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ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP



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GoToMeeting

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EMG SOM27/mid-term/04x

Distribution: EMG members

Proposal by UNEP

UN system-wide approach to a Pollution-Free Planet

Objective

Leverage the full potential of the UN system to accelerate the transition towards a pollution-free planet through increased prioritization of efforts, more consolidated and coordinated approaches and enhanced partnerships and synergies in tackling pollution and its impacts.

Background

Pollution is one of the three major crises faced by our planet, together with climate change and biodiversity loss. Pollution and unsustainable management of chemicals and wastes not only impact the environment but also have tremendous health impacts, which together hamper the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It has been estimated that nine million premature deaths yearly are linked to pollution. Pollution and the exposure to harmful chemicals, moreover, have greater impacts on the most vulnerable, including children, and impair human rights and economies and exacerbate inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic has added an additional dimension to the urgency of tackling pollution to secure a healthy and resilient population. It has also unveiled opportunities for shifts in consumption and production patterns and lifestyles that can lead to a greener world. Recovery efforts are an opportunity to move in this direction.

The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) placed pollution high on the global agenda with the adoption of a global Implementation [Plan Towards a Pollution Free Planet](#) (hereinafter Implementation Plan) which places UN-wide partnerships as a critical component towards its delivery. The Implementation Plan, cutting across the various pollution domains (air, freshwater, marine and coastal, soil and land and chemicals and wastes), aims to address key capacity gaps faced by countries and stakeholders at various levels in tackling pollution, and identifies broad areas for action to address these and accelerate action and transition to a less polluted environment.¹

Closing these gaps and moving towards a system-wide transition towards a pollution-free planet requires heightened prioritization of pollution-reduction efforts in the context of sustainable development planning and implementation, and stronger investment from the UN system as a whole.

¹ <https://www.unep.org/beatpollution/take-action>

Many UN agencies address pollution through their mandates, expertise and operations, promoting improved environmental quality and human health, supporting multi-stakeholder action in a variety of sectors and advancing efforts from the global to local level. Nevertheless, existing efforts could benefit from stronger synergies, common narratives, and more coordinated action for increased impact.

Achieving the expected level of ambition outlined in the Implementation Plan, in particular, requires a system-wide, coordinated approach that can target the root causes and drivers of pollution and deliver deeper, broader impacts. Developing a UN-wide approach to pollution can leverage the opportunities provided by the United Nations Development System reform and advance existing inter-agency arrangements that address pollution-related issues, as well as nexus areas with other environmental issues and all sustainable development objectives enshrined in the SDGs. This can, in turn, support the implementation of existing frameworks, including the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and Agenda 2030, as well as future frameworks to tackle chemicals and waste management and other aspects of pollution beyond 2020.

In this context, there is ample opportunity for the Environment Management Group to support system-wide efforts to bring about more coherence and coordinated action on this topic.

Activities and scope

It is proposed to launch a consultative process to foster a UN-wide approach to pollution that can spur collective efforts across EMG members, facilitate continued collaboration and deliver more synergized and coherent outcomes. If the EMG agrees to establish such process, its exact scope and activities would be discussed with all interested members of the EMG prior to its establishment. Near-term and long-term activities of such process may include:

- 1. Mapping of existing efforts, roles, mandates and opportunities for strengthened efforts towards a pollution-free planet**
 - i. Map out agencies, funds and programmes of the UN system, and UN interagency arrangements, partnerships, frameworks and initiatives that can contribute to the achievement of “a pollution-free planet”;*
 - ii. Identify opportunities for further leveraging the potential of UN agencies and their initiatives, vis-à-vis the areas of action identified in the Implementation Plan “Towards a pollution-free planet.”*

- 2. Establishing a system-wide approach to tackling pollution**, including through the development of recommendations, guidance, tools and resources for heightened and more coordinated action on pollution across the UN system, such as:
 - iii. guidance/common approach to country analysis and joint programming;*
 - iv. common targets and indicators for joint programming, implementation and progress monitoring;*
 - v. a common offer to address pollution-related capacity gaps and priorities of countries, comprising of tools and guidance documents produced by various agencies, building on existing efforts undertaken by various agencies to this end.*

- 3. Joint messaging on a Pollution-Free Planet** to raise the profile of coordinated advocacy efforts and influence political priorities and behaviors at all levels.

- 4. Joint initiatives and partnerships to address specific pollution issues**, including regular dialogues and platforms to exchange lessons learned, challenges and opportunities.