



United Nations Environment Management Group

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**United Nations Environment Management Group
Forum on the United Nations Reform Initiatives
Geneva, 3 and 4 July 2006**

Report of the EMG Forum on United Nations Reform Initiatives

Executive summary

1. The United Nations Environment Management Group (EMG) Forum on the United Nations Reform Initiatives took place at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 3 and 4 July 2006. The Forum was held to facilitate discussions on the EMG contribution to the current processes of United Nations reform, i.e., to the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the Fields of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment and to the United Nations General Assembly's informal consultative process on the environment. During the Forum, representatives of EMG member organizations exchanged views and perspectives on the core issues at the centre of the ongoing consultations on United Nations reform, with the overall aim of ensuring that the EMG contribution fully reflected the perspectives and views of its members and was endorsed by them.

2. The Forum was attended by representatives of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and Pacific, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the World Bank, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

3. The Forum, which was hosted by WHO, was organized as follows:

(a) A segment for senior-level officials and EMG focal points was held on 3 July, co-chaired on behalf of Mr. Achim Steiner (EMG Chair) by Mr. Walter Erdelen (Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences, UNESCO), Mrs. Susan Weber-Mosdorf (Assistant Director-General, Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments, WHO) and Mr. Mukul Sanwal, representing Mr. Richard Kinley (Executive Secretary In-Charge, UNFCCC);

(b) A high-level segment on 4 July for the executive heads of agencies and executive secretaries of multilateral environmental agreements, chaired by Mr. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, supported by three co-chairs, Mr. Jerry Langoasa (Assistant Director-General, WMO), Mr. Dennis Aitken (Assistant Director-General, Office of the Director-General, WHO) and Mr. Richard Kinley (Executive Secretary In-Charge, UNFCCC). Mr. Walter Erdelen introduced the outcome of the deliberations of the segment of senior officials representing the EMG members. The consultation of the segment of senior officials (3 July 2006) was co-chaired by Mr. Erdelen, who facilitated the

deliberations. He worked closely with the ad hoc group set up to facilitate the formulation of proposals for the consideration of the participants for strengthening the work of the EMG.

4. During the 3 July segment, a luncheon was hosted by the new Chair of EMG. The Chair shared with the participants his understanding of the challenges ahead and the shared commitments, and emphasized the need for commitments and responsibilities, which must be concretely demonstrated at all levels, including politically and managerially, to be shared in order to tackle those challenges.

5. The 4 July segment heard a briefing by Ambassador Peter Maurer (Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations), Co-Chair of the United Nations General Assembly informal consultations on the institutional framework on the United Nations environmental work.

6. This executive summary provides an overview of the key issues raised in the discussion during the Forum, with a particular focus on the outcomes of the meeting of the heads of agencies and executive secretaries.

Consultation between senior-level officials

7. The consultation between senior-level officials concluded with a statement entitled “Proposals from the EMG Forum of Senior Officials to the High-level Segment of Executive Heads and Executive Secretaries”, which outlined an approach for strengthening the work of EMG. During the consultation, participants discussed the importance of continuing and enhancing collaboration and cooperation between EMG members on environment and sustainable development. Participants concurred with the view expressed by the Chair during his address at the luncheon hosted by him on 3 July to the effect that a time frame of two years should be set to allow EMG to demonstrate its worth and value added. Participants exchanged views on successful experiences of best practices which could be used as examples for future cooperation between EMG members. Representatives of EMG members expressed the belief that there must be a review of existing arrangement between EMG members in sectoral areas at the global and regional levels; that a stocktaking exercise should be undertaken by the EMG secretariat in the area of sustainable development cooperation and networking activities to identify the areas in which cooperation between EMG members could provide benefits; and that the EMG secretariat should circulate the results of the stocktaking exercise for EMG members to review and submit their comments.

High-level consultation between executive heads of agencies and executive secretaries of multilateral environmental agreements

8. The high-level consultation between executive heads of agencies and executive secretaries of multilateral environmental agreements allowed for a frank exchange of views on the implications of the United Nations reform initiatives for EMG. In addition, the proposal emanating from the senior-level officials’ consultation was considered. A number of key issues emerged from the discussions and a number of needs were identified, including:

- (a) The need for a forward-looking approach to the future of EMG in the recognition that such an approach would be an important element in the overall, system-wide reform process;
- (b) The need to focus on result-oriented approaches;
- (c) The need for a clear understanding of the commitments and responsibilities of EMG and its member organizations, including an understanding of how EMG members worked together and the possible need for differentiated approaches to specific issues;
- (d) The need to explore how EMG could achieve more effective partnerships between its members;
- (e) The need to identify a limited set of specific issues where enhanced work and added value could be achieved, and where EMG could bring together the United Nations system’s collective efforts;
- (f) The need for a focus on a few of the existing challenges that could be met head on, and on new and emerging issues which were not yet on the policy agenda;
- (g) The need to focus on thematic areas or a task-driven approach to cooperation through issue-based groups;
- (h) The need for EMG to tackle the problem of coherence at the global, country and regional levels;

(i) The need to enhance the work of EMG as a mechanism for information- and knowledge-sharing between its members in the United Nations system.

9. The importance of increasing effectiveness and synergies across the system was highlighted and the role of EMG in ensuring coherence between development policy and environmental planning at both the global and country level was emphasized.

10. A need was also identified for specific time lines for what could be achieved by EMG in the following two years, such as reviewing existing cooperation arrangements in terms of a thematic focus and embarking on a stocktaking exercise. EMG member organizations accepted the proposal for a stocktaking exercise, and several specific recommendations were proposed, including:

(a) Stocktaking could be used to provide intellectual leadership to global governance and environmental policymaking and could identify between three and five most pressing issues which required enhanced system-wide cooperation;

(b) Stocktaking should not be seen as a one-off process, but rather as a regular systematic tool for monitoring;

(c) From a management perspective, the stocktaking process should engage partners and ensure ownership by EMG;

(d) The stocktaking exercise should focus on the positive, identify what was working well and assess the gaps in coherence;

(e) Stocktaking should include an analysis of those gaps and identify areas that were overcoordinated;

(f) Stocktaking should be undertaken in a theme-based manner rather than simply listing activities;

(g) Stocktaking should create a sense of ownership among EMG members;

(h) Stocktaking should be followed up and the results of the exercise should be clear;

(i) Stocktaking should map out the key entry points at the country level;

(j) Stocktaking should focus on what was being done across the system, what could be done better, how it could make a difference, what the common outputs could be and what could become cooperative projects.

11. The Chair summarized the following specific outcomes of the meeting:

(a) That a stocktaking exercise was needed to identify the core activities and areas of EMG members and to identify the key areas in which agencies and organizations were working;

(b) That the exercise should also identify topics which interface with the environmental agenda;

(c) That EMG should ensure that its work contributed to adding value to the work of each agency or organization;

(d) That a conceptual framework for working in a more proactive manner together was needed;

(e) That EMG should ensure that what it did was relevant at both the global and country levels;

(f) That EMG could add value by focusing on the key current and emerging issues;

(g) That the members of EMG, with the assistance of the secretariat, should generate a menu of options outlining the issues on which EMG wanted to focus, particularly those issues where the greatest number of EMG members had a key interest and where there was need for further attention;

(h) That EMG should establish a few issue-oriented task forces and agree on their terms of reference and on the specific activities to be undertaken;

(i) That those task forces should be led by interested agencies and secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements;

(j) That EMG members must play a greater leadership role in coordinating the task forces, including assisting with preparatory activities and allocating staff resources for such purposes.

12. The Chair suggested that the functioning, including the mandates, of the task forces should be reviewed at the level of the heads of agencies and organizations, and suggested also that those issue-based task forces or working groups should seek to leverage information and capacity from the outside the United Nations system by inviting “think tanks” to participate in their activities. On resourcing the task forces, the meeting concluded that it was essential for EMG member organizations to identify how their own agencies or organizations could provide support, particularly through leveraging existing staff resources.

Way forward

13. The Chair made the following proposals for immediate, specific action:

- (a) The members of EMG should agree on a set of performance criteria to assess the impacts and effectiveness of EMG in its operations over the two years to come;
 - (b) Within three weeks, the stocktaking process should be summarized in such a way that EMG members could take it back to their agencies or organizations and engage with other EMG members in constructing a framework that would focus on forward-looking, action-oriented measures;
 - (c) The EMG Secretariat should compile and present a series of responses outlining the views of member organizations on system-wide coherence and collaboration and their experiences in that connection;
 - (d) The EMG Secretariat should compile a document bringing together what the various members of EMG had already contributed to the reform processes so that that information could be shared by all members;
 - (e) Within three months, EMG should reach general agreement on the overall direction for its work; in that connection, the Chair would seek the concurrence of the executive heads of agencies and the executive secretaries of the multilateral environmental agreements on the way forward;
 - (f) The suggested measures would include identifying, jointly with the executive heads of agencies and the executive secretaries of the multilateral environmental agreements, two or three issues on which to focus, and corresponding issue-oriented task forces or working groups should be set up;
 - (g) Lead agencies or institutions to support the work of the task forces or working groups should be identified and their responsibilities clearly specified, including the designation of the staff members who would be their members;
 - (h) Other forms of support for the task forces or working groups should also be determined;
 - (i) The meetings of the task forces or working groups should be organized and supported by the collaborating member agencies;
 - (j) A specific product, containing cutting-edge analysis and recommendations, from the work of the issue-oriented group(s) should be presented at the next EMG meeting, in eight or nine months’ time, to the executive heads of agencies and organizations.
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