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Item 5.14 of the agenda

**PROCLAMATION OF 2008
AS A UNITED NATIONS
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PLANET EARTH**

OUTLINE

Source: 172 EX/Decision 63.

Background: At the request of the United Republic of Tanzania, an item on the proclamation of 2008 as the United Nations International Year of Planet Earth was included in the agenda of the 172nd session of the Executive Board (172 EX/57) and was examined in connection with an earlier item submitted by the United Republic of Tanzania at the 171st session of the Executive Board and supported by Brazil, Burkina Faso, China, Egypt, Ghana, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Senegal, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Turkey among others, on the proclamation of 2007 as the United Nations International Year of Planet Earth.

Purpose: This document provides information on the rationale, objectives and other important information regarding the proposed United Nations International Year of Planet Earth, 2008.

Decision required: paragraph 10.

Explanatory Note

1. The human race needs its planet. We depend on it completely, because we evolved from it, remain forever part of it, and can exist only by courtesy of the self-sustaining Earth system. The Earth is unique, not only in our solar system, but as far as we know, in the accessible universe. It is not just the only planet we have – it is the only living planet we know, or may ever know.
2. Earth scientists have unravelled many of our planet's secrets already and made great progress in understanding how our planet works. The extent and depth of data that exists within the geoscientific community is tremendous. But at the same time that information is still not used to its full potential to improve the health and wealth of humankind.
3. The tsunami tragedy in the Indian Ocean (26 December 2004) has highlighted the importance of international cooperation in science that might have led to the installation of a regional monitoring system, and also the strong need for a programme of public education that would have allowed people to respond appropriately to any warning. But the mortality from the tsunami in the Indian Ocean is just one example of the consequence of neglecting international cooperation in the Earth Sciences. Landslides, volcanoes and earthquakes cause many deaths in each decade, many of them preventable.
4. Large parts of the Earth's crust have been mapped and huge quantities of geo-data are stored in digital databases ready to inform society about the Earth. We know where to find the largest reservoirs of natural resources stored in the Earth's crust and we know why and where earthquakes may occur. We are able to reconstruct past climates in a very detailed way. We know when and where Earth plates moved over the globe, how this is related to development of mountain chains and how these mountains were successively eroded. We can predict many – unfortunately, not all – of the natural hazards based on fossil examples and on our knowledge of Earth processes.
5. It is thus timely to call for action. Earth scientists worldwide are ready and prepared to assist society in its endeavours to arrive at a safer, healthier and wealthier planet for all. A first step towards this goal is envisaged in the International Year of Planet Earth.
6. The International Year of Planet Earth is envisaged as a worldwide celebration of Earth Sciences and its importance to our everyday lives, and shall contribute to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. It has the objective of raising public awareness of the importance of Earth Sciences in building sustainable communities, notably in developing countries, as well as emphasizing the importance of science and technology in the follow-up to agreements reached at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002) or the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan, 18-22 January 2005).
7. The International Year of Planet Earth, subtitled Earth Science for Society, is meant to be a worldwide endeavour with UNESCO becoming the leading United Nations agency in the implementation phase in cooperation with the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) and its Founding Partners. These include the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics, the International Geographical Union, the International Union of Soil Sciences, the International Lithosphere Programme, the Geological Society of London, the Institute of Applied Geosciences TNO in the Netherlands, the International Soil Reference and Information Centre, the International Association of Engineering Geologists and the Environment, the International Society of Rock Mechanics, the International Society of Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering, the International Union for Quaternary Research and the American Geological Institute.

8. Proclaiming a United Nations International Year of Planet Earth is likely to benefit not only globally cooperative research in the field of the Earth Sciences, but also society at large, as well as policy-makers concerned with sustained socio-economic development. This effort must be a partnership with national and local organizations involved in Earth Sciences and with teachers around the world. Earth scientists have demonstrated their willingness to cooperate on a global, multidisciplinary scale and to act jointly in geoscientific projects with social, cultural and educational components to ensure the realization of this initiative.

9. At its 171st session the Executive Board of UNESCO adopted 171 EX/Decision 57 supporting the proclamation of the year 2007 as the International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE). Due to technical reasons the Executive Board at its 172nd session, through 172 EX/Decision 63, endorsed 2008 to be declared the IYPE. In 2008 two major international geoscientific events are taking place, namely the 33rd International Geological Congress in Oslo, and the 31st International Geographical Congress in Tunis. Both events provide excellent opportunities for outreach in the central, United Nations-proclaimed year of the planned triennium. Further, the IYPE is not asking for any financial support from UNESCO, the United Nations or its agencies. It will raise funds from industry, hence it requires time to do so.

10. The General Conference may wish to adopt the following draft resolution:

The General Conference,

Mindful of the fact that the planet Earth offers life support systems to the human race and other living things,

Noting that the wealth of scientific information available on planet Earth, which could assist planning, disaster mitigation, resource exploitation and management remains untapped and hardly known to the public, policy- and decision-makers,

Convinced that education in Earth Sciences provides men and women with the tools to live gently on the planet and to build the scientific infrastructure essential for sustainable development,

Taking into account the crucial role UNESCO and the Year could play in raising public awareness of the importance of Earth processes and resources, disaster reduction and developing capacity for building sustainable communities,

Welcomes UNESCO Executive Board's 171 EX/Decision 57 following the examination of document 171 EX/52 and 171 EX/52 Add. & Corr., and subsequently 172 EX/Decision 63 following the examination of document 172 EX/57 supporting the proclamation of 2008, the International Year of Planet Earth;

Invites the Director-General to support all efforts leading to the United Nations General Assembly proclaiming 2008 as the United Nations International Year of Planet Earth;

Further Invites the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the global geoscience community through the International Union of Geological Sciences to organize activities celebrating 2008 as the International Year of Planet Earth, notably by inviting all national UNESCO Commissions to create national groups for the implementation of the Year and collaborating with the Earth Sciences societies and groups throughout the world, including the developing countries;

Recommends that the United Nations General Assembly at its 60th session adopts a resolution declaring 2008 as the United Nations International Year of Planet Earth.