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UN environment assembly adopts 25 resolutions to support green agenda

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The world's environment ministers, gathered at the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2) in Nairobi last Friday, passed far-reaching decisions on issues such as marine litter, the illegal trade in wildlife, air pollution, chemicals and waste, and sustainable consumption and production.

These are an integral part of the global action needed to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement.

Thousands of delegates from 174 countries took part in UNEA-2 and associated side events on issues of global importance, such as on sustainable innovations and science policies.

The UNEA is the world's most authoritative decision-making body on the environment. Among the 25 resolutions and actions decided at UNEA-2, the following themes dominated:

The main theme of the assembly, Delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was a particular focus. UNEA asked the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to initiate new partnerships and strengthen existing ones, including with the private sector and civil society.



Some 5.2 trillion pieces of plastic are estimated to be floating in our oceans, harming the marine environment and biodiversity. Photo: Reuters

The assembly also agreed that UNEP should accelerate support to countries to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change.

On illegal trade in wildlife, the assembly passed a resolution urging countries, through regional and international cooperation, to implement strategies to eradicate the supply, transit and demand related to wild species.

Some 5.2 trillion pieces of plastic are estimated to be floating in our oceans, harming the marine environment and biodiversity. Delegates called on UNEP to develop action plans to target marine plastic litter and microplastics, with emphasis on those regions that are the largest sources. They also resolved to encourage manufacturers to consider the life cycle and environmental impacts of products containing microbeads and compostable polymers.

World Health Organisation estimates that 12.6 million deaths are linked to environmental factors each year, highlighting the importance of a healthy environment to healthy people. Several resolutions related to human health and the environment were passed. The resolution on sound management of chemicals and waste targeted actions on chemicals such as lead – exposure to which claimed an estimated 654,000 lives in 2010 and causes developmental damage to young children.

Delegates called on UNEP to get the private sector to play a bigger role in sound management of chemicals and waste, and requested nations to ensure better recycling of lead-acid batteries.

Another resolution called on UNEP to establish a global research network on the threat posed by sand and dust storms. Armed conflict and its relation to the environment were also heavily discussed. One decision called on member states to comply with obligations under international humanitarian law in relation to the protection of the environment in times of armed conflict.

Another resolution called for efforts to decrease the one-third of all food produced each year that is lost or wasted, and committed member states to achieve sustainable development goals focused on sustainable consumption and production.

– UNEP

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