



United Nations Environmental Assembly

Committee Mandate

At the Rio+20 United Nations Conference for Sustainable Development, the international community called for a strengthening and upgrading of the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) such that it could better execute on its mandate.¹ UN Environment was created in 1972 at the UN Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden and had been run by a small Governing Council until 2013, when the Governing Council adopted resolution 27/2, which expanded the Governing Council to universal membership and requested the General Assembly to change its designation to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA).² The name change was made official in *A/RES/67/251* the same year.³

UNEA is the governing body of UN Environment and is the international community's highest-level decision-making body on environmental matters.⁴ UNEA governs and sets policy for UN Environment, which works to develop environmentally friendly practices and policies both within the United Nations (UN) system and throughout the international community.⁵ UN Environment has played a significant role in coordinating environmental policy and is the official body concerned with environmental issues in the UN.⁶ It has helped in the drafting and execution of major environmental documents such as *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, *Agenda 21*, the *Convention on Biological Diversity*, the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*, and the *Convention to Combat Desertification*.⁷

Membership

In 2013, UNEA replaced the former Governing Council of UN Environment, which was comprised of 58 members.⁸ UNEA's membership includes all UN Member States and the UN's permanent observers are welcomed to its sessions.⁹ UNEA's universal

¹ United Nations General Assembly, *The Future We Want*, A/RES/66/288, 2012, p. 18.

² United Nations Environment Programme, *About the UN Environment Assembly*; United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment*, A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1, 1972.

³ Ibid.

⁴ United Nations Environment Programme, *UN Environment Assembly and Governing Council*, n.d.

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme, *About UN Environment*, n.d.

⁶ United Nations General Assembly, *Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental co-operation*, A/RES/2997(XXVII), 1972; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2017-18*, 2017, pp. 256-257.

⁷ Johnson, *The First 40 Years*, 2012; Convention on Biological Diversity, *The Rio Conventions*, n.d.

⁸ United Nations General Assembly, *Institutional and financial arrangements for international environmental co-operation* A/RES/2997(XXVII), 1972.

⁹ United Nations Environment Programme, *Directory: Committee of Permanent Representatives to the UN Environment*, 2019, p. 4.

membership helps to strengthen the role of UN Environment in international affairs and increase the responsiveness of Member States in developing environmental policy.¹⁰

UN Environment has a Secretariat that is responsible for supporting UNEA and consists of a rotating President, three Vice-Presidents, and a Rapporteur.¹¹ There is also a Committee of Permanent Representatives, which is a permanent subsidiary body of UNEA that prepares for meetings, monitors the implementation of its decisions, and provides advice to UN Environment between the sessions of the Assembly.¹² The Committee is composed of all accredited Permanent Representatives to UN Environment and is an important link between the program and national governments.¹³

Reporting

UN Environment reports both to the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹⁴ UN Environment is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya and has six offices dispersed globally that undertake projects on regional and local levels.¹⁵ Each office holds yearly Regional Consultation Meetings with various civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders in order to engage in an environmental policy dialogue.¹⁶ The offices then bring any concerns or ideas from these meetings to the next UNEA session for wider discussion.¹⁷

¹⁰ United Nations Environment Programme, *About the UN Environment Assembly*, n.d.

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly, *Change of the designation of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme*, A/67/784, 2013.

¹² United Nations Environment Programme, *Committee of Permanent Representatives: Overview*, n.d.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 2017-18*, 2017, pp. 256-257.

¹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme, *Civil society engagement*, n.d.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

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