

**UNEP STATEMENT AT THE INFORMATION SESSION WITH MULTILATERAL
ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS (MEAS)
5 JULY 2000**

Communication from UNEP

1. UNEP welcomes this MEA Information Session with WTO Members, as well as the planned MEA Information Session on 24 October, and commends the WTO for making these sessions a regular event. We are convinced that the information exchange and informal cooperation built around these sessions will enhance synergies between these legal regimes. However, we are also convinced of the need to deepen this collaboration, so as to contribute to a smooth evolution and development of these bodies of international law.
2. UNEP places great emphasis on promoting a positive relationship between MEAs and the WTO, particularly as trade-related issues are increasingly relevant to MEAs. The transboundary and global interface of trade and environmental policies is growing, therefore promoting trade, protecting the global environment and realizing sustainable development requires a renewed commitment to international cooperation. Cooperation has many benefits, including: ensuring that MEAs are implemented effectively; reducing pressure on the WTO's dispute settlement system; and guaranteeing that Member countries gain the most from trade liberalization and environmental protection.
3. Since the last CTE Information Session with MEAs, and the agreed elements of cooperation between WTO and UNEP, drawn up last December between UNEP, the UNEP-administered Conventions and the WTO Secretariat have increased their joint activities and analysis focused on the MEA-WTO interface.
4. Informal meetings between MEAs, UNEP and WTO secretariats have been held in April and July 2000, in addition to the one that was held in June 1999.
5. UNEP and the MEAs continue to participate in WTO regional seminars on trade and environment – UNEP, the Basel Convention and the Mediterranean Blue Plan were present in the WTO Regional Seminar on Trade and Environment held in Malta in May 2000. UNEP and the Basel Convention will again be represented at the Gabon regional seminar in July 2000.
6. Dr. Töpfer, the Executive Director of UNEP, hosted a high-level panel discussion, which included senior representatives from UNEP-administered MEAs, the WTO Secretariat and environment ministers at the Eighth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in April 2000 in New York. This panel explored the WTO-MEA relationship in an open, frank and constructive manner, providing further insights into this complex relationship.
7. These activities will feed into the longer-range goals of better integrating trade and environment policies, reducing tensions and exploiting the synergies between them. These are important preliminary steps to enhancing the mutual supportiveness of the legal regimes of the WTO and MEAs, but more needs to be done.

8. Recent international meetings have called for renewed efforts to increase cooperation on the trade and environment interface. The eighth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development identified priority areas for future work. These are making trade and environment policies mutually supportive, and undertaking system-wide efforts to strengthen institutional cooperation, build capacity and promote trade and environment partnerships. Similarly, the Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Malmö, Sweden in May 2000 identified strengthening cooperation on trade and environment issues as a priority. Enhanced collaboration between the WTO, MEAs and UNEP will also help governments to prepare for the ten-year review of the implementation of Rio Earth Summit agreements in 2002.

9. Granting MEAs and UNEP observer status in relevant WTO bodies will undoubtedly facilitate the inter-agency information exchange, which must underpin such cooperation. There are pending requests for the Convention on Biological Diversity to become an observer to the TRIPs Council and the Committee on Agriculture, and for UNEP to be admitted as an observer to the TRIPs Council, the General Council, and the Committee on Trade and Development. We hope that these requests will soon be granted, in order to enhance information flows and deepen collaboration.

10. UNEP and a number of MEA Secretariats met on 4 July 2000 to jointly plan activities to contribute to these short and long-term goals. The meeting was attended by four UNEP-administered conventions, which were later joined by colleagues from the WTO Secretariat. Discussions between UNEP and the MEAs revealed the need to move into a more proactive phase of cooperation with the WTO. As a result of that meeting it was agreed by UNEP and the MEAs to initiate a process to do this.

11. Consequently, UNEP wishes to invite interested delegations, as well as the Chair of the CTE, to an informal UNEP and MEA-sponsored meeting to be convened in late September or early October 2000 to examine trade and environment synergies and potential tensions. The goal of the meeting will be to initiate a process whereby the MEAs and UNEP identify measures to increase those synergies and decrease tensions. Throughout this process UNEP and the MEAs will remain in close consultation with the WTO Secretariat and interested governments.

12. UNEP believes that such a process will serve to support the objectives of the WTO, MEAs and UNEP, and enhance their mutual supportiveness. UNEP looks forward to working with governments, the WTO and other relevant institutions to help achieve this overarching goal.
