

Youth Environment Assembly 2025

Over the weekend, the Children and Youth Major Group, through the [Youth Environment Assembly \(YEA\)](#), brought together young people and representatives from Multilateral Environmental Agreements and global institutions, concluding the 2025 Youth Environment Assembly (YEA) held on November 29th and 30th, a distinct shift in the tone of global environmental advocacy became apparent. Convening at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters, over 500 young leaders and representatives from across the globe gathered not merely to protest, but to legislate the future.

This assembly, the largest of its kind ahead of the upcoming seventh session of the [United Nations Environment Assembly \(UNEA-7\)](#), was driven by a theme that transcends traditional activism. Against a backdrop of geopolitical fragmentation and accelerating planetary instability, the youth constituency has moved beyond demanding a seat at the table. They have laid out a technical, structural blueprint to redesign the table itself. The resulting *Global Youth Declaration on the Environment 2025* is not a wishlist; it is a sophisticated policy instrument. It confronts the "crisis of international cooperation" head-on, arguing that the current multilateral system is failing to meet the speed and scale of the triple planetary crisis. The following analysis unpacks the strategic pillars of this declaration and what they signal for Member States preparing for UNEA-7.

The Geopolitical Context

The premise of the youth intervention is grounded in a stark realization: the multilateral order is facing an "eroding trust in the multilateral order" and "rising geopolitical tensions". The Declaration notes that the world is off track on nearly all global goals, exacerbated by a financial architecture that traps the Global South in debt cycles, denying them the fiscal space to act.

However, the youth analysis also identifies a window of opportunity. Citing the [Pact for the Future](#) and the [Declaration on Future Generations](#) adopted at the 2024 UN Summit, young leaders argue that multilateralism can remain a platform for transformation if it is grounded in "equity, accountability, and intergenerational justice". The challenge posed to UNEA-7 is to operationalize these high-level commitments into binding, systemic realities.

Reforming the Architecture of Governance

A central tenet of the youth strategy is the reform of environmental governance to address fragmentation. The current landscape is characterized by disjointed governance and a weak science-policy interface. Since its inception, UNEA has adopted [125 resolutions and decisions](#). The most recent session, [UNEA-6](#), adopted 15

resolutions in March 2024, yet the Declaration argues these have often been "too specific or disconnected," stretching limited resources.

To remedy this, the youth constituency proposes a "high-level task force" modeled on the Independent High Level Expert Group on Climate Finance. The objective is to enhance synergies between Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), suggesting the clustering of related MEAs such as the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm conventions to reduce duplication and lower implementation costs. Furthermore, the Declaration demands the institutionalization of the science-policy interface. It calls for scientific input to be embedded directly into UNEA negotiations, ensuring that resolutions are not just politically convenient but scientifically robust.

The Economic Imperative

Perhaps the most radical component of the youth agenda is its critique of the global economy. The Declaration asserts that the triple planetary crisis is "closely linked to the current global economic and financial architecture". It calls for a transition away from the "linear, extractive economic model" that drives biodiversity loss and pollution.

The policy recommendations here are specific and structural:

1. **IFA Reform:** A fundamental reform of the International Financial Architecture (IFA) to scale up concessional finance and restructure the mandates of institutions like the World Bank and IMF to reflect climate and nature considerations.
2. **Innovative Taxation:** The implementation of innovative revenue sources, including fossil fuel levies and financial transaction taxes, to ringfence funding for environmental action.
3. **Demand-Side Management:** A pivot toward demand-side solutions that curb overconsumption, including legally binding targets for absolute resource reduction in Advanced Economies (AEs).

Confronting Pollution

The weekend's proceedings heavily featured the [#YouthtoBEATPOLLUTION](#) campaign, emphasizing that pollution now causes one in six deaths globally. The youth position on pollution is absolute: the progress made in recent frameworks must be matched by a "legally binding, full-lifecycle global plastics treaty".

Crucially, the Declaration rejects downstream solutions as sufficient. It demands a cap on virgin plastic production and the elimination of toxic additives. This is paired with a call for a robust "polluter pays" framework, ensuring that those responsible

for contamination bear the full costs of remediation and community care. The youth also introduced the [Global Waste Management Outlook for Youth](#) during the assembly, a technical document aimed at democratizing knowledge on circularity and waste reduction.

Protecting Nature: The "Protect-Manage-Restore" Hierarchy

In addressing biodiversity, the youth delegation highlighted the gap between global commitments as the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) and local implementation. The Declaration proposes a legal "protect-manage-restore" hierarchy, prioritizing the conservation of intact ecosystems before restoration is even considered.

This pillar is deeply intertwined with human rights. The text explicitly calls for Indigenous peoples and local communities to be legally empowered as co-managers of ecosystems. It argues that Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) must be integrated into management strategies, moving beyond token consultation to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

From Stakeholders to Partners

The narrative emerging from Nairobi is one of maturation. Young people are no longer satisfied with being viewed as "future stakeholders"; they assert themselves as "present-day partners in decision-making and implementation". The *Global Youth Declaration 2025* serves as a litmus test for UNEA-7. Will Member States continue with fragmented, incremental resolutions, or will they engage with the systemic reforms proposed by their youngest constituents? As the delegates prepare for the negotiations in December, the youth have made their position clear: the time for "profound global uncertainty" must end, replaced by a renewed, science-based, and equitable multilateralism.