

## **LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

Greetings Delegates,

It gives us great pleasure to welcome you to this session of the UNEP. As the Executive Board, we are excited about the discussions and debates that will take place. The agenda at hand is extensive and intricate, and a fruitful debate on it would require your shared participation. It is entirely up to you to determine how you want to move this committee forward. This agenda necessitates looking at the topic from several perspectives, which takes extensive study and knowledge of the issue at hand. The delegates are advised to not limit their research only to the contents present in the guide and to acquire their research from other sources too. The Executive Board strongly recommends delegates, particularly first-timers, to thoroughly analyze your country's position on the agenda and come up with substantive proposals while keeping your country's foreign policy in mind. As you prepare to attend the conference, you must comprehend the agenda at hand as well as the history of it.

We hope this guide will provide you with a comprehensive understanding of the issue and assist you in your preparation. We look forward to engaging discussions and innovative solutions.

Sincerely,

The Executive Board.

## **AGENDA: Strengthening Environmental Recovery and Resilience in the MENA Region**

### **UNEP and its Mandate:**

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), established in 1972 following the Stockholm Conference, is the leading authority within the UN system on global environmental issues. Its mandate is to provide leadership, coordinate environmental action, and support countries in developing policies and practices that protect the environment while promoting sustainable development.

UNEP conducts global assessments, offers scientific guidance, and develops key multilateral environmental agreements. It assists countries in building institutional capacity, enacting environmental laws, and accessing clean technologies.

UNEP also coordinates environmental work across the UN system, manages partnerships, and facilitates access to international climate finance through mechanisms like the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund. Through public campaigns and educational initiatives, it promotes environmental awareness and engages civil society and youth.

Its work spans areas including climate change, biodiversity, pollution, environmental governance, and sustainable finance. UNEP is governed by the United Nations Environment Assembly, comprising all 193 Member States, which sets the global environmental agenda through politically significant resolutions. In conflict-affected and fragile regions, UNEP plays a key role in supporting environmental recovery and integrating sustainability into peacebuilding efforts.

### **What is Expected from Delegates**

Delegates are expected to go beyond simply defending their country's policies and instead engage with the broader environmental crisis facing the MENA region. While representing national interests is important, this agenda calls for a deeper understanding of shared regional challenges such as water scarcity, desertification, pollution, and the growing impacts of climate change.

Delegates should aim to identify and propose solutions that are not only in line with their country's position but also contribute to the region's collective recovery and long-term resilience. You are encouraged to think in terms of regional cooperation, sustainable development, and environmental justice, rather than limiting your approach to short-term or isolated fixes.

## **Introduction to the Agenda**

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region stands at the forefront of a growing environmental crisis. Characterized by arid and semi-arid landscapes, limited freshwater resources, and rapid urbanization, the region is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change. Rising temperatures, increasing water scarcity, desertification, coastal erosion, and frequent extreme weather events have placed immense pressure on ecosystems and human settlements. In addition to environmental stress, many countries in the region continue to face the compounded effects of conflict, displacement, weak infrastructure, and economic instability, which further hinder their ability to recover and adapt.

Environmental recovery refers to the process of restoring ecosystems, resources, and institutions following damage caused by human activity, natural disasters, or conflict. Resilience, on the other hand, involves strengthening the capacity of communities, governments, and ecosystems to absorb shocks, adapt to changes, and thrive in the face of long-term environmental challenges. In the MENA region, recovery and resilience are deeply interconnected, as many countries must rebuild damaged environmental systems while also preparing for future climate-related threats.

This agenda is not limited to national policies or isolated issues. It challenges delegates to take a holistic view of environmental recovery and resilience in MENA, to think beyond short-term solutions, and to advocate for action that is equitable, regionally coordinated, and rooted in sustainability. The future of the region depends on the ability of states to work together, rebuild stronger, and ensure that both people and ecosystems are protected against the challenges that lie ahead.

## **Key Concepts**

### **1. Environmental Recovery**

Environmental recovery refers to the process of restoring ecosystems, natural resources, and environmental services that have been degraded or destroyed due to human activity, natural disasters, or conflict. In the MENA region, this includes rehabilitating polluted water bodies, restoring degraded land, managing post-conflict environmental damage, and rebuilding damaged environmental institutions. Recovery is not limited to ecological systems but also includes strengthening legal frameworks, rebuilding environmental infrastructure, and addressing long-term environmental health risks. Effective recovery efforts are essential to restoring the environmental foundation needed for sustainable development and peace.

## 2. Environmental Resilience

Environmental resilience is the capacity of ecosystems, communities, and institutions to withstand environmental shocks and stressors, adapt to changing conditions, and recover from disruptions. This includes the ability to cope with climate-related risks such as droughts, floods, and heatwaves, as well as socio-political challenges such as displacement or resource scarcity. In practice, resilience involves designing cities and infrastructure that are climate-smart, managing natural resources sustainably, diversifying water and energy sources, and empowering local communities to participate in environmental decision-making. Building resilience ensures that societies are not only able to survive environmental shocks but can continue to thrive despite them.

## 3. Climate Change and its Regional Impacts

Climate change is a global phenomenon, but its impacts are felt unevenly. In the MENA region, rising temperatures, declining rainfall, and extreme weather events are becoming increasingly common. These changes intensify existing vulnerabilities, such as water scarcity, desertification, and food insecurity. Climate change is also a threat multiplier, exacerbating political tensions and economic instability in fragile environments. Understanding the link between climate change and regional insecurity is essential to designing effective recovery and resilience strategies.

## 4. Sustainable Development

Sustainable development refers to growth that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. It involves balancing economic development with environmental protection and social inclusion. In the context of this agenda, sustainable development means ensuring that recovery and resilience strategies do not further degrade the environment or exclude vulnerable populations. It also implies long-term planning, investment in green infrastructure, and a shift away from environmentally harmful practices such as over-extraction of water or reliance on fossil fuels.

## 5. Post-Conflict Environmental Governance

In conflict-affected areas of the MENA region, environmental damage is often severe and recovery is complicated by weak governance. Post-conflict environmental governance involves re-establishing regulatory frameworks, rebuilding institutions, addressing environmental crimes, and ensuring that environmental recovery is included in peacebuilding efforts. It also requires coordination between humanitarian and environmental actors to ensure that recovery efforts do not create new risks or deepen existing inequalities.

## 6. Regional Cooperation

Environmental issues in the MENA region frequently cross national borders. Water sources, desertification patterns, and air pollution often affect multiple countries at once. Regional cooperation refers to collaborative efforts among neighboring states to manage shared resources, exchange data and expertise, and develop joint strategies for climate adaptation and environmental protection. Given the political complexities in the region, promoting cooperation through neutral platforms like UNEP can help depoliticize environmental issues and foster stability.

### **Background of the Issue**

Environmental degradation in the MENA region is not only the result of natural pressures. Human factors have played a central role. Rapid urbanization, unregulated industrial activity, overexploitation of natural resources, and unsustainable agricultural practices have all contributed to the deterioration of ecosystems. Many cities in the region suffer from poor air quality and inadequate waste management systems, while rural areas are often affected by shrinking water supplies, soil exhaustion, and habitat loss.

Compounding these issues is the region's long history of conflict and political instability. Armed conflicts in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Sudan have had devastating environmental consequences. Warfare has led to the destruction of critical infrastructure, contamination of water sources, degradation of agricultural land, and large-scale deforestation. The movement of displaced populations and the collapse of environmental institutions in conflict zones have made environmental governance extremely difficult. In some cases, environmental damage has been used as a weapon of war, with long-term consequences for health, livelihoods, and stability.

Climate change acts as a threat multiplier in the MENA region. It interacts with existing political, economic, and environmental stressors, intensifying the risks of resource-based conflict, food insecurity, and forced migration. The region's reliance on fossil fuels and water-intensive industries adds further complexity, as efforts to build resilience must also consider economic diversification and energy transitions.

Despite these challenges, the MENA region has opportunities for transformation. Several countries have begun investing in renewable energy, climate adaptation projects, and environmental restoration programs. However, most of these efforts remain fragmented and underfunded. A lack of regional coordination, weak enforcement of environmental laws, and limited public participation continue to hinder progress.

## **Challenges to Environmental Recovery and Resilience**

Despite growing recognition of the environmental crisis in the MENA region, several structural and practical challenges continue to hinder meaningful progress toward recovery and long-term resilience. These challenges are deeply interlinked, cutting across environmental, political, institutional, and socio-economic dimensions.

### **1. Water Scarcity and Resource Overexploitation**

The MENA region has the lowest per capita freshwater availability in the world. Over-reliance on groundwater, inefficient irrigation practices, and limited investment in water-saving technologies have led to the depletion of vital water sources. This makes recovery efforts especially difficult in agriculture-dependent areas and exacerbates competition over scarce resources.

### **2. Environmental Damage from Conflict**

Prolonged armed conflicts in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Sudan have resulted in widespread environmental destruction. Infrastructure damage, oil spills, deforestation, and the collapse of waste management systems have left behind serious pollution and health risks. Post-conflict recovery often focuses on political stability and humanitarian needs, sidelining environmental concerns.

### **3. Weak Environmental Governance**

Many countries in the region lack strong legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect the environment. Environmental ministries are often underfunded and lack the authority or capacity to implement regulations. Corruption, overlapping mandates, and a lack of transparency further limit the effectiveness of environmental institutions.

### **4. Limited Regional Cooperation**

Environmental challenges such as air pollution, desertification, and shared water resources frequently cross national borders. However, regional cooperation remains weak due to political tensions, lack of trust, and the absence of binding environmental frameworks. Without joint strategies, individual efforts are often fragmented and less effective.

### **5. Dependence on Fossil Fuels**

Many MENA economies are heavily dependent on oil and gas exports, which not only contribute to environmental degradation but also limit the political will to transition toward greener



alternatives. Efforts to diversify energy sources are often slow and face institutional and financial barriers.

## 6. Inadequate Access to Climate Finance and Technology

Although international funds exist for environmental recovery and climate adaptation, many MENA countries struggle to access them due to complex application processes, limited technical expertise, and lack of project readiness. This slows down the implementation of much-needed resilience-building programs.

## 7. Lack of Data and Monitoring Systems

Reliable environmental data is essential for planning, but many countries in the region lack updated, accurate, and accessible information on key indicators. This makes it difficult to design evidence-based policies, track progress, or respond to emerging threats in a timely manner.

### **Role of UNEP and the International Community**

The environmental challenges faced by the MENA region cannot be addressed in isolation. Effective recovery and long-term resilience require strong support from both UNEP and the broader international community. UNEP, as the leading environmental authority within the United Nations system, plays a critical role in guiding and supporting member states through technical expertise, policy development, and regional cooperation.

UNEP assists governments in designing evidence-based environmental policies, conducting environmental impact assessments, and developing national adaptation plans. It also provides scientific research and data to inform decision-making, such as regional assessments on climate change, drought, and land degradation. Through capacity-building initiatives, UNEP helps strengthen the institutions responsible for environmental management, particularly in fragile or post-conflict settings where environmental governance may be weak or absent.

A key part of UNEP's work in the region involves facilitating cooperation between countries on shared environmental issues. Transboundary challenges such as water scarcity, desertification, and air pollution require coordinated action, and UNEP provides a neutral platform for dialogue and joint initiatives. It also works closely with regional organizations such as the League of Arab States and UNESCWA to harmonize national policies with broader regional strategies.

UNEP further supports countries in accessing international climate finance from mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility. By helping countries prepare funding proposals and build project readiness, UNEP enables them to implement large-scale environmental recovery and adaptation efforts. It also promotes the transfer of sustainable technologies through platforms like the Climate Technology Centre and Network.

In addition to UNEP, other international actors play a vital role. United Nations agencies such as UNDP, FAO, UN-Habitat, and WHO collaborate with UNEP to address interconnected challenges, including food security, health impacts, and urban resilience. International financial institutions and donor countries provide funding, infrastructure investment, and technical assistance for climate and environmental programs. Global treaties such as the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity offer a legal and policy framework for cooperation and accountability.

Non-governmental organizations contribute through community engagement, education, and on-the-ground implementation of environmental projects, while the private sector plays an increasingly important role in advancing innovation, investing in clean technologies, and building climate-resilient infrastructure.

Together, UNEP and the international community form a comprehensive support system that can help the MENA region recover from environmental degradation and prepare for the future. However, the success of these efforts depends on political will, inclusive governance, and the active involvement of communities most affected by environmental harm.

### **Questions a Resolution Must Answer**

1. What specific environmental issues in the MENA region is the resolution addressing?
2. How does the resolution propose to support environmental recovery?
3. What strategies are recommended to build long-term environmental resilience?
4. How does the resolution promote regional cooperation and joint action?
5. Who are the key stakeholders involved, and how will they be included?
6. What role will UNEP play in implementing or supporting the resolution?
7. How will the proposed initiatives be financed or supported technically?
8. How will progress, impact, or implementation be monitored or evaluated?