

Concept Note
Promoting regional cooperation to improve air quality globally
A resolution for UNEA-6 in Nairobi, 26 February – 1, March 2024
United States Proposal

Overview

Air pollution, including but not limited to particulate matter and ozone, is the leading environmental risk factor for human health and contributes to negative impacts on ecosystems and the climate. Addressing air pollution results in multiple benefits to the economy, ecosystems, climate, and human health. While air pollution is often perceived as a local problem, air pollution can have regional or global dimensions. We recognize, as do many other countries and organizations, that air pollution does not stop at national borders and can impact many regions in different ways. With renewed global attention on the importance of addressing air pollution, we are committed to building broader international and regional cooperation and supporting and promoting initiatives for continued action on air quality. These efforts contribute towards the health and well-being of our people and environment as part of addressing the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The theme for UNEA-6 is “Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.”

To ensure clean air globally, we need to 1) leverage the expertise in existing regional bodies that take a regional cooperation approach for addressing air pollution and build on resolutions 1/7 and 3/8¹; and 2) provide a framework for these bodies to act regionally to address the sources of air pollution through information sharing, airshed management that crosses boundaries, improving science and technical cooperation, developing and implementing integrated air quality and climate strategies, and supporting countries in taking action to improve air quality. Having a robust regional cooperation network will give countries with more advanced air quality management programs a mechanism to better work with countries that need more support to address similar issues within the region.

Tackling air pollution to protect health and the environment also requires coordinated policy action across different sectors such as residential fuel burning, transportation, energy, waste, agriculture, other industrial sources, and wildfires. Best practices and guidance documents are available² that address reducing emissions. These documents include policy approaches to achieve emissions reductions such as regulations, incentive programs, and non-technical and voluntary measures. Creating a global framework for regional bodies to address air pollution will help to improve implementation of best practices and measures, leverage resources, and help reduce emissions of multiple pollutants in key sectors to improve public health, protect

¹ UNEA resolution 1/7 on strengthening the role of the United Nations Environment Programme in promoting air quality; and UNEA resolution 3/8 on preventing and reducing air pollution to improve air quality globally.

² [Air Convention Publications | UNECE](#)

our ecosystems, increase the quality of life, and achieve net economic benefits from air pollution abatement.

Goal

The goal of a new air quality resolution will be to establish a global framework for regional and sub-regional cooperation by bringing together existing regional networks (e.g., CLRTAP and the Forum for International Cooperation on Air Pollution initiative under the UNECE, Regional Action Plan on Air Pollution under the ESCAP, EANET, Intergovernmental Network on Atmospheric Pollution for Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa sub-regional air quality cooperation agreements, Central Asian Regional Air Quality Dialogue Platform) and key international organizations (e.g., UNEP and its partner CCAC, WHO and the BreatheLife campaign, WMO, Arctic Council, Global Methane Initiative, Stockholm Environment Institute, Clean Air Fund, C40, World Resources Institute, World Bank, Environmental Defense Fund, Clean Air Institute, among others). It will also be important to promote regional cooperation in areas where it is currently lacking and to strengthen existing regional/sub-regional cooperation platforms and communities of practice.

The global framework will include 1) a structure for the existing regional bodies to increase cooperation and implementation of air quality strategies; and 2) an online and in-person platform to share information on the basic components of air quality management, including air quality monitoring, leverage expertise, and support the development and use of air quality management tools, air quality management plans, and educational partnerships to address environment and health concerns associated with poor air quality. Such a global framework would enhance international cooperation and facilitate funding, implementation, and support for low- and middle-income countries in developing and implementing air quality management plans. There is a lack of basic monitoring and emission inventory information in some of these countries. These capabilities are crucial to advance in order to set appropriate regional goals or targets. The implementation projects and air quality management plans should include measures to reduce tropospheric ozone and particulate matter and their precursors, including reductions in NO_x, VOCs, and ammonia emissions, to address health and ecosystem impacts of air pollution. Global reductions in methane are needed to reduce background concentrations and long-term exposure to ozone.

The resolution should promote global knowledge and training and to expand UNEP's platform for information sharing between member states and relevant organizations as envisioned in resolution 3/8. The platform should include interactive online tools to help with developing air quality management planning. This platform could house capacity-building resources to enable member states to use existing air quality data to support policy- and decision-making.

The resolution could call for each region of the globe to set a regional goal or target and develop a regional action plan (e.g., similar to that of UN ESCAP's Asia-Pacific Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution). It is important for the platform to aid in the development of regional goals, indicators or targets and action plan development considering the realities of each region. Policies and measures that are implemented to address other environmental

concerns such as climate change would make attainment of air quality targets more likely, therefore an integrated multi-pollutant approach makes the most efficient use of available resources. Capacity-building efforts with a focus on identifying emission reduction measures that address multiple pollutants and consider the linkages with other policy areas could be supported by a regional cooperation network (e.g., catalyze additional emission reductions in methane).

The resolution should raise awareness and increase advocacy for the importance of clean air for health, the climate, and protection of ecosystems. This includes communicating the best science and the economic benefits of addressing air pollution regionally, nationally, and locally. The resolution could call for resource mobilization from all sources to support actions to protect public health and the environment from the devastating effects of air pollution.

Building on Resolutions 1/7 and 3/8

Resolutions 1/7 and 3/8 and the existing program for addressing air pollution that has resulted from them provide good bases for moving toward mitigation and an implementation structure for addressing air pollution at the global and regional levels. Member states will benefit from a regional cooperation framework to help implement the activities called out in paragraphs 1-6 of 3/8. Re-energizing the intention of these past resolutions and providing a platform to operationalize the work is in line with UNEP's medium-term strategy for 2022-2025 that is driving multi-stakeholder actions that target the causes of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

In addition, help is needed to build the economic case for action including working closely with international and regional financial organizations to help set up funding mechanisms for specific projects that address air pollution.

Next Steps

Discuss the concept and a draft resolution with multiple countries that could be partners in this effort. Determine how the global framework for regional cooperation will help effectively combat air pollution globally and work with partners listed above and co-sponsors on drafting the resolution. Submit the draft resolution proposal to UNEP ahead of the December 18 deadline for UNEA-6 proposals.