

Written Statement of UNEP for the 28th meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention (02 – 04 July 2024)

Progress made with regard to promoting effective access to information and stakeholder engagement in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)

Prepared by UNEP, June 2024

1. UNEP's Access-to-Information Policy

The Governing Council of UNEP, at its twenty-seventh and first universal session held in February 2013, decided in Paragraph 17 of decision 27/2 to enhance transparency and openness in its work, and in this regard requested the UNEP Executive Director to establish a written Access-to-Information Policy. On January 28, 2016, the Executive Director of UNEP established the [new policy](#).

2. Stakeholder Engagement Policy

Modalities for engaging Major Groups and Stakeholders in UNEP's work at policy and programmatic level builds on Rule 70 of the [Rules and Procedures](#) of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). These are reflected in UNEP's [Stakeholder Engagement Handbook](#) which aims to inform and guide Major Groups and Stakeholders on applied rules, mechanisms and practices for stakeholder engagement within UNEP.

The current provisions for stakeholder engagement allow UNEP accredited organizations to:

- Participate as observers in all public meetings of the [Committee of Permanent Representatives](#), including subcommittee meetings, briefings etc. In such meetings they have the opportunity to make oral statements and submit written proposals via the Secretariat. In the reporting period, UNEP has noted consistent participation of Major Groups and Stakeholders, particularly by the Children and Youth Major Group in [CPR meetings](#) and in the Annual subcommittee meetings of the CPR.

- Provide written and oral input to all deliberations of UNEA and its subsidiary organs, such as the current [Open-Ended Working Group](#) to establish a Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution (OEWG SPP) and [intergovernmental negotiating committee on plastic pollution](#) (INC).
- Access information relevant to the work of the Governing Bodies. Information is distributed by email to the Member States and at the same time to accredited organizations. Furthermore, they have access to all publicly available documents, including pre-session, in-session and post-session documents of all relevant meetings and may also access the password protected [UNEP Resolutions Portal](#) to submit written input on draft resolutions and decisions negotiated during UNEA.
- Participate in [Regional Consultative Meetings](#) (RCM) once a year. The RCMs are organized where possible back-to-back with Regional Ministerial Environmental Fora and provide an opportunity for major groups and stakeholders to engage in dialogues pertinent to the environmental agenda, network with other civil society actors from the respective regions and enhance capacity on how to engage with intergovernmental environmental decision-making processes. The RCMs are also open to non-accredited organizations.

In addition to the above-mentioned modalities for stakeholder engagement, some Member States accredited to UNEP have recently established an informal “Group of Friends” for enhanced civil society participation in UNEP-led events, which comprises of interested Member States and 15 elected representatives from each of UNEP’s nine Major Groups and six regions. The proposed objective of this self-organized informal Group is to function as a platform for exchange of information, knowledge and collaboration between Member States and major groups and stakeholders and, as such, enhance stakeholder engagement within environmental governance.

Lastly, the Children and Youth Major Group (CYMG) implemented a comprehensive Youth Engagement Strategy to ensure meaningful and impactful youth participation in environmental governance. This strategy included the formation of a Policy Coordination Group (PCG) to gather and represent youth perspectives through consultations and policy interventions. CYMG facilitated youth representation in all Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) meetings to gather diverse insights. Advocacy efforts and capacity – building sessions further supported youth involvement, culminating in significant contributions to UNEA – 6. This approach ensured that the voices of the younger generation were prominently featured in decision-making processes, promoting

effective, inclusive, and sustainable multilateral actions on climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

3. Stakeholder Engagement in UNEA

The sixth session of UNEA took place 26th of February – 1st of March 2024. Over 1412 major groups and stakeholders registered for the meeting. UNEP provided travel support to 15 key representatives from civil society to participate in the meeting and the preceding [open-ended CPR](#). Each Major Group presented an opening statement, as well as one consolidated regional statement in the opening session of UNEA-6. In the closing session, the major groups presented one joint statement.

In addition, stakeholders took an innovative approach to engaging on the resolutions tabled for UNEA-6 by nominating dedicated focal points from the different Major Groups to lead in preparing and delivering inputs from Major Groups on the respective resolutions. Focal points were selected based on interest, expertise and availability to follow the negotiations. For the first time, stakeholders, through the nominated focal points, met with co-facilitators from Member States and the main proponents of the resolutions before negotiations commenced to present the positions and views of stakeholders. This new practice was well received by Member States and stakeholders and is being modeled also in the implementation phase of the resolutions.

Ahead of UNEA-6, the Children and Youth Major Group to UNEP (CYMG), organized the second [global Youth Environment Assembly](#) (YEA) with the support of UNEP's Civil Society Unit. YEA gathered over 450 youth to finalize preparations for UNEA and a [global youth declaration on the environment](#) which was presented in the opening segment of UNEA-6 and delivered to the Executive Director of UNEP. Work is underway to institutionalize YEA within UNEA and as such expand the stakeholder component of the Environment Assembly.

Other traditional avenues of stakeholder engagement during the UNEA processes, including at UNEA-6 included:

- [A multi-stakeholder dialogue](#) during the high-level segment of the agenda which provided a unique opportunity for dialogue between Major Groups and high-level decision makers.
- The [Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum](#), which facilitated the participation of civil society in the Environment Assembly and associated

meetings by gathering 645 civil society participants from accredited and non-accredited organizations worldwide.

- [The Green room](#) was an exclusive venue for Major Groups and Stakeholders participating in UNEA-6. In addition to daily coordination meetings, 35 side events took place in the Green Room during UNEA, elevating civil society voices in UNEA discussions.

4. Stakeholder Engagement in UNEP

UNEA Subsidiary Bodies operate with UNEA Rules of Procedure and as such the same provisions for stakeholder engagement exists in UNEA as for its subsidiary Bodies.

One current example is OEWG SPP. Major Groups and stakeholders accredited to UNEP and also to MEAs have demonstrated considerable interest in participating and contributing to the proceedings and in panels, dialogues, webinars held during the OEWG process and have also organized their own webinars, consultations and preparatory meetings ahead of the three meetings of the OEWG which have been advertised and made publicly available on [UNEP's webpage](#). Of particular importance has been the preparatory meetings for civil society, organized a day before the start of the OEWG meetings, which has allowed stakeholders to coordinate their approach and positions ahead of the negotiations. The Secretariat has provided a dedicated meeting room for stakeholders throughout the OEWG process, and their engagement has been supported by the UNEP Civil Society Unit.

During the SPP negotiations, the nine Major Groups have had dedicated seats, speaking slots during the opening sessions and been able to have their oral contributions reflected in the negotiations of the Working Groups as long as at least one Member State supports their statement. There has been a demonstrated interest by major groups and stakeholders in particular from the Science and Technology and the Children and Youth Major Groups to play an active role in the panel representing civil society perspectives. A Science Coalition for OEWG process and ultimately the Panel is being considered, which would enhance stakeholder engagement with the work of the panel.

Stakeholders have also been actively engaged in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. In the lead up to the INC sessions, accredited observers from non-governmental organizations have participated in webinars to present their views and reflections, and, prior to the third session, presented written submissions to inform the process. During the INC sessions, accredited observers have delivered statements, including on behalf of coalitions, alliances, or groups of organizations, in both plenary and contact groups. Moreover, throughout each session, a dedicated room for observers is available for stakeholders to have coordination meetings and informal discussions. Over 480 observer

organizations attended the most recent INC session (INC-4, which took place 23 – 29 April 2024 in Ottawa, Canada.

Within the field of environmental law, The Fifth Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Programme V) and the [Second global meeting of national focal points](#) which took place 3–5 June 2024 in Nairobi, supported the proposed decision to collaborate and promote partnerships across the United Nations and with other relevant entities, including civil society organizations. Paragraph 5 (c) of the Programme stipulates that the Programme and its activities will be developed and implemented in cooperation, coordination or partnership, as appropriate, with relevant stakeholders, promoting public participation. Paragraph 6 (a) (vi) of the Programme states that the secretariat will foster the active participation of relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the Programme, and paragraph 6 (d) states that academics and eminent experts in the field of environmental law, relevant civil society organizations and the private sector may be invited to assist in the implementation mechanism of the Programme, as appropriate and feasible.

Effective participation of stakeholders across UNEP programmes has been and remains a strong priority for UNEP and has been effectuated across many flagship projects and programs including the Global Environment Outlook Assessment as well as the International Decade on Ecosystem Restoration just to name a few.

We also note that Member States who are Aarhus Convention Parties have an obligation under Article 3.7 of the Convention to promote its principles in international environmental decision-making processes and within the framework of international organizations. We, therefore, allocate significant importance to the role the Convention Parties play in any intergovernmental processes related to the environment in fulfillment of this obligation.

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