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International environmental policy and governance issues

Programme of work and budget and other administrative and budgetary issues

Information on the implementation of resolution 5/12 on environmental aspects of minerals and metals management: environmental knowledge gaps in relation to tailings management

Note by the secretariat

1. In its resolution 5/12 on the environmental aspects of minerals and metals management, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP to compile a report on knowledge gaps in relation to the environmental aspects of tailings management.[1]

2. The report draws on input from regional intergovernmental consultations on resolution 5/12 and the global intergovernmental meeting on minerals and metals held on 7 and 8 September 2023 in Geneva. It benefits from research, technical content and input gathered during two multi-stakeholder expert workshops held online on 14 November 2023 and organized by the Geological Survey of Finland. The report also builds on several other sources of information, including the compendium of papers prepared for the Global Tailings Review,[2] and considers the Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management.

3. Knowledge gaps in the report comprise aspects where further knowledge is required to move forward, as well as where knowledge exists but has not been effectively applied. The report considers the regulatory, social and operational dimensions of the environmental aspects of tailings management for both large-scale and artisanal mining, including chronic impacts of the prolonged storage of tailings.

* UNEP/EA.6/1.

[1] The report on knowledge gaps in relation to the environmental aspects of tailings management is available at https://www.greenpolicyplatform.org/guidance/knowledge-gaps-relation-environmental-aspects-tailings-management. The report has not been formally edited.

[2] B. Oberle, D. Brereton and A. Mihaylova (eds.), *Towards Zero Harm: A Compendium of Papers Prepared for the Global Tailings Review* (St. Gallen: Global Tailings Review, 2020). https://globaltailingsreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/GTR-TZH-compendium.pdf.

4. Billions of metric tons of mine tailings are produced globally each year, and the volume is rising. Tailings may contain toxic chemicals and other contaminants, which can remain hazardous for decades. Their inadequate management may cause pollution of rivers, water or soil, as well as negative impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems and health. Tailing facilities may also pose physical and stability risks if not properly managed.