

***Convened by**: UN Environment Programme, in partnership with the CBD Secretariat and the COP 17 Presidency*

***Moderator**: Mr. Neville Ash, Director, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)*

***Participation**: By invitation. Ministers and heads of organisations*

Concept Note

CBD COP 17 High-Level Segment - Ministerial Lunch Session

"UN80: Increasing synergies among MEAs"

Date & time: Wednesday 28 October 2026, 13:15 to 14:45

Background

The architecture for environmental multilateralism has developed incrementally. The multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) addressing issues such as biodiversity, climate change, combating desertification, trade in endangered species, migratory species, wetlands, world heritage, plant genetic resources, chemicals and waste each carry distinct legal mandates and

unite different representatives of very largely overlapping constituencies. In practice, they are implemented through separate policies, institutions and national and international financing systems, at times carried by competing ministries, drawing on the same stretched national budgets and reported on by small teams of officials across government struggling with disparate reporting formats and cycles. Greater coherence across MEAs at national and international scales provides a considerable opportunity both to deliver accelerated action in the race to avoid dangerous tipping points, but also in the need to use available resources efficiently.

There has never been a better time to take forward action on MEA synergies. Momentum has been generated across individual MEAs alongside that of the UN80 initiative and the global context of constrained resources. Among the Rio Conventions, building on the Bern process, Belém Joint Statement, the work of the Joint Liaison Group (JLG) and the discussions in Bonn and Ulaanbaatar, the process is moving towards practical, country-led cooperation, with a proposed Rio Synergies Group for Action and its potential launch at COP 31. Yerevan is the bridge: it brings the biodiversity perspective into that agenda and identifies what should be carried forward. Ulaanbaatar did not conclude its consideration of cooperation and synergies, which makes a frank exchange in Yerevan timely. Across the biodiversity-related MEAs, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework has provided the opportunity for a coming together around joint ambitions and action.

The wider multilateral system is also examining its own architecture. As part of the UN80 initiative, Work Package 27 on the Environment, co-led by UNEP and the UNFCCC secretariat, has set out a set of recommendations. Three of these recommendations relate directly to MEA synergies: advancing administrative synergies; strengthening programmatic synergies and harmonised reporting; and exploring consolidation options where feasible. Parties, not secretariats, will decide on next steps for these recommendations, and ministers have an interest and opportunity to shape and direct them rather than to receive them.

The three recommendations do not apply equally to every set of conventions[1]. The Rio Conventions share an origin, a Joint Liaison Group and are perhaps the most visible expression of directly connected environmental challenges being addressed through a fragmented landscape of policies and action. But progress is being made, in particular under the CBD, where the Secretariat has been mandated to develop a multilevel roadmap for synergies among the Rio Conventions. The biodiversity-related conventions share subject matter, a secretariat coordination mechanism through the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG) and, in many countries, the same focal points and/or Ministerial responsibilities. Through the ways of working across the

[1]For the purposes of this discussion: the Rio Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD); the biodiversity-related conventions (CBD, CITES, CMS, the Ramsar Convention, IWC, IPPC, the World Heritage Convention and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture); and the chemicals and waste conventions (Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm and Minamata). The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement might also be considered.

Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, the chemicals and waste cluster has made great progress, showing what is achievable whilst retaining distinct mandates and legal identities. Asking how, and for which of these sets of conventions, the recommendations from UN80 might best be implemented allows ministers to give differentiated guidance on the next steps rather than a single verdict on synergies to which institutional complexity may be a barrier.

This session will focus on synergies across the agreements and their existing coordination mechanisms. Advancing agreed synergies internationally requires delivering on them nationally, in planning and budget cycles; in the alignment of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans and Land Degradation Neutrality Targets and other national implementation mechanisms; and in whether integrated national priorities to deliver across multiple MEAs can efficiently secure finance and technical support. Exploring the implications of taking forward the three recommendations therefore requires consideration of what the recommendation would mean both internationally, but also for countries.

The case for enhanced coherence and cooperation is widely recognized by Parties and is increasingly being put into practice, with good examples in many countries. The remaining barriers are familiar: disparate policies and ambitions that rarely intersect, fragmented finance, capacity constraints in the countries expected to carry every agenda at once, fiscal pressure on multilateral cooperation, and vested interests in the status quo. Some of these barriers may also be opportunities, for example to explore the more efficient and coherent use of limited finances and capacity. The reform process is therefore better met as a considerable opportunity to strengthen effectiveness, efficiency and impact of MEAs, than as a threat. The case for it is made most persuasively by Parties, with the benefits from greater alignment already delivering nationally.

Objectives

- Reaffirm high-level political commitment to take forward increased coherence across the landscape of multilateral environmental agreements and inspire candid discussions about where views still differ on how wide and how far to go, including on consolidation.
- Provide a differentiated ministerial view on the three recommendations, and how they might be taken forward across the landscape of MEAs.
- Make practical recommendations and a political steer to improve the workings, scope or ambition of existing cross-MEA mechanisms for cooperation.
- Contribute a Ministerial perspective to the emerging Rio Synergies Group for Action and carry that signal from Yerevan to Antalya.

Format

A high-level session for ministers, vice-ministers, and heads of organisations, held over lunch as a moderated discussion. The COP 17 President will deliver the opening remarks, including introducing the Joint Declaration arising from the Presidency Rio Synergies event on 21st October. Ms. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of UNEP and co-chair of Work Package 27, sets the scene. The moderator, Mr. Neville Ash, Director of UNEP-WCMC, then guides the exchange around the three sets of issues addressed in the recommendations and listed as issues for discussion below. Interventions should be short (1-2 minutes), and respond to the topics under dicsussions. Speakers can choose which of the issues they wish to address. Short interventions are encouraged to enable greater participation in the session. Ministers wishing to speak in each issue indicate this to the moderator, and the moderator may invite additional brief responses to draw out where views converge and where they differ. This should allow for around 8-10 interventions on each of the three issues. The time constraints and priority given to ministerial interventions mean that it is likely that not every minister or head of organization will have the opportunity to speak. The moderator, with assistance, acts as rapporteur and will collect additional written points for the summary of the session. The moderator closes with some draft key messages for Antalya and beyond. The discussion complements the plenary statements, in which ministers are also invited to reflect on environmental coherence and synergies across the UN system.

Indicative running order:

13:15 to 13:25	Arrival and seating
13:25 to 13:30	Welcome and framing by the moderator
13:30 to 13:35	Opening remarks: COP 17 President
13:35 to 13:40	Scene-setting: Executive Director, UNEP
13:40 to 14:35	Moderated exchange on the three sets of issues, maximum two-minute interventions
14:35 to 14:45	Moderator's synthesis and close

Issues for discussion

The questions below indicate the ground each set of issues covers. They will not necessarily be taken in turn, and speakers may address whichever they wish.

Administrative synergies

- Considering the current landscape of MEAs, where could the greatest efficiencies and cost-effectiveness be gained, and what gains could this lead to in national implementation?

Programmatic synergies and harmonised reporting

- Looking at the existing toolbox, how can improved coherence across MEAs be delivered through better alignment of planning, implementation support, technical cooperation, monitoring and reporting, and joint resource mobilisation, and what would help more countries build on the progress already made at national level?

Exploring consolidation

- Where might consolidation best be explored further and what is required to take the next steps?

Expected outcomes

- A renewed, high-level signal of intent on coherence, which could be reflected in the Yerevan Call to Action and inform the follow-up to the UNSG report.
- A differentiated ministerial reading of the three recommendations, providing first guidance on how Work Package 27 can be taken forward.
- Direction to existing coordination mechanisms and CoP17 negotiations relating to synergies.
- Practical priorities to support country-led implementation, and a biodiversity contribution to the Rio Synergies Group for Action, to carry from Yerevan to Antalya.
- A moderator's summary reported to the closing plenary of the High-Level Segment.

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