



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (OCHA)

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

JOINT UNEP/OCHA ENVIRONMENT UNIT (JEU)



Steering Committee on Environmental Emergencies Meeting Report

**Geneva, Switzerland
8 December 2009**



UNITED NATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

The first meeting of the Steering Committee on Environmental Emergencies was held in Geneva, Switzerland on 8 December 2009. The Committee was established following recommendations at the 8th meeting of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE). Please see the annex for the membership and Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the following countries and organizations: Cameroon, Canada, European Commission's Monitoring Information Centre (EC-MIC), Germany, Global Fire Monitoring Center, Cote d'Ivoire, Jordan, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland (including the AGEE Chair, Ambassador Toni Frisch), and the United States of America. Representatives from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Austria, Denmark, France and Green Cross were not able to attend. The meeting was chaired by Chris Dijkens from the Netherlands and co-chaired by Dave Wright from the United States of America.

The annotated agenda and powerpoint presentations have been posted on the unit's website at <http://ochaonline.un.org/ochaunep>

II. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

Opening of the meeting and setting the scene

Presented by Vladimir Sakharov, Chief, Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (JEU) and Emergency Preparedness Section, Officer-in-Charge of Emergency Services Branch

During the 8th meeting of the AGEE, great expectations were raised in particular on the implementation of Vision 2012; Expanding the Resource Network for Environmental Emergency Response; Environmental Emergencies Center, and the Environmental Emergency Guidelines. In order to deliver on these expectations, the AGEE Secretariat – the small JEU – will need the full support of Steering Committee members. The JEU operates thanks in large part to the in-kind support (experts) as well as political support of Steering Committee members and ongoing financial support of UN Member States.

As an example of such support, it was noted that the recent luncheon hosted by the Swiss Mission in Geneva under the auspices of Vision 2012 was a success, as it provided the opportunity to brief high-level diplomats on environmental emergencies, and to lay the foundation for seeking support for a draft UNEP Governing Council decision that could be submitted in 2011. This luncheon was the first concrete step in obtaining high-level commitment to the cause of environmental emergencies. Similar events are foreseen to be held in New York and Nairobi.

Agenda Item I

Overview of activities post AGEE 8

Presented by René Nijenhuis, Officer-in-Charge, JEU

Mr. Nijenhuis presented examples of coordination and mobilization activities undertaken by the JEU during the period from May to December 2009, namely: Benin: Floods – UNDAC mission; China/Taiwan: Typhoon Morakot – UNDAC mission; Burkina Faso: Floods – post UNDAC mission; Guinea (Conakry): Seized chemicals; Philippines: Tropical storms – UNDAC mission; Samoa: EQ/Tsunami – UNEP assessment; and Indonesia: Padang EQ – UNDAC mission.

He recalled the unit's work plan for 2009-2011 as adopted at the Advisory Group meeting, including the four main areas: Mobilisation and Coordination of International Assistance; Advocacy and Strengthened Response Capacity (including preparedness activities); Strengthened Governance Systems; and Operational aspects of Provision/Receiving Assistance. It was further stressed that, as already successfully undertaken in the period 2007 to 2009, the JEU should continue its outreach activities, making best use of existing networks and regional organizations, as well as UNEP and OCHA Regional Offices.

Summary of discussions, conclusions and recommendations:

- The JEU will prepare a proposal on the “status” (nomenclature, expectations) of those who have undergone Environmental Emergencies Trainings (EET) as well as possible improvements of the internal deployment procedures;
- The JEU and the Steering Committee will explore advocacy possibilities tied to the launch of the environmental emergencies book; to be discussed in a dedicated group;
- The US Environmental Protection Agency has requested the organization of an Environmental Emergencies Training, in Washington, DC, USA in May 2010, jointly with Environment Canada.

Agenda Item II

How to strengthen a regional approach?

Presented by Chris Dijkens, Chair

Chris Dijkens presented an overview of the strengths of a system based on a regional approach, including: active and enthusiastic nations; natural position in the UN (DAC) system; wide variety of expertise; experienced experts; and clear international focal points for coordination (JEU and EC-MIC). Some of the current risks mentioned were linked to too much dependence on a small number of donor nations; donor nations are mainly within Europe and North America and very much based on personal contact; limited UN resources; high vulnerability to ‘unexpected’ events such as financial crisis (budget reductions), changes in national policies, and changes in the political climate of a nation.

The roadmap ahead would include:

- Creating a more robust and sustainable network, including readily-available pool of diverse experts; equipment to support operations; and excellent bilateral and multilateral cooperation;
- Creating a worldwide donor network that is more equitable and more distributed (decentralized);
- Stronger involvement of, and cooperation with, the EU;
- Involving other organizations like academia, NGO’s, industry – private sector, etc; and
- Formalizing the system. The Regional approach should involve regional networks of nations, involving regional coordination and (informal) cooperation. The UN (and EU) should be responsible for the worldwide coordination.

The implementation of a regional approach would contribute to a more vigorous and flexible – less vulnerable system; deployments will be faster; fewer linguistic and cultural issues to overcome; it would be less expensive; and could lead to the enhancement of regional capabilities, including pools of experts and equipment. One possible approach is to divide the globe in logical regions, which cover Africa, Latin America, Asia/Pacific, North America, Europe, which could be linked to the existing UN regional breakdown or existing informal partnerships like the International Humanitarian Partnerships.

It would be important to then identify a regional “champion” or “frontrunner” who believes in and will promote the regional concept within its region, and invest in countries with proven best practices (e.g. regional exercises, Environmental Emergencies Training, Hazard Identification Tool, Flash Environmental Assessment Tool, among others), as well as build a (informal) network within each region. The regional approach should consider promoting and conducting regional projects related to emergency preparedness and response, as well as involving fully EC-MIC.

This approach could be stimulated by organizing and conducting a regional international exercise, including the development of an emergency scenario specific to South East Asia, bringing the Environmental Assessment Module to a country in this region as well as securing the participation of Singapore’s first response Hazmat team and other countries within that region as players or observers. Such an exercise would also need to be evaluated and can form the basis to develop a regional concept based on lessons learned, as well as tailor it to other regions.

Summary of discussions, conclusions and recommendations:

- The Regional Approach, as proposed by the Chair has been accepted, and will be further discussed in a smaller group in order to be operationalised;
- A mapping of what already exists and is being done in different regions is a critical step in advancing efforts towards a regional approach;
- JEU and the Steering Committee need to look to existing opportunities (events/trainings) to sell the idea of regional approach: for example, the 8-9 February UNDAC Advisory Board meeting; the Ibero-Latin America civil protection conference;

- Need to copy/paste and tailor Singapore training to South-East Asia, and to explore the possibility of hosting an international exercise in the Philippines, perhaps tied in with the Hazardous Mapping conference to be held in Manila on the 8-15 April 2010;
- Where possible, the Steering Committee to further explore efforts to build capacity regionally, for example using Sweden/Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)'s NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) course, which could perhaps become a UN course;
- Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC), JEU and EC-MIC to discuss coordinated regional approach to firefighting upon completion of a European Union survey/study of member states.

Agenda Item III

Developing a fundraising strategy for the UNEP Trust Fund

Presented by Chris Dijkens, Chair

Many activities resulting from the AGEE meetings and the *Rosersberg Initiative* need to be established as projects. At the moment, there is no robust way to fund these projects. As a result, projects are stagnating and important and relevant activities that should be the building blocks for strengthening the system are not happening. The lack of secure funding leads to no continuity or sustainability of the JEU's activities which can be a critical factor for the success and impact of JEU's work.

There is a need to secure project funding through an effective, sustainable and controlled UNEP Trust Fund and a clear long-term financial strategy for projects. The Trust Fund is suitable for longer-term projects – not for operational emergency response, and functions as a complementary funding mechanism, not replacing existing ones. Projects should be jointly funded by the Trust Fund and other contributions of project partners. Partnerships are to be encouraged between industry, government agencies and academic institutions. Stakeholder ownership is very important for the sustainability and impact of projects.

It is of the utmost importance to seek and encourage voluntary donations by nations for the Trust Fund and explore funding opportunities such as the European Union. A possible way to move things forward would be considering hiring an external fund raiser to secure seed investments; publicize the concept and get industry and academia interested in it; seek proposals for selected projects; and adjust the concept as required and develop a short- to long-term financial strategy.

Summary of discussions, conclusions and recommendations:

- The need for the developing of a fundraising strategy must be raised by Member States to high levels of OCHA and UNEP;
- A donor support group could be created to promote project-specific funding through the UNEP Trust Fund for environmental emergencies.

Agenda Item IV

Moving forward Vision 2012

Presentations by Dave Wright, Vice-Chair and Andreas Schiess, Switzerland

Andreas Schiess reported on a meeting with the JEU that took place on 30 June 2009 regarding the eventual cooperation between SDC and the JEU, including SDC's participation in the SCEE and SDC's possible involvement in the proposed UNEP Governing Council decision and eventual UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) 2010 input.

A luncheon with permanent missions was organized by SDC in Geneva on 26 November 2009, with the purpose of giving environmental emergencies more attention and raising visibility; sensitizing the group of countries represented in the Steering Committee on environmental issues; drawing their attention to the existence of the Steering Committee; and bringing the proposed draft UNEP Governing Council decision to their attention.

Switzerland presented several options to move the high-level commitment forward, including the submission of a UNEP Governing Council decision for 2011 (at the regular session) and/or a high-level Policy Statement by, for example, UNEP's Executive Director.

A number of options for achieving greater momentum on these options were mentioned, such as the Ambassadorial Luncheon that was organized with Permanent Missions in Geneva on 26 November 2009 and the plan to organise similar Luncheons in Nairobi and New York to better engage capitals of

members of the UNEP Governing Council.

Switzerland further suggested organizing a side event during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Segment in July 2010 in New York, with the purpose of bringing the issue of environmental emergencies to the attention of ECOSOC participants, as a step forward in a direction of a more formal recognition by ECOSOC and, at a later stage, the possible consideration of proposing a dedicated UN General Assembly resolution.

Switzerland also announced that it will host the 9th meeting of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies in Bern from 18 to 21 May 2011. In addition, Switzerland intends to organize an international Wilton Park conference on environmental emergencies in the latter half of 2010.

David Wright stated that Vision 2012 provides a unique opportunity to disseminate tools; build networks; and raise awareness regarding environmental emergencies. Some activities that could contribute to the implementation of Vision 2012 could be: organizing side events (share approaches, publications, and guidelines); involving a broad range of stakeholders viewing environmental emergencies from different angles (climate change, severe weather events); working to strengthen the political mandate for responding to environmental emergencies; and building on the activities of the *Rosersberg Initiative*.

Some options for moving forward this process could be: convening a political working group; AGEE participants (technical) consult in-country foreign affairs ministries; identify and engage potential allies (States, NGOs, industry, associations); broadly advancing environmental emergencies as a key issue meriting attention at the summit, among others.

Summary of discussions, conclusions and recommendations:

- The efforts under the leadership of Switzerland were applauded and the hope expressed that Switzerland would continue to provide this leadership;
- It was noted that an ECOSOC side event would be useful as well as materials to help educate and provide information on the issue of environmental emergencies;
- Switzerland was requested to keep the Steering Committee members up to date on its efforts towards a UNEP Governing Council decision in order to encourage other national authorities to back such a proposal. Swiss-hosted luncheons are foreseen in Nairobi and NY related to this;
- A short guidance should be written with background information (one or two page document) that can help countries encouraging authorities to support the draft UNEP Governing Council decision.

Agenda Item V

Environmental Emergencies Centre & Environmental Emergencies Partnership Presentation by Vanda Dias Dos Santos, Consultant

At the 7th meeting of the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) in June 2007, when launching the *Rosersberg Initiative* and as part of Thematic Area 1 – Awareness-raising, engagement, training and capacity development – initial proposals were made for the establishment of a “training academy” or a network/centre for excellence for environmental emergencies-related training.

In May 2009, during the 8th meeting of the AGEE, participants urged that a survey would be carried out. Subsequently, the Joint Environment Unit conducted an in-depth survey to assess the needs and gaps of environmental emergencies capacities at national levels. The results of the survey were intended to assess the need for an Environmental Emergencies Centre; to determine the scope and further details of this need, if any; and finally, to better design an environmental emergencies centre, that would address those gaps and needs.

Also as part of the survey, existing initiatives at global and regional levels were mapped and analysed. The conclusion of this mapping exercise was that there exists no known environmental emergencies centre which fulfils the multitude of needs identified by the survey. There are several organizations and / or centres which specifically address one or more of many aspects of environmental emergencies; or focus on disaster management/reduction, response or preparedness in general. However, a single centre that deals with all the issues related to environmental emergencies does not exist.

By far, the large majority of the respondents manifested their support and need for establishing an Environmental Emergencies Centre. Furthermore, based on respondents’ answers, the scope of the Environmental Emergencies Centre should be focused on environmental emergencies preparedness,

especially dedicated to strengthening national capacities. Its core functions should mainly be: capacity development; monitoring and evaluation of environmental emergencies; facilitate research and information sharing regarding environmental emergencies; and provide advice/guidance to non-emergency / preparedness organisations. The results of the survey also showed that, in a first phase, the Environmental Emergencies Centre should be implemented as *an on-line centre*, because it is cost-effective and the best way of linking existing capacities and networks of expertise. Future prospects include a physical centre, with hopefully regional presences. This analysis was based on responses from 20 countries and 5 organizations, including UN agencies and an academic organization. The data collected from the survey were complemented by information from individual interviews (please find the report in attachment).

Summary of discussions, conclusions and recommendations:

- The idea of the establishment of an Environmental Emergencies Centre was fully endorsed by the Steering Committee;
- The Environmental Emergencies Centre should be maintained by the JEU, and cover capacity development, information sharing, providing advice and guidance to response organizations;
- In-kind contributions may be available to set this up;
- Sweden expressed strong interest and committed funding for the first year. Netherlands and USA will look into in-kind contributions;
- EC-MIC supports this idea and therefore endorses the Environmental Emergencies Centre and Environmental Emergencies Partnership. Similar gaps in prevention and preparedness were identified by the EC, which, although it works primarily in Europe, welcomes the idea of an Environmental Emergencies Centre with worldwide focus. With regard to EC-MIC concerns related to duplication of efforts, the JEU provided assurances that this will not be a problem, as the Environmental Emergencies Centre will mostly work in national capacity development, especially in developing countries;
- Sweden/MSB suggested a meeting in early 2010 with interested partners;
- The JEU is requested to develop a more detailed project proposal, including a budget (and a cost-analysis for the short- and long-term needs);
- The Environmental Emergencies Partnership seeks to expand the environmental emergencies network to the private sector. Germany will look into this.

Agenda Item VI

Environment as a cross-cutting issue

Presentation by Tom Delrue, UNEP's Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch

Disasters and conflicts often impact the environment in ways that threaten human life, health, livelihoods and security. Whether through direct damage to land, water or air, or through coping strategies that indirectly stress scarce natural resources, environmental impacts in the aftermath of crisis can threaten the success of recovery activities by leaving populations with degraded natural resources and vulnerable to future events.

At the same time, the relief and recovery operations that follow disasters and conflicts can sometimes cause as much environmental damage as the crises they were designed to respond to. Indeed, unsustainable and damaging techniques used in the humanitarian phase can leave disaster- and conflict-prone regions on trajectories that continue to overexploit natural resources and the environment. At the same time, the basic operation of a large humanitarian presence, which is designed for rapid and intense operations, all too often leaves behind a trail of polluting waste, concentrated resource overuse and heavy, unsustainable urbanization.

A failure to address these risks and insufficient inclusion of environmental considerations in relief operations can undermine the relief process, causing additional loss of life, displacement, aid dependency and increased vulnerability. Although this relationship has been documented in case-studies, and is commonly acknowledged by humanitarian practitioners in the field, there remain many opportunities lost and risk ignored in the environmental sector throughout the humanitarian phase.

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Cameroon made a brief presentation on environmental emergencies in Cameroon, and welcomed specifically the assistance of the Environmental Emergencies Centre for capacity development once it is established.

Annex I

AGEE Steering Committee

Terms of Reference

During the eighth meeting of the international Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE 8), held in Brussels from 6-8 May 2009, the forum endorsed the creation of a Steering Committee to guide the work of the AGEE and its secretariat, the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit.

The AGEE Steering Committee serves as an extension of the larger AGEE, and will work more directly and regularly with the Joint Environment Unit in implementing the recommendations of AGEE 8. It will convene one or more times between the Advisory Group meetings, depending on available funding.

Specifically, the AGEE Steering Committee will provide overall guidance and support, particularly with regard to implementation of the three Thematic Areas of the *Rosersberg Initiative*, and on overall strategic direction and main activities related to environmental emergencies, by identifying major trends and opportunities, and by contributing to further engagement of countries and organizations in the AGEE.

In particular, the Steering Group will

- Ensure follow-up on the Conclusions and Recommendations of AGEE 8;
- Support the implementation of Vision 2012 (see EU/AG/50);
- Review the 'Best Practices Guidelines for requesting, receiving, offering, and providing assistance in international environmental emergencies' (see EU/AG/55) before the next Advisory Group meeting;
- Develop a fundraising strategy for the Trust Fund (see EU/AG/57);
- Discuss the development of an Environmental Emergencies Centre (see EU/AG/52);
- Assist in preparations for AGEE 9, including setting a proposed agenda.

AGEE Steering Committee composition

1. Austria	Mr. Viktor WOHLFART
2. ASEAN	Mr. Raman LETCHUMANAN
3. Cameroon	Dr. Jean Pierre NANA
4. Canada	Mr. Stéphane LEBLANC
5. Cote d'Ivoire	Mr. Yao Bernard KOFFI
6. Denmark	Mr. Steffen SCHMIDT
7. European Commission	Mr. Hans DAS / Ms Vera FERREIRA
8. France	Ms. Carline GRANDJEAN
9. Germany	Mr. Peter SIMONCELLI
10. Global Fire Monitoring Center	Dr. Johann GOLDAMMER
11. Green Cross	Ms. Mara BUN
12. Jordan	Ms. Al-Sharifeh Nawzat BINT ALI
13. the Netherlands (CHAIR)	Mr. Chris DIJKENS
14. Norway	Mr. Orjan KARLSSON
15. Philippines	Ms. Maria Elena BAUTISTA
16. Sweden	Mr. Kjell LARSSON
17. Switzerland	Mr. Andreas SCHIESS
18. United States of America (VICE-CHAIR)	Mr. David P. WRIGHT