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**International environmental governance: implementation of decisions
of the seventh special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial
Environment Forum and the World Summit on Sustainable Development
on the report of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers
or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance**

International environmental governance

Report by the Executive Director

Addendum

Report of the work of the Environmental Management Group

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-eighth session, the General Assembly, in its resolution 58/209 of 23 December 2003, requested that a report on the work of the Environmental Management Group (EMG) should be made available to the General Assembly at its next session through the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

2. At its seventh special session, the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, by its decision SS.VII/1 of 15 February 2002 on international environmental governance, adopted the report of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance containing the recommendations on the subject of strengthening international environmental governance. With regard to EMG, the report states that “for the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum to effectively play its policy role, it requires an instrument at the inter-agency level to enhance policy coordination across the environmental activities of the United Nations system. The Environmental Management Group is such an instrument and should be charged with reporting annually to the Forum, taking into account the provisions of

* UNEP/GCSS.VIII/1.

General Assembly resolution 54/217 of 22 December 1999, as well as on specific issues arising from the work of the United Nations system in the environmental area on which the Forum could make recommendations on the work of the Environmental Management Group.”

3. The present report provides a summary of the work undertaken by EMG until February 2004, with a focus on the group’s activities since mid-2003, when its permanent secretariat was established in Geneva, Switzerland.

II. Background

4. EMG was established by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the purpose of enhancing United Nations system-wide inter-agency coordination in the field of environment and human settlements. It is a central outcome of the endorsement by the General Assembly, in resolution 53/242 of 28 July 1999, of a comprehensive series of measures designed to enhance coherent action within the United Nations system in these areas, as recommended by the Secretary-General in his report on environment and human settlements (A/53/463). By its resolution 54/217 of 22 December 1999, the General Assembly also supported the proposal of the Secretary-General concerning the establishment of an environmental management group.

5. The group’s mandate was confirmed in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in paragraph 140 (b) of chapter XI, entitled “Institutional framework for sustainable development”. This states that the international community should “strengthen collaboration within and between the United Nations system, international financial institutions, the Global Environment Facility and the World Trade Organization”, using, among other bodies, EMG.

III. Mandate and structure of EMG

6. EMG seeks to strengthen inter-agency cooperation through an issues-management and problem-solving approach. It aims to find solutions to important and emerging issues on the environment and human settlements agenda and to foster joint action.

7. The group’s terms of reference, as contained in annex I to the present report, were endorsed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) in 1999, following a process of consultation carried out through the Committee’s Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) and the UNEP Committee of Permanent Representatives in Nairobi. The terms of reference envisage EMG as a flexible mechanism, only meeting when required, to facilitate a timely approach to the tackling of emerging issues and to integrate knowledge available in the United Nations system. They also establish a two-tiered structure for the group: a senior-level decision-making body, the Environmental Management Group proper, chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP and comprising senior-level officials from member organizations of the Group, and time-bound ad hoc issue-management groups set up by EMG. These latter will cease to exist after completion of their tasks. The secretariat of EMG is provided by UNEP.

8. Members of EMG are the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations system, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements, as well as the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO). EMG also establishes specific working relationships with non-governmental organizations, other civil society groups and the private sector on selected issues.

IV. Programme of work

9. Over the period between its establishment and the full functioning of its secretariat in 2003, EMG has held consultations on certain selected issues, such as the harmonization of biological diversity-related reporting, and contributed as well to the work of intergovernmental processes, such as the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance.

10. In pursuance of decision GCSS.VII/1 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, EMG became reinvigorated and fully operational in mid-2003, with the establishment of its permanent secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland.

11. EMG met several times to develop its new programme of work for the short and medium term. Taking into account recent developments in international cooperation, in particular the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and other major conferences, such as the recent sessions of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the UN-HABITAT Governing Council, at its meeting in July 2003 EMG considered how it could best contribute to the implementation of the sustainable development agenda in the areas of environment and human settlements.

12. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation – one of the major outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development – identifies a set of challenging issues facing the international community in its endeavour to achieve a sustainable future for people, countries and the planet Earth. Poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, protecting the natural resource base of economic and social development, support for Africa, means of implementation – all these areas require actions at all levels to reverse existing negative trends, with the hope of laying the foundations for a sustainable and prosperous future. Implementation is the key imperative.

13. To meet those challenges, the concerted efforts of all actors involved, including Governments, international organizations and many other stakeholders, are more necessary than ever before. The United Nations bodies, funds, programmes and agencies and other international institutions active in the field of sustainable development must join hands to contribute to implementation.

14. Against this background EMG agreed to focus its work on practical contributions to the implementation of this agenda. The group should become a forum in which all its members can share their views or concerns on issues of common interest, review progress or identify obstacles, develop policy options to address such issues, and convey their views and recommendations to intergovernmental forums, such as the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the UN-HABITAT Governing Council and the Commission on Sustainable Development. In the spirit of the Johannesburg Summit, EMG intends to involve non-governmental organizations, the private sector, scientific organizations and other stakeholders in its work.

V. Activities

A. Contributions of EMG to major intergovernmental processes

1. Contribution to the process on international environmental governance

15. Against the backdrop of the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, at its twenty-first session, on 9 February 2001, the UNEP Governing Council adopted decision 21/21 on international environmental governance, which established an open-ended intergovernmental group of ministers or their representatives, mandated to undertake a comprehensive policy-oriented assessment of existing institutional weaknesses as well as future needs and options for strengthened international environmental governance. This group presented its report containing analysis and options to the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its seventh special session in February 2002.

16. At its meetings in 2001, EMG discussed the continuing international environmental governance process, and members provided their comments and inputs on the proposals put forward during the process. Their contributions were incorporated in the relevant documents.

2. Contribution to the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements

17. The sustainable management of water resources has been recognized as one of the biggest challenges facing the international community in achieving sustainable development. Water-related issues were not only one of the priority areas of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, they are also the focus of follow-up work in the Commission on Sustainable Development, in particular, at its twelfth and thirteenth sessions, and of the eighth special session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

18. The World Summit's Plan of Implementation, in paragraph 29 of its chapter IV, on protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development, calls for the promotion of "effective coordination among the various international and intergovernmental bodies and processes working on water-related issues, both within the United Nations system and between the United Nations and international financial institutions".

19. Against this background, and in accordance with its overall approach, EMG decided to contribute to the deliberations of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its eighth special session and the Commission on Sustainable Development at its twelfth session, on water, sanitation and human settlements. At their meeting in September 2003, EMG members provided their views on specific environmental aspects of water, sanitation and human settlements. The outcomes of this discussion were incorporated in the background paper for the ministerial-level consultations contained in document UNEP/GCSS.VIII/4, with a view to helping focus the ministerial-level consultations at the eighth special session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum on specific environmental aspects of water, sanitation and human settlements, as well as on practical recommendations for implementation.

20. In addition, and with a view to strengthening the interagency aspects of the discussions, EMG solicited information on its members' activities in these areas and prepared an information paper on activities of the United Nations system that addressed environmental aspects of the water agenda, contained in document UNEP/GCSS.VIII/INF/5. EMG worked in close cooperation with UN Water, the inter-agency mechanism responsible for coordinating follow-up to the water-related decisions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goal relating to freshwater. Details of the results of this work are provided in annex II to the present paper.

3. Intergovernmental consultation on strengthening the scientific base of UNEP

21. Pursuant to paragraph 5 of Governing Council decision 22/1 I A of 7 February 2003, on strengthening the scientific base of UNEP, both intergovernmental and interagency consultations on this issue were held in Nairobi in January 2004. The recommendations of these consultations highlight, among other things, the necessity to promote cooperation and synergy between different intergovernmental organizations and, in particular, multilateral environmental agreements, as well as regional ministerial forums. The representatives attending the consultations also requested further exploration of the requirements for interactive mechanisms aimed at strengthening the interface between science and policy. Finally, they stressed the need for stronger cooperation between United Nations bodies, international financial institutions, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organizations, scientific and academic institutions, the private sector and think-tanks. Governments underlined the potential role of such mechanisms as the Environmental Management Group and the United Nations system-wide Earthwatch mechanism, in ensuring effective United Nations system cooperation and response to the identified needs and gaps in environmental assessment.

22. In view of the above, EMG is exploring its possible contribution to the intergovernmental consultation, such as assisting in facilitating further synergies and cooperation in environmental assessment and monitoring, including the preparation of the assessment landscape.

B. Work of EMG on selected issues

1. Issue management group on the harmonization of information management and reporting for biodiversity-related conventions

23. This issue management group, which was established in 2001 with UNEP as its lead agency, has continued its work and submitted a progress report to EMG at its session in February 2004. EMG approved the recommendations for follow-up activities contained in the report and requested a report on the implementation of those activities by its members in 2005. More details on the work of this issue management group may be found in annex III to the present report.

2. Capacity-building

24. At its meeting in February 2004, EMG decided to take up the issue of capacity-building and development. The Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development highlights the importance of capacity-building in all areas of sustainable development and calls for better resourced, more effective, coordinated and complementary capacity-building activities in poverty alleviation and sustainable development programmes.

25. In view of the close involvement of the United Nations system and the international financial institutions in capacity-building activities, the issue of the efficiency and effectiveness of these activities and the potential for further synergies between actors within and outside the United Nations system has become increasingly relevant.

[C.E2]

[C.E3]26. In the light of the above, and in view of the interest shown by some EMG members, the group's secretariat initiated a series of informal consultations with the aim of identifying specific needs and concerns of EMG members in the area of capacity-building which could be addressed within the framework of EMG. As a result of this first round of consultations, a note was prepared to initiate further discussions with all EMG members on potential activities to be undertaken in the framework of EMG during 2004.

27. EMG discussed several options for its work. These included the exchange of information on capacity-building activities and good practices related to the implementation of the seventh Millennium Development Goal and its targets to ensure environmental sustainability, as well as developing indicators and benchmarks to measure the success of such capacity-building activities.

28. The establishment of an environmental capacity-building resource library or clearing-house was regarded as a useful tool for gaining access to information and for sharing knowledge and experience in the United Nations system and beyond, and could eventually lead to the development of tool-kits by the members of EMG.

29. The development of model capacity-building programmes for specific areas, involving various multilateral environmental agreements and United Nations agencies, was another option suggested.

30. EMG decided to establish an issue management group on environmental capacity-building to discuss the issue further and to develop a specific and time-bound programme for the group's work in this area. This issue management group would consider the development of an environmental capacity-building resource library as its immediate focus.

31. The work by the issue management group could also provide an interagency input into work by UNEP to develop an intergovernmental strategic plan for technology support and capacity-building, as mandated in Governing Council decision 22/17 of 7 February 2003.

VI. Planned activities

32. Where its programme of work over the next two years is concerned, EMG intends to take up a few more issues proposed by its members, such as changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns and sustainable procurement. Further synergies and cooperation between EMG and the United Nations system-wide Earth Watch are also envisaged to enhance the work of the two bodies by sharing and exchanging data and information, so as further to catalyse environmental activities among all United Nations agencies for integrated assessment purposes. The two bodies could also contribute to the intergovernmental consultation on strengthening the scientific base of UNEP by ensuring a collective interagency response to needs and gaps identified by the consultation.

33. Up-to-date information on the activities of EMG may be found on its website: www.unemg.org.

VII. Links with intergovernmental forums and with other coordination mechanisms in the United Nations system

34. The recommendations in the report of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance, adopted in decision SS.VII/1 of 15 February 2002, state in paragraph 37 that “the efficient functioning of the Environmental Management Group requires a clear relation with intergovernmental processes which includes a clearly defined reporting relationship with the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the Commission on Sustainable Development, and other forums in the United Nations system.”

35. In accordance with that decision, EMG will inform the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the conferences of parties to multilateral environmental agreements about its work. Through the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the group will also report to the General Assembly.

36. While there is no formal relationship between EMG and other existing formal or informal interagency groups, the group will ensure that its work is consistent with the work of other relevant bodies, in particular the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the United Nations Development Group.

VIII. Functioning of the EMG secretariat

37. In paragraph 37, the report of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance states that adequate resources to support its functioning and the possibility of financial contributions for specific activities will be required to enable EMG to realize its full potential.

38. A small EMG secretariat, which is provided by UNEP, was established in International Environment House in Geneva and became fully operational by mid-2003. The Government of Switzerland provided a generous financial contribution for the secretariat’s start-up phase. More resources are required, both to cover secretariat costs and to finance specific activities.

IX. Suggested action

39. In the light of the General Assembly’s request, referred to in paragraph 1 above, that a report on the work of EMG should be made available to the Assembly at its next session through the Governing Council of UNEP, the Council may wish to transmit the report on the work of EGM to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

Annex I

Terms of reference of the Environmental Management Group

Background

The General Assembly in its resolution 53/242, paragraph 5, supports the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish an environmental management group for the purpose of enhancing United Nations system-wide inter-agency coordination related to specific issues in the field of environment and human settlements.

Mandate

Taking into account the views expressed by Member States on the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements (A/53/463), and also taking into account the mandates of the relevant United Nations system organizations and bodies, as well as the views expressed by ACC (see ACC/1999/4) and IACSD at its thirteenth and fourteenth meetings, the Environmental Management Group is entrusted with the following responsibilities:

- To provide an effective, coordinated and flexible United Nations system response to and to facilitate joint action aimed at finding solutions to important and newly emerging specific issues of environmental and human settlements concern, through an issue management approach as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform” (A/51/950);
- To promote inter-linkages, encourage timely and relevant exchange of data and information on specific issues and compatibility of different approaches to finding solutions to those common problems, contribute to the synergy and complementarity among and between activities of its members in the fields of environment and human settlements, and hence act in a complementary manner and add value to the existing United Nations system-wide inter-agency cooperation.

Objectives

In fulfilling its mandate, the Group shall aim at attaining the following objectives:

To identify, address and resolve collectively specific problems, issues and tasks on the environmental and human settlements agenda requiring enhanced inter-agency cooperation in a given time-frame through securing effective and collaborative involvement of the relevant United Nations system agencies, programmes and organs and of other potential partners, as appropriate;

To provide a forum for an early discussion and sharing of information on emerging problems and issues in the field of environment and human settlements geared at finding collectively the most effective coordinated approach to the solution of the new tasks;

To assist UNEP and Habitat in carrying out their functions related to the promotion of coordinated approaches to environmental and human settlements issues in the United Nations system and to enhance the environmental and human settlement perspectives, in particular their normative and analytic aspects, in the work of other United Nations system organizations;

¹ UNEP/GCSS.III/5/Add.2.

To facilitate, in this vein, the work of UNEP and Habitat in carrying out their responsibilities as IACSD task managers for a number of environment and human settlements-related chapters of Agenda 21 with a view to enhancing their contributions to the work of IACSD, its subcommittees and the task managers system and other related inter-agency mechanisms, as well as the Commission on Sustainable Development, as appropriate.

Membership

In line with the mandate and objectives of the Group set out above, making it an instrument to enhance further inter-agency cooperation and coordination across the United Nations system on specific issues in the field of environment and human settlements, members of the Group shall be the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations system, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements.

Modus operandi

The Group will function in a results-driven, flexible and cost-effective manner, using modern telecommunication technologies whenever possible and appropriate. It will take into account work in progress under the aegis of the Ecosystem Conservation Group and utilize that Group, to the extent possible, to facilitate its own work on ecosystem management and conservation.

UNEP will be providing the secretariat for the Environmental Management Group.

The Group will have a two-tiered structure:

- A senior-level decision-making body, entitled the Environmental Management Group, chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP and consisting of senior-level officials from member organizations of the Group;
- Time-bound ad hoc issues-management groups set up by the Group. They will cease to exist after completion of their tasks.

The members of the Group will meet at least once a year on the invitation of its Chairman, after appropriate consultations. They will, in particular:

- Identify the specific issues to be addressed by the Group;
- Establish, as appropriate, an ad hoc issue management group for each specific issue identified;
- Decide on the mandate and time-frame of each ad hoc issue management group;
- Adopt the reports of the ad hoc issue management groups.

In cases where an issue is of an urgent nature and demands prompt action, the Chairman of the Group will immediately inform the members of the necessity to form an ad hoc issue management group and invite members to participate in the task. While all Group members have the right to accept or decline participation in any given ad hoc issue management group, any such group should benefit as much as possible from the participation of those organizations of the United Nations system which are most concerned with the issue at hand.

Each ad hoc issue management group is responsible to fulfil its mandate within the given time-frame. In case a group is not able to meet the deadline, it will submit a proposal on how and when to accomplish the task to the secretariat of the Group at least six weeks before expiration of the deadline. The Group will decide on the proposal.

UNEP will normally be the lead agency and chair the ad hoc issue management groups, the work of which will be organized and supported by the secretariat of the Group. However, an ad hoc issue management group may nominate by consensus a lead agency other than UNEP if this is found appropriate in light of the specific task. The lead agency will then prepare the documents, organize and chair the meetings, and prepare the report on the results of the group's deliberations.

Participation of non-members

Representatives of relevant sectors of the civil society and of international non-governmental organizations with a potential and specific expertise related to issues being deliberated by the Group may participate upon the request of Group members in meetings of the Group by invitation of the Chairman of the Group, taking due account of respective United Nations rules and procedures. They may also participate in the work of an ad hoc issue management group if required by the specific issue under discussion and so decided by the group. Accordingly, the lead agency of the ad hoc issue management group will invite the respective additional participants.

Reporting

The lead agency of each ad hoc issue management group will submit the report on the results of the group's work to the Chairman of the Group through its secretariat.

The secretariat in turn will submit copies of the report for comments and adoption to the representatives of those organizations-members of the Group who have participated in the respective work. In order to enhance efficiency the deadline for comments should not exceed four weeks. Immediately after the report has been adopted, the secretariat will distribute copies of the report for information to Group members.

When appropriate and in the case of an ad hoc issue management group having been chaired by an organization other than UNEP, after having consulted this lead agency, the Chairman of the Group may bring the report to the attention of the Secretary-General.

In the event that the results of the meetings of the Group and/or its ad hoc group's work have a bearing on United Nations system work in sustainable development, the Chairman of the Group will inform ACC and the secretariat of the Group will communicate the relevant report to the secretariat of IACSD.

Annex II

Contribution of EMG to the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements

Addressing environmental aspects of the water agenda: Activities of the United Nations system (UNEP/GCSS.VIII/INF/5)

1. The present information paper was submitted as a contribution by the Environmental Management Group (EMG) to the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its eighth special session and the to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its twelfth session. It surveys major programmes and activities across the United Nations system relating to environmental aspects of water, giving details of the partners involved, their objectives and their outputs. The activities were analysed and grouped into three policy areas, namely: first, the application of ecosystem approaches in integrated water resource management; second, environmental dimensions of sanitation; and, third, water, health and poverty. While the survey shows the extent of inter-agency cooperation already taking place, the paper concludes by calling for more concerted programming of activities within the United Nations system, which also needs to be underpinned by more concerted action on the part of donors, and by identifying some emerging topics on the water agenda to which the United Nations system might respond with further joint action.

2. The main recommendations for further action are as set out below:

(a) Recommendation 1: Strengthening ecosystem approaches in integrated water resource management

Ecosystem approaches in integrated water resource management may be strengthened by:

- Enabling the allocation of water to environmental flow requirements, especially in so-called “closed” river basins where existing allocations have already exhausted or exceeded available supplies of freshwater;
- Using ecosystem approaches in urban storm water and urban catchment management, in order to increase urban biological diversity;
- Applying ecosystem approaches in irrigated agricultural systems, by linking aquaculture with agriculture and making use of the principles of integrated pest management; and in rainfed agricultural systems, by designing rainwater harvesting systems to increase biological diversity, and promoting the sensitive management and cultivation of seasonal wetlands;
- Promoting awareness of the virtual water trade: water-scarce countries can make substantial water savings by decreasing their exports of virtual water, while importing virtual water, via water-intensive crops and products;
- Producing better statistics and more accurate estimates of the true values of freshwater resources, their productivity, the level of livelihoods dependency, and the extent of use.

(b) Recommendation 2: Strengthening the environmental dimensions of sanitation within the United Nations system

The environmental dimensions of sanitation within the United Nations system may be strengthened by:

- Intensifying efforts to ensure wastewater reuse in a range of urban and industrial uses, in addition to its use in agricultural irrigation and aquaculture;
- Giving more urgent attention to the implementation of ecological sanitation and the future of waterborne sewerage systems, in rapidly urbanizing developing countries;
- Examining the viability of establishing zero-effluent discharge targets both for human settlements and for industries;

- Tackling the issue of endocrine-disrupting chemicals, which are not removed by conventional wastewater treatment.

(c) *Recommendation 3: Strengthening water, health and poverty approaches within the United Nations system*

Water, health and poverty approaches within the United Nations system may be strengthened by:

- Targeting more resources towards hazard identification and flood risk management, as a proportion of those dedicated to emergency assistance;
- Addressing risk management for low-level disasters in poor communities;
- Integrating work on water supply and sanitation in a participatory approach to the upgrading of informal settlements, rather than as isolated projects implemented from without;
- Mainstreaming water, poverty and environment indicators into processes already under way, such as poverty reduction strategy papers, in order to underpin effective water governance and management, to harmonize sectoral programming and to measure progress.

Annex III

Issue management group on the harmonization of information management and reporting for biological diversity-related conventions

1. At its first meeting in January 2001, EMG discussed the issue of the harmonization of national reporting and agreed to establish an issue management group dealing with this issue. UNEP was invited to serve as task manager, focusing on biological diversity-related conventions while considering the relevance of biological diversity-related aspects of other multilateral environmental agreements. The issue management group was asked to look at this issue comprehensively, taking into account issues such as the best use of lessons learned, the composition of the group and the number of the countries to be used in a pilot phase.

2. Over the ensuing years, a number of actions were taken to implement the mandate given to the issue management group, and EMG discussed several progress reports. Among those activities were bilateral meetings on harmonization issues between UNEP as the task manager and the secretariats of all the global biological diversity-related conventions, several regional agreements, and some international programmes. Four national harmonization pilot projects coordinated by UNEP have continued in Ghana, Indonesia, Panama and the Seychelles, and have now all delivered results. It is expected that a draft report on those pilot projects will be available in February 2004 for initial review by those participating in them. It is hoped that a workshop will be convened later in the year to review the experiences gained and proposed follow-up.

3. Over this same period, there have been significant changes in the international agenda as it relates to biological diversity and reporting, and the issue of reporting has been considered further in advisory and governance meetings held by the multilateral environmental agreements.

4. At the EMG meeting in February 2004, UNEP as the task manager of the issue management group submitted the following broad recommendations, based on the activities and developments described above:

- (a) **Secretariat liaison meetings:** Regular liaison meetings between those responsible for reporting and information management matters within the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements should be reestablished to help, among other things, in promoting harmonization in reporting; in the analysis, synthesis and use of reports; in associated information management and use; and in the sharing of information among secretariats;
- (b) **Collaborative task forces and workshops:** Appropriate use of task forces and workshops on reporting and information management issues of relevance to a range of international conventions and programmes will help ensure that key issues are tackled in a synergistic manner. Issues to be tackled in this manner might include, for example, nomination and reporting formats and processes for site-based treaties, or harmonized taxonomies for international conventions and programmes with species annexes and appendices;
- (c) **National level approaches:** Testing harmonization approaches at the national level and sharing the results in the form of lessons learned, assessments of the value of different approaches and guidelines to help others in developing more integrated approaches will help to build national mechanisms that can respond more effectively to the need for information to be used in a more effective manner to support implementation and reporting on a range of international agreements and programmes;
- (d) **Direct support to nations in reporting:** It has been suggested in various forums that some streamlining of the reporting agenda and improved access to information that will support reporting (including reporting formats, previous reports and any relevant handbooks and guidelines) will help countries in responding to reporting requirements. This might include advice on information management to support implementation and reporting processes;
- (e) **Information dissemination:** Mechanisms should be developed and promoted to ensure the more efficient sharing of information and experience in harmonization. This could be in the

form of improvements in the existing web site and its wider promotion and use, wide dissemination of the synoptic report, and the holding of workshops and seminars at relevant international forums;

- (f) ***Future approaches:*** While there is currently a reluctance to consider use of this approach, various international forums and national pilot projects have shown an interest in the potential of what might be termed “virtual reporting”, and this should be investigated further. This would mean that a country would place information on a national web site that would then constitute its report (or part of its report) to an international agreement on a particular issue. Such a study would be purely exploratory at this stage.

5. EMG decided to recommend to all its members that they contribute to the implementation of these recommendations and to report to EMG on their activities undertaken in this area in 2005.
