



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

EMG

24th Senior Officials Meeting

Monday 24th September 2018

Issue Note

Submitting organization: **United Nations Environment Programme**

Summary:

The EMG Senior Officials are invited to consider the proposal by the UN Environment Programme on a UN Coalition on Combating Sand and Dust Storms for cooperation at the global, regional and national levels in line with agencies' ongoing initiatives and in response to associated international calls. The Senior Officials are invited to highlight their agencies' ongoing or planned initiatives on sand and dust storms, opportunities for collaborative action in this area and their interest in joining the Coalition.

Issue: **Combating Sand and Dust Storms**

Key discussion items:

1. How can a Coalition effectively work to add value to the ongoing efforts in combating sand and dust storms?
2. What are the main areas or priorities for joint action?

Annexes:

[EMGSOM24 INF - 5. UN Examples Sand and Dust Storms](#)

Background and UN dimensions:

Sand and dust storms present a formidable and wide-spread challenge to achieving sustainable development in its economic, social and environmental dimensions. They have become a serious global concern in recent decades due to their significant impacts on the environment, health, agriculture, livelihoods, and socio-economic well-being. Sand and dust storms are an essential element of the Earth's natural biogeochemical cycles but are also caused in part by human-induced drivers including climate change, unsustainable land management, and water use, and in turn sand and dust storms contribute to climate change and air pollution. Sand and dust storms' impacts are felt in all regions of the world, both in developed and developing countries, and pose severe

challenges to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals including SDG 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, and 15 in affected developing countries (see General Assembly resolution 70/1).

The sand and dust storms challenge has figured prominently on the UN agenda over the last several years, with calls for assistance from the UN Environment Programme and sister UN agencies. There is a growing acknowledgement of the significance of the sand and dust storm issues due to the economic, social and environmental costs involved for people and the planet. Sand and dust storms represent a key transboundary hazard in numerous parts of the world, enhancing the need to strengthen sub regional, regional and cross-regional cooperation.

In the past few years the international community has stressed the urgency of addressing the Sand and Dust Storm issue. Most recently the United Nations General Assembly (Resolution 72/2251) invited the Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme to “consider initiating an inter-agency process involving relevant entities of the United Nations system, within their respective mandates and existing resources, and taking into account United Nations Environment Assembly Resolution 2/21 of 27 May 2016⁵ and other relevant resolutions and decisions, to prepare a global response to sand and dust storms, including a situation analysis, a strategy and an action plan, which could result in a UN system-wide approach to addressing sand and dust storms, and which can be used as an inter-agency framework for medium- or long-term cooperation and division of labour”.

The Second Session of the UN Environment Assembly (Resolution 2/212) held in 2016, also requested the Executive Director to engage with all relevant United Nations entities to promote a coordinated approach to combating sand and dust storms globally.

Given its multi-dimensional nature, combating sand and dust storms requires engagement of a broad range of actors including from the UN-wide system, with normative, technical or operational knowledge and expertise on climate, land, soil and water management, health, livelihoods and agriculture, and overall socio-economic well-being of the affected societies, among others. In this vein, at the high-level interactive dialogue on sand and dust storms organized by the President of the UN General Assembly in New York on 16 July 2018, the Executive Director of UN Environment proposed the creation of an UN Coalition on Sand and Dust Storms under the UN Environment Management Group for enhanced cooperation in addressing this challenge. The proposal received support from the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the World Meteorological Organisation.

Today a number of UN entities, including the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the World Meteorological Organisation, UN Environment Programme, the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the World Health Organisation, are engaged in addressing the sand and dust storm challenge directly or indirectly. A non-exhaustive list of UN agencies, mandates, programmes and initiatives in relation to sand and dust storms can be found in EMGSOM24 INF - 6.

Taking into consideration the diversity of actors and range of initiatives, a mechanism to strengthen collaboration on sand and dust storms in the UN system may add considerable value.

Potential areas of cooperation under the Coalition

As a platform for enhancing collaboration, exchange of information, knowledge and good practices, advocacy and communication amongst various actors including UN entities, governments, academia and the private sectors, the proposed Coalition on Sand and Dust Storms may engage in areas such as:

- Promoting global coordination for consolidated sand and dust storms policy at global, regional and national levels;
- Engaging in partnerships on advocacy and outreach raising awareness and enhancing institutional, technical and scientific capacities on sand and dust storms;
- Engaging in partnerships for strengthening preparedness measures and strategies for risk reduction related to sand and dust storms, and mitigating anthropogenic and new sand and dust

¹ [The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 72/225, December 2017.](#)

² [The UN Environment Assembly Resolution 2/21, August 2016.](#)

storm sources;

- Raising funds for sand and dust storm actions deemed necessary by the Coalition (e.g. capacity building, preparedness and early warning systems, afforestation, assessments)
- Establishing a knowledge and communication network between UN agencies, academia, Member States and the private sector to convene and to share related knowledge and experience;
- Promoting and supporting innovative approaches to combating sand and dust storms (e.g. providing socio-economic incentives needed to encourage local people to implement the necessary measures on their land);
- Preparing joint trainings engaging stakeholders from different sectors and a joint capacity building programme to strengthen the coping capacities of affected countries in terms of enhancing their human, instructional, policy and regulatory capacities to mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of sand and dust storms;
- Enhancing understanding of the stakeholders on impacts and risks related to sand and dust storms.

Proposed next steps by UN Environment Management Group:

- 1) Invite interested UN agencies to nominate focal points to join the Coalition;
- 2) Develop the Terms of Reference of the Coalition and agreement on key actions by a task team of interested agencies;
- 3) Develop a plan of action for the Coalition for short and long-term measures;
- 4) Approval of the plan of action and launch of the Coalition by the Task Team;
- 5) Report on progress to the next Senior Officials Meeting.