

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME:

INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING ON MONITORING - NAIROBI 11-20 FEBRUARY 1974

The meeting was called to discuss the organization and implementation of the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) which is part of the UNEP subject area Environmental Assessment: Earthwatch. It was attended by representatives of 55 countries, observers from 3 United Nations bodies, 6 United Nations specialist Agencies and 6 intergovernmental organizations. Mlle Martin-Sané (France) was elected chairman, Mr Odhiambo (Kenya) vice-chairman and Mr E Somers (Canada) rapporteur.

The major items on the agenda (attached) concern the definition of objectives and principles (Item 4), priority pollutants to which monitoring activity should be first directed (Item 5) and the design and development of the monitoring system itself (Item 6). Discussion over the agenda and order of business rapidly brought to light the same dichotomy of view on priorities as existed between developed (DCs) and less developed countries (LDCs) at the Geneva Governing Council in June 1973: the former wishing to fix attention on a few priority pollutants in the various media which were deserving of monitoring in a uniform way on a global basis, and the latter determined to introduce a number of non pollutant variables into the GEMS programme at an early stage. Some of these non pollutant variables already commanded a place and support in areas of the programme other than Earthwatch.

A compromise position was reached in which one part of GEMS would be concerned with priority pollutants and the related factors necessary to correctly evaluate pollutant monitoring data, and another part which would see the introduction of non pollutant orientated variables. There was an implied priority attending these two parts but this was lost during the week, and the Governing Council will have to attempt to resolve questions of conflicting priority. It is possible that, failing satisfactory resolution of the various

requirements, major donor countries to UNEP funds will earmark all or part of their contributions for specific monitoring purposes.

The substantive work of the meeting was largely accomplished within working groups convened for each agenda item following preliminary discussion of individual subject areas in plenary session. This did not, unfortunately obviate a second round of discussion in plenary when working group reports were tabled. This was particularly so on those items where views were polarized as between DCs and LDCs.

Objectives and principles (see CPR.9)<sup>x)</sup> were elaborated by the addition of specified programme goals (US initiative) and general programme guidelines (UK initiative). The objectives and principles are substantially as already written: programme goals include "an assessment of the state of ocean pollution and its impact on marine ecosystems", and general guidelines include emphasis on the design and implementation of national and regional monitoring programmes as well as global systems. Among the most important principles are of course:

- (a) Intergovernmental cooperation in monitoring should be built on the basis of existing national, regional and international systems to the maximum extent possible.
- (b) Special emphasis should be given in global monitoring to the variables of most critical importance that are capable of adequate scientific measurement at the present time.
- (c) Monitoring systems should be designed to meet clearly defined objectives.

The discussion on priority pollutants and other related environmental factors<sup>(see CPR.9 Addendum 1)<sup>x)</sup></sup> reached a fairly satisfactory conclusion until a late intervention from Peru supported by various other LDCs, which resulted in a Number 1 priority being accorded to strontium-90 and caesium-137 as constituents of weapon-test fallout. It is unfortunate that perhaps the best understood pollutants of all, which have been adequately studied for more than

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25 years, should be accorded such an anomalous priority, but some absurdities are bound to slip through in a programme where political objectives appear to be as important as scientific ones. In a marine context, petroleum hydrocarbons are accorded the highest priority (Priority 5) as a specific marine pollutant, but are exceeded in priority by cadmium, mercury and lead, which have a higher priority in a general pollutant context in food and water, and will therefore be monitored in the context of marine foodstuffs.

The design and development of a global system for monitoring priority pollutants and other related environmental factors (see CPR.10 Rev.1)<sup>x)</sup> was kept to a consideration of the design principles, and it is useful to note in this context that during the first stage of GEMS a global network of baseline stations should be set up under UNEP auspices, incorporating existing capabilities and only establishing new ones where needed, especially in developing countries. Some guidelines for the operation of regional monitoring centres were also provided, and it was stressed that the establishment of a centre or centres, and designation of their area of responsibility, should be decided by the agreement of the governments of the region, built where appropriate on existing centres and capabilities. It was also agreed that the Governing Council should be recommended to authorize the Executive Director to appoint at UNEP HQ a Director for GEMS together with supporting staff, whose task it will be to design and develop the global monitoring system based upon the objectives, principles, programme goals, guidelines, priority pollutants and design principles previously referred to. The Director should work only in accordance with the decisions of the Governing Council but taking account of the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Meeting on Monitoring. There was a sharp difference of view as to the role of expert groups in the provision of advice to the GEMS Director. Some countries took the view that there should be an Intergovernmental Steering Group to advise him, but the majority took the view that the Director should be empowered to convene and seek guidance from ad hoc groups of experts as appropriate to specified programme needs. These experts should be appointed in their personal capacity but with the x) available in ICES file G.5.a

concurrence of their governments.

There were several major differences of view and several of the package deals that were steered through were rather finely balanced, and a great deal of further discussion can be anticipated at the Governing Council later in March. It is by no means certain how far the framework outlined above will be maintained.

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## INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING ON MONITORING

Nairobi, 11-20 February 1974

### AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Election of officers
3. Approval of the agenda and organization of work (UNEP/IG.1/1)
4. Definition of objectives and principles (UNEP/IG.1/3 annex II)
5. Priority pollutants and other related environmental factors to be monitored in various media on the basis of agreed criteria (UNEP/IG.1/2 annex I and UNEP/IG.1/3 annex I)
6. Design and development of a global system for monitoring of priority pollutants and other related environmental factors in the various media (UNEP/IG.1/2, chapter II)
7. Other aspects of environmental monitoring (UNEP/IG.1/2, chapter III)
8. Programme of future work and institutional arrangements (UNEP/IG.1/2 in addition to oral presentation by Assistant Executive Director)
9. Training and other forms of assistance to developing countries to enable them to participate in executing the action plan (oral presentation by Assistant Executive Director)
10. Adoption of the report and recommendations to the Governing Council (document to be prepared in the light of discussions)