Group of African countries

Vice-Chairs: Group of Western European and others countries

Rapporteur: Group of Eastern European countries

Mexico said that there was no need for delegates to discuss this point as it would be more logical to extend the time of the present Bureau until the special session next year. This proposal was supported by Finland and Kenya and no contrary opinion was offered. Argentina, while agreeing with the proposal, said that at the time the Committee was created, rotation had also been agreed. The Chairman replied that this was so.

### **Forests**

Ambassador Asadi also reported as Chairman of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF).

He recalled that the IFF was established in 1997 by UNGASS as an institutional follow-up to the two-year process of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF). The IFF work programme includes a range of environmental, social, economic and cultural issues, clustered in three inter-linked overall categories:

- 1) Implementation of IPF proposals for action
- 2) Unresolved issues in the IPF process, such as financial cooperation, transfer of technology, trade and

environment relating to forest products, goods and services

3) International arrangements and mechanisms, for example, a legally binding instrument on all types of forests.

The Ambassador explained that the IFF is building upon the consensus achieved in the IPF process and is determined to move it forward and to a high level on all the three categories. The IPF/IFF process has been successful in promoting sustainable forest management at the national, regional and global levels and in defining the basis for international cooperation on forests.

The fourth – and the last – session of the IFF will take place in New York from 31 January to 11 February 2000. Its final report will be submitted to the 8<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in April 2000. The proposals for action that will be contained in the final report will represent significant progress and a valuable north-south consensus on a wide range of complex and politically sensitive forest-related and environment-related issues.

Ambassador Asadi then reported on UNEP's role in this process. He said that

"Put in very general terms, the intergovernmental deliberations and negotiations on management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests which are anticipated to take place in the IFF follow-up period (*i.e.*, 2000 and beyond) will demand an active participation and visibility from a revitalised UNEP. And whatever the decision by the CSD VIII concerning an 'international arrangement and mechanism on forests,' UNEP will be needed to provide the environmental dimension, as one of the three fundamental pillars of sustainable development of all types of forests.

In more practical terms, UNEP can play three critical roles in future forest policy deliberations and implementation; namely, providing leadership, enhancing partnership and strengthening coordination.

*Leadership:* The major objective would be to promote and facilitate the implementation of the Proposals for Action in the three IPF/IFF Programme Elements under UNEP's responsibility: i) needs and requirements of countries with low forest cover; ii) underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation; and iii) forest conservation and protected areas.

UNEP as lead agency within the ITFF on these three issues has the opportunity to assist Governments in these areas and to act as facilitator and convenor of UN agencies, regional organisations, donor countries, NGOs, private sector and other major groups including indigenous people organisations and local communities."

*Partnership:* The Coordinator said that most governments would appreciate UNEP's substantive contributions in the implementation of activities relating to the following four IPF/IFF Programme Elements:

- a) Trade and environment in relation to forest products and services (in partnership with ITTO, WTO, UNCTAD)
- b) Transfer of environmentally sound technologies to support sustainable forest management (in partnership with FAO, UNIDO, World Bank)

- c) Forest biological diversity, including forest conservation and protected areas (in partnership with the CBD Secretariat, WWF, WRI, IUCN, WCMC, FAO, UNESCO)
- d) Criteria and indicators for forest sustainability (in partnership with FAO, ITTO, World Bank and on-going intergovernmental processes)

*Coordination:* Ambassador Asadi said that this area of UNEP activity would be related to support the implementation of the CSD VIII decision on "International arrangements and mechanisms to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests." A substantive contribution from UNEP would be required to identify areas needing enhancement for achieving sustainable forest management world-wide, including support to the development of coherent interlinkages among 24 existing forest-related environmental conventions and the new international arrangement and mechanisms on forests.\*

The Coordinator concluded by underlining what he stated to be two important points:

One, since there is an emerging, practically unanimous, support for the continuation of the informal, high-level Interagency Task Force on Forests, continued high-level and active participation of UNEP in the Task Force is essential and hence, should be given due attention.

Second, he wished to take the opportunity of talking to Ministers and officials in charge of environment to draw attention to the imperative of cooperation between the environment department and the forest sector.

"The best partner of the Department or Ministry responsible for Environment in its quest for achieving long-term ecological sustainability at the national level, is an 'environmentally-oriented forest sector' supported by a strong national policy on forests and land-use plans, formulated by an open and inclusive participatory process. UNEP's contribution to build bridges of cooperation between the environment agencies and the forest sector would be highly welcome in many political and policy circles, and can indeed constitute a substantial political achievement at the national level," he concluded.

\* (This report could not be adopted because of lack of time.) □