

**Resource Africa UK and Community Leaders Network at the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of  
the United Nations Environmental Assembly**

**28 February to 2 March 2022,  
3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> UNEP 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

**Nairobi, Kenya**

**Final Report**

## BACKGROUND

The United Nations Environment Assembly is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment. It addresses the critical environmental challenges facing the world today. Understanding these challenges and preserving and rehabilitating our environment is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Environment Assembly meets biennially to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law. Through its resolutions and calls to action, the Assembly provides leadership and catalyses intergovernmental action on the environment. Decision-making requires broad participation, which is why the Assembly provides an opportunity for all peoples to help design solutions for our planet's health.

UNEA 5 was an opportunity for Member States and Stakeholders to share best practices for sustainability and create momentum for governments to build back better through green and sustainable recovery plans, following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Substantive matters that require in-depth negotiations, including a Ministerial Declaration under the UNEA-5 theme “**Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**”, were deferred to a resumed session of UNEA-5 which took place in person and online place on 28 February – 2 March 2022 (UNEA-5.2).

UNEA 5<sup>th</sup> assembly took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 28<sup>th</sup> February to 2<sup>nd</sup> March and it was followed by a Special Session of the UN Environment Assembly, **UNEP@50**, from 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> March 2022, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the creation of UNEP in 1972. UNEP@50 was held online and in person in Nairobi, 3 - 4 March 2022. The special session's theme was "Strengthening UNEP for the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

RAUK and CLN participated in the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the United Nations Environmental Assembly intended to achieve the following strategic outputs. These outputs are aligned with the objectives and planned activities of RAUK and CLN over the following three years. The strategic outputs are as follows:

- For RAUK and CLN to take part in the world's premier international environmental forum to ensure that due recognition is given to the rights and needs of rural communities in every decision and discussion at this forum, noting that there are a number of draft resolutions that have been developed and will be decided. While these draft resolutions are largely beneficial, there is always the risk that amendments can be made during debate that would pose a threat or risk.
- RAUK and CLN to take part in one major side event, as panellists a panel discussion on infrastructure development. This is quite relevant as Africa in particular is undergoing rapid transformation and industrialization through infrastructure development. Such development poses great risks to rural communities because their lands end up being

fragmented, adequate attention to environmental harm is seldom given (especially infrastructure developed with Chinese loans or grants) and national legislation on environmental protection (and resource rights) is mostly weak or absent.

- Strengthen cooperation with ACBA will be achieved through collaboration on engagement with UNEA in general and the infrastructure in particular. It is a sign of intent from ACBA to cooperate closely with RA that a RAUK member was nominated by them to UNEA for participation as described above.
- There will be multiple opportunities for networking which as in the past with other international meetings could lead to RA and CLN extending their spheres of influence, networks and partnerships. The meeting will importantly also provide an opportunity to make personal contact again with key institutions that RA and CLN engaged with previously at IUCN WCC to maintain contact and strengthen relationships.
- UNEA 5 presents important opportunities for identifying funding opportunities for both RA and CLN that may be linked to UNEA's work programme or opportunistically with other potential sources of funding.
- UNEA 5 will provide important input towards the CBD CoP15 to be held later in 2022 especially concerning the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework which has enormous implications for rural communities and in particular community-based conservation lands. It is important that RAUK and CLN continue to engage on the GBF to ensure adequate consideration of their issues.

## **UNEA 5.2 OPENING**

On Monday, 28 February, UNEA 5.2 President Espen Barth Eide opened the meeting, reflecting on the half century achievement of environmental protection since the Stockholm Conference, citing UNEP's supporting role in combating ozone depletion, pollution, climate change, and other crises. He reminded Member States that they are not called to relinquish their sovereignty, but to use diplomacy for the common good. He was supported by UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen who stressed that UNEA's responsibility to deliver solutions to address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution in times of turmoil, when multilateralism is more important than ever. She applauded the hard work and progress achieved on various resolutions during the resumed session of the fifth meeting of the OECPR the previous week, highlighting the need to address plastic pollution by delivering a historic environmental agreement.

**Major groups and other stakeholders** presented the outcomes of the 19th Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum held online from 7-10 February 2022, which, among others, welcomed negotiations on a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, and the adoption of a stand-alone resolution on the animal welfare–environment–sustainable development nexus.

**The Farmers’ major group** lamented the absence of the word “farmer” in all the resolutions forwarded to UNEA. They highlighted farmers’ rejection of the market-based solutions proposed at the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, which failed to recognize traditional food systems.

**The indigenous peoples’ major group** highlighted the need to recognize rights of Indigenous Peoples as part of Nature Based Solutions and called for inclusion of their group in the political declaration of UNEA 5.2.

**The women’s major group** expressed concern over the lack of prioritization of the rights of women, noting the importance of addressing land tenure rights in resolutions on Nature Based Solutions and mineral resource management.

**The scientific and technological community major group** reported on the Scientists’ Declaration on the Need for Governance of Plastics Throughout their Life Cycles from a webinar held on 16 February 2022, which highlights that a robust global treaty for plastics is required to address the impacts of plastics on climate, biodiversity, human health, and the environment.

**The workers and trade unions major group** highlighted the need to recognize the role and interest of local recyclers in plastics management.

**The major group for children and youth** highlighted the Global Youth Environment Assembly held under the auspices of UNEA-5.2 proved that youth have true power and the ability to catalyze change, and urged the adoption of a landmark resolution on plastics.

**The business and industry major group** highlighted the resolutions on plastics and the sound management of chemicals, stressing that the business community is committed to being part of the solution.

## **NATIONAL STATEMENTS**

Over 150 member states presented their statements physically and virtually. Statements from Heads of State and Government, ministers, heads of delegations and stakeholders at the high-level segment of the Resumed Fifth Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2)

The statements were made highlighting strategies to tackle environmental challenges in their respective countries and also expressed commitment to continue supporting initiatives that aim at addressing climate change.

The presentation of statements took place for about three days running concurrently with negotiation of resolutions by permanent representatives from member states and multilateral organisations.

## **MAJOR GROUP SIDE EVENTS**

RAUK and CLN were active on the major side events that were mostly facilitated by civil society organizations where some key ministers and government or multilateral organization were able to get views on draft resolutions being discussed by the member states.

The UN Chief scientist shared with the group of civil society representatives that the UN seeks to promote proper communication of science to decision makers. The UN will use UNEA 5 to further promote the use of scientific and local knowledge in decision making of environmental and natural resources policies.

Jan Morrill from Earth Works made a presentation on creating safe communities and healthy ecosystems during mine waste management. It was clear during the discussions that there are many mining projects which rehabilitation has been doing particularly the protection of communities and environment from the adverse impacts of mineral and energy. Earth works highlighted the need for promoting rights of local people around mining sites in Africa, America and Asia. Earthworks also engages major mining companies and donors on taking into account the rights of indigenous people around mining sites.

The African council of religion leaders had an opportunity to talk on enhancing environmental protection for sustainable development goals. The representatives share the role of religion in development and how vital it is to engage them in decision making. In addition, the religious leaders could be a powerful conduit for the message of environmental protection including the implementation of different conservation activities.

Nature Based Solutions (NBS) was one of the contentious resolutions that took several days of negotiations and discussion. African member states chose not to adopt the resolution until the voice of indigenous communities were included. Another contention issue on this resolution was the time frame for the implementation of these NBSs as Asia, Latin America and Africa wanted instant implementation. Civil society engaged the minister of climate, environment and sustainable development Ms Khattabi Zaki on this resolution. She stressed that African member states are rejecting it on condition that the resolution incorporates African concerns and they hoped to reach an agreement and adopt it before the assembly ends.

RAUK and CLN took part as panelists at one of the side events on African Sustainable infrastructure cooperation in support of the post 2020 global biodiversity framework. This is very relevant as Africa is facing numerous issues on large scale developments being implemented in almost all the countries with largely through loans from China and other developed countries. These projects often do not conduct community consultations before implementation begins, thus ignoring local voices and national environmental laws are visibly not applied which poses risk to the surrounding communities. In addition, Environmental Impact Assessments are most accessible by people in urban areas and not the local communities who cannot manage to read huge EIA documents. It was concluded that the EIAs are not thoroughly done, an effective communication i.e. notices are put in newspapers which are not easily access by the local communities. In addition,

major financiers of infrastructures have safeguards but governments often choose those with less onerous conditions.

The following 14 resolutions that were adoption during the UNEA 5.2:

- Resolution to End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument
- Resolution on an Enhancing Circular Economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production
- Resolution on Sustainable Lake Management
- Resolution on Nature-based Solutions for Supporting Sustainable Development
- Resolution on the environmental dimension of a sustainable, resilient and inclusive post COVID-19 recovery
- Resolution-Animal Welfare – Environment – Sustainable Development Nexus
- Resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management
- Resolution on Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure
- Resolution on the Sound Management of Chemicals and Waste
- Resolution for a Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution
- Resolution text on environmental aspects of minerals and metals management
- Resolution on the Future of the Global Environment Outlook
- Resolution on Biodiversity and Health
- Resolution due regard to the principle of equitable geographical distribution, in accordance with paragraph 3 of article 101 of the Charter of the UN

### **UNEA at 50 years**

The resolution on plastic pollution was the UNEA showstopper. It was the most widely anticipated outcome of the meeting. An international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, “the most important instrument since the Paris Agreement” in the words Executive Director Inger Andersen, is going to be the newest MEA on the block when negotiations conclude. UNEA 5.2 lived up to its promise and delivered a new Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee with the mandate to complete a draft legally binding agreement by 2024. The final agreement is expected to address the full lifecycle of plastics as well as the design of reusable and recyclable products and materials, signifying a shift from linear to circular economic models. In the words of UNEA-5 President Espen Barth Eide, “Plastic pollution has grown into an epidemic. With today’s resolution we are officially on track for a cure.”

### **Opportunities for partnership**

Earthworks believes that the communities most impacted by mining practices must have a voice in decisions made by mining companies and governments that affect their lives. CLN engaged it during the assembly and are interested to work with the network especially around mining communities in the region. It currently works in South Africa and West African countries.

Another like-minded organization which CLN engaged was Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF). It focuses on inclusive in dealing with climate change and environmental management especially women who are most affected by effect of climate change. It also promotes grassroots voices on nature conservation.

Closing statement by Inger Andersen UNEP Executive Director

*“The environment is always a casualty of war. Always. Regardless of how wars begin or end. And when the environment is a casualty of war, people suffer long after the conflict has ended.”*

## **CONCLUSION**

The resumed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2), which convened under the theme “Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” vaulted itself into the history books by adopting a resolution to “End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument.” Another game-changing outcome with far-reaching consequences was the resolution to establish a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution. All in all, 14 resolutions, one decision, and a Ministerial Declaration were adopted, as well as a political declaration commemorating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).