

**2017 Environment Assembly Preparatory Retreat
Windsor Golf Hotel & Country Club in Nairobi
27 – 28 October 2016**

**Discussion Paper for Session 1: Structure of the High-level Segment of the
2017 Assembly**

What considerations have to be made regarding the theme of the 2017 Environment Assembly, organizational matters and the high-level segment of the Environment Assembly?

A well-structured High Level Segment of the Environment Assembly can enhance the effectiveness and visibility of the UN Environment Assembly at the global level and at the grassroots. It can effectively position the Assembly as a leader on environment issues at the High Level Political Forum and at other important global meetings. The ideal structure and process must allow the High Level Segment to successfully carry out its roles and functions in the two days available.

Through Governing Council decision 27 /2, Member States discontinued the Global Ministerial Environment Forum and decided that each session of the governing body of United Nations Environment Programme would end with a two-day high level segment. Its role is to take strategic decisions, provide political guidance and perform, among others, the following functions: (a) Setting the global environmental agenda; (b) Providing overarching policy guidance and defining policy responses to address emerging environmental challenges; (c) Undertaking policy review, dialogue and exchange of experiences; (d) Setting the strategic guidance on the future direction of the United Nations Environment Programme; (e) Organizing a multi-stakeholder dialogue and; (f) Fostering partnerships for achieving environmental goals and resources mobilization.

Against this background and in the light of experiences at previous environment assembly sessions, the 2017 Environment Assembly Preparatory Retreat will seek to ensure that the actual structure and the process of the High-level Segment effectively highlights the selected themes of the Assembly.

Key considerations

Four closely interrelated aspects are critical for the success of the High Level Segment: theme, resources, format, and outcome.

Theme

Close attention must be paid to theme selection, particularly: early selection, number, nature, relevance to environment ministers, especially for integrated themes and degree of sensitivity. The relevance of the theme selected to the priorities of Member States will determine whether ministers will stick to it or instead highlight pressing national challenges and concerns. The degree of sensitivity of the theme will help determine what kind of outcome countries will be able to support. The kind of outcome will in turn have a bearing on

what format ministers will feel comfortable with in engaging on the theme. Agreement on a single theme helps ensure focus, sharpens key messaging and saves precious time. However, it is usually easier to get compromise with multiple or overarching themes.

Resources

Time: Time is one of the most critical resources at the High Level Segment. An effective opening ceremony plays an important role in enhancing visibility and setting the tone for the meeting. Decisions are adopted in the final session. If we take out the time required for the opening and closing sessions and the multi-stakeholder's dialogue, we are left with two and half sessions for the High level Segment. Suppose all 193 UN countries participated in the High Level Segment and 7 additional interventions of 3 minutes and Chairs and secretariat interventions were allowed. We would need at least 11 hours meeting time, far less than the 7 and a half hours available in two and a half sessions. A key aspect of organizing the High Level Segment must be how to maximize the limited time available without compromising visibility, interaction and effectiveness.

A simple powerful, focused well executed programme would facilitate this. Parallel round tables should be used to maximize the time available especially since the evenings and mealtimes are often taken up by receptions and other events. There must be sufficient meeting space and conference rooms should be set up in round table format as this affects the atmosphere and level of interaction. Session Chairs should adhere strictly and impartially to time limits using a traffic light system.

Time available for preparation will determine whether ministers insist on reading statements or actively engage. Early communication on format, papers and key questions will allow for sufficient preparation and greater comfort with non-traditional formats. Chairs and facilitators must be carefully selected and adequately prepared and supported by the Secretariat.

Interpretation and Translation

The capacity for interpretation and translation will affect the level of interaction, determine comfort level with process and will colour perceptions of non-English speaking countries on inclusion. Resources to support the format selected, including resources for interpretation and timely translation of important background documents should be factored into preparations at an early stage.

Format

Everyone wants interaction. At the same time everyone wants to be heard not only by the Assembly but also by their national audience. Both audiences are an important part of accountability and justification for participation. For many ministers, the opportunity to highlight national achievements and challenges is a strong motivation. The Assembly needs to strike the right balance between the Davos Style and the traditional format. Innovative ways to enable this could include a compilation of providing national statements and inputs that could be published ahead of the Assembly and publicized.

Outcome

The outcome of the High Level Segment is an important communication tool to the outside world. Unfortunately, there is no consensus among Member States on whether the outcome of the High Level Segment should be a negotiated political outcome or a President's summary. Early consensus should be reached or Ministers will get bogged down on procedural discussions on the nature of the outcome at the expense of strategic issues at the High Level segment. The nature of outcome may affect the kind of structure and process with which ministers will be comfortable.

Conclusion

The High Level Segment can enhance the visibility of UN Environment Assembly and provide a critical link to the High Level Political Forum and other important global meetings. The retreat should help provide clarity on matters that require political decision by Member States like the type of outcome and selection of the theme/s and provide guidance to the Secretariat on matters of structure and process.

Key Questions

What three concrete steps can we take to ensure the structure and the process of the High-level Segment effectively highlights the selected theme/s of the Assembly?

- In what three ways can the High Level Segment enhance the visibility of the Environment Assembly at all levels?
- How can we ensure that in the two-day High Level Segment enables Ministers can address both the Environment Assembly and their national audience, while effectively engaging each other in a truly interactive manner?

Drafted by the Governance Affairs Office

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