

Swiss Comments on the Draft Resolution “Strengthening the environmental activities in the United Nations system”, 28 May 2008

Switzerland attaches great importance to a strong international environmental governance and has always been actively engaged in various processes to this goal. The Draft Resolution “Strengthening the environmental activities in the United Nations system” and the process following the WSSD is an important step for a strengthened IEG. Countries should seize the momentum we are experiencing now.

Many of the proposals in the resolution can contribute to a stronger IEG. Nevertheless, further elements should be added to strengthen the resolution. Switzerland thinks that UNEP should be further strengthened: universal participation within the GC/GMEF of UNEP through a change of its rules of procedures should be requested in the resolution and the mandate of UNEP should be reinforced.

Switzerland supports the two-phased approach, following the principle of an ‘ambitious incrementalism’. Switzerland is of the view that the UN General Assembly should enact measures where UNGA decisions are necessary. The General Assembly should support and complement UNEP’s governing bodies’ commitments to strengthen the environmental governance and provide further support for the strengthening of the environmental regime. Measures in the competence of UNEP should be adopted by the UNEP GC.

Concerning the broader transformation and follow-up of the resolution, Switzerland favours formalization of the further process, with a clear timeframe.

Preambular Paragraphs:

A further preambular paragraph should be integrated (PP3bis) to reaffirm the Cartagena decision and highlight the importance of the policy guidance role of UNEP. In PP7, the principle of precaution as a further principle should be added (Rio Declaration: “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities”).

Building Block 1:

Switzerland attaches great importance to strengthening the scientific capacities of UNEP as a basis for policy advice. UNEP has already a Chief Scientific Capacity with the attributes as described in OP3, namely its Division of Early Warning and Assessment that produces the GEO reports. We should therefore use the expression of strengthening rather than creation. For a comprehensive scientific capacity under the authority of UNEP, it is important to integrate the GEO-SS; this should be reflected in OP4.

Building Block 2:

Switzerland welcomes the call for the establishment of “issue based groups” within the EMG. We believe that the issues of these groups should be consistent with the thematic clusters as identified by UNEP (OP13), which should be reflected in OP7.

A way of strengthening the authority of EMG would be to integrate it as a 4th pillar under the CEB, under the leadership of the Executive Director of UNEP.

We welcome the efforts of UNEP and UNDP for a strengthened collaboration. We think the resolution should also reflect the clarification of the roles of the two agencies. Switzerland

believes that UNEP should give policy guidance in the field of environment, while UNDP and other UN agencies should act as implementing agencies.

We have certain sympathy for the idea of an annual consolidated appeal, as mentioned in OP9. But it will be important that UNEP sets the priorities for the capacity building activities reflected in it.

In OP11, we see the risk of a duplication of the mandate of UNEP by the CEB, as it is the mandate of UNEP to ensure a coordinated approach of the UN system to environmental issues. We believe that the CEB should mainstream environmental issues within the UN system.

Building Block 3:

We welcome the clustering approach. The clusters should be identified by UNEP. More efforts are needed in order to strengthen synergies between the MEAs. We think that UNEP should provide the secretariats for all the major MEAs, which should be reflected in OP17 in general and in OP14 in particular for the Rio Conventions. We propose that the MEAs should report to the General Assembly through UNEP.

The issue-based cooperative agreements mentioned in OP16 should reflect the clusters identified by UNEP as mentioned in OP13.

It should be clarified that not the COPs, but the Parties of the MEAs implement their respective agreements (OP15). Furthermore, countries should implement their respective agreements, once they are parties to a MEA and not only if those are in accordance with their priorities.

Building Block 4:

In accordance with the Mid-term Strategy of UNEP, in OP19 it should be specified that the *strategic* presence of the regional office should be strengthened for the facilitation of support for the Bali Strategic Plan. In addition, UN entities should closer collaborate with each other and align their support structures in fulfilling their capacity building and technology support mandates.

Building Block 5:

The BSP should be understood as the overarching framework for the capacity building activities in the field of environment. Its implementation is of high importance and should be supported by UNDP and other agencies working in the field of environment. These agencies should be urged to endorse the BSP.

In OP 21, we should add the need for mainstreaming of environmental issues into the development agenda.

We don't understand the UNDG as being in a position to approve policies, but rather to approve *activities to implement policies*, which should be reflected in OP23 accordingly.

(Building Block 6: no comments)

Building Block 7:

We welcome the proposed measures for a more adequate and predictable financial backing. We think that an environmental financial tracking system could be a useful tool, though there is a risk for high administrative costs, which should be limited. Therefore it should build on already existing capacities, which should be further developed.

In addition, we propose the continued application of the indicative scale of assessment, a step-by-step adaptation to the UN scale of assessment and maintenance of the contributions that are above the UN scale.