

More than 80 NGOs from the entire UN ECE region met on September 22 and 23, 2001, to discuss the negotiations and the Draft Ministerial Declaration for the UN ECE Regional Meeting for the WSSD in Johannesburg 2002 and beyond.

The following document is the NGO statement, and represents the results of these two days of discussions:

Preamble.

“The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.” Rio Declaration, Principle 7.

Ten years after the Rio Earth Summit, unsustainable development continues unabated. Poverty is deepening, pressure on natural resources is increasing, human security is diminishing, and the environment deteriorates. As the UN ECE regional assessment report clearly shows, governments have failed to meet the obligations or fulfil the responsibilities which they committed themselves to at Rio. It is vital that the reasons for this lack of implementation are identified and addressed, as was agreed at CSD 10, and genuine commitment to action is made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The latest draft Ministerial Declaration does not indicate that these requirements will be met.

The NGOs believe that the underlying causes of the implementation failure are more fundamental than is currently recognized by governments. The overwhelming dominance and acceptance of an unsustainable development paradigm, lack of education and public awareness, and excessive corporate influence over government policy, has led to a situation where economic growth and trade liberalization over-ride social and environmental concerns. Eco-efficiency has been given insufficient priority and what progress has been made, has been more than offset by overall trends in production and consumption. It is evident that business-as-usual economic growth will not lead to sustainability.

The NGOs are deeply disappointed that the obstructive approach taken by certain states, has prevented agreements being reached on concrete and far-reaching commitments in the negotiations so far. We call on all Member States of the UN ECE to ensure that their Ministerial Statement contains clear targets and expresses their political will to implementation and action.

The NGOs therefore welcome the proposal for a Global Deal and look forward to working with states to further define this initiative. The objectives and responsibilities to be entailed in this Global Deal should be developed in partnership with states and civil society in all regions. We believe that in order to be effective, the Global Deal must include the following elements:

- Equity – Eradicating poverty through equitable and sustainable access to resources
- Rights – Securing environmental and social rights
- Limits – Reduction of resource use to within sustainable limits
- Justice – Recognition of ecological debts and cancellation of financial debts

- Democracy – Ensuring access to information and public participation
- Ethics – Rethinking the values and principles that guide human behaviour

The NGOs call on Heads of States to immediately declare their intention to attend the World Summit. We stress that a gender perspective should permeate all preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and that peace and human security are necessary preconditions for meeting the sustainability challenge.

The NGOs urge Governments to reintegrate the time-tables and targets identified in earlier draft ministerial statements, and address the following priority issues:

Governance and Rights

Despite promises made at the Earth Summit, strong governance structures to support sustainable development have not been created. Strengthening governance should be built on principles of accountability, transparency, subsidiarity and participation of civil society. In addition, the United Nations Environment Programme must be strengthened and its financing must be increased and stabilized.

Environmental and social rights.

Global sustainability requires recognition that human rights include the right to a favourable and healthy environment including social rights and equitable access to resources; the right of participation of members of the public in decision making; the right of access to information; and the right of access to justice.

We call on the WSSD

- to launch a negotiation process for a global convention, building on Rio principle 10, to implement these environmental rights, with participation of civil society in the negotiation process.
- to develop programmes to enhance the integration of environmental and human rights issues, as proposed by the consensus decision of the 56th meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights;

Integration of policy and law for sustainable development.

Sustainable development decision making must be integrated in all policy areas and at all levels, and made central to all environmental, social and economic planning and law. To rectify current imbalances, international sustainable development law must be strengthened and integrated into all national, regional, and global legal instruments.

Subsidiarity

Decisions should be made closest to those affected, wherever appropriate. It is our view that law and policy frameworks at higher levels of government should be better focussed to enable local action. This requires a strengthening of local authorities and decision making structures.

Poverty eradication

There has been too little progress on eradicating poverty since 1992. New issues have emerged, notably new forms of poverty in the CEE and NIS nations while poverty in the poorest nations world-wide has increased. The relationship between poverty and sustainable development is a complex one, but it is clear that poor people are more vulnerable to and affected by environmental degradation. Overconsumption by wealthy groups is often a cause of such degradation and can exacerbate poverty. In this context we recognise the power and potential of poor communities to contribute to more sustainable development.

We call on the WSSD to face up to this injustice. Priorities should include:

- review and reform of development finance, including programmes in NIS nations;
- develop a programme to fund and meet International Development Targets, including the 0.7% GDP ODA target and the Millennium Poverty Target;
- implement and expand programmes of debt relief and cancellation;
- reallocation of financial resources from military budgets to poverty eradication.

The idea that access to markets will **on its own** bring poor communities out of poverty is wrong. Involvement of the poor in community-focussed social and economic development has repeatedly been shown to be a highly effective way of tackling poverty; such approaches need to be supported by ensuring the poor to have access to and control of basic services, including clean water, shelter, education and health services; such access should also include effective involvement in decision-making on service provision and control of their own natural resource base. Finally, decision-making structures and methodologies at all levels need to ensure they are enabling the involvement of poor communities.

Globalisation

Worldwide concerns have been raised about the failure of Governments to challenge the damaging aspects of globalisation. The following commitments are necessary to steer globalisation trends in a more positive direction.

Corporate accountability

Governments, particularly in this region, are responsible for the framework within which corporations operate. While they represent notable steps forward, existing voluntary corporate social responsibility mechanisms are insufficient because they fail to raise the standards of all companies. The WSSD must:

- Initiate and complete by 2005 a negotiation on a global corporate accountability and liability convention that balances the power of corporations with citizens' and workplace rights and secures effective compliance with multi-lateral environmental and social agreements.

Trade justice

The international trading system must be reformed to support sustainable development and in particular MEAs, because at the moment it does not. Trade is not on its own going to secure sustainable development and must not be considered a superior objective. The WSSD must

- ensure a review (reported in 2003) of the trading regime with a view to supporting a healthier system that strengthens local economies, establishes fair trade with equity and benefit-sharing at heart, promotes sustainable consumption and which works to eradicate poverty. This must be acted upon before any new round of liberalisation is initiated.

International finance

Speculative financial flows and unsustainable investment patterns by the private and public sectors have contributed substantially to unsustainable trends - particularly in the South and countries in transition. The WSSD must:

- initiate negotiations towards development of mechanisms to ensure financial markets contribute to sustainable development, such as the Tobin tax;
- recognise controls on the movement of capital as a legitimate instrument to ensure sustainable development; and
- agree Global rules governing publicly financed investment, eg. international financial institutions and export credit agencies to ensure it is tested against sustainable development criteria.

Sustainable Production and Consumption

At Rio, world leaders agreed that the goal of sustainable production and consumption, and sustainable development in general, is to improve the quality of life for all. Changing production and consumption patterns to meet that goal was described as urgent, and the developed countries of the world agreed on their responsibility to take the lead.

Why have governments failed to take this lead? The obstacles include not only an outdated development model and influence by vested interests, but also promotion of consumerism and an antiquated concept of national security that prioritises military spending over quality of life.

Achieving sustainable production and consumption requires national, regional and global policies based on the following objectives:

- remaining within the limited carrying capacity of nature;
- equal opportunities for all people in the world related to consumption and access to sustainable livelihoods;
- maintain and improve the quality of biodiversity; and
- the right of people for a clean and healthy environment.

Given the inevitable insecurities related to these aims, the implementation of the precautionary principle is essential in all relevant policies.

A major step in taking this lead involves developing comprehensive policy frameworks on sustainable production and consumption. Establishing national policy frameworks and plans at

achieving sustainable production and consumption patterns, was agreed as an urgent commitment at Rio. Yet few nations have developed such a framework or plan. As a consequence, no country has successfully uncoupled economic growth from its ecological footprint; few have prioritised such an effort.

Urgent national and regional actions are needed:

- Abolish all environmentally perverse subsidies by 2005
- Implement environmental tax reforms and other economic instruments for environment based on the polluter pays principle, in a socially acceptable manner by 2005
- Greening the government procurement process.
- Promote informed responsible consumer choice and options.
- Establish strict liability for environmental damage in the entire region by 2005
- Reorient research, education, knowledge dissemination (including traditional knowledge) towards sustainable development.
- Ensure the decline of biodiversity stops not later than 2010.
- Ensure environmental healthy living standards for all, based on the "safe human exposure levels" agreed in WHO.
- Sustainable and GMO free agriculture, guaranteeing food safety and security and sustainable livelihoods.
- Energy policy aimed at drastic reduction of CO₂ emissions, including energy conservation and a 10% minimum of environmentally sound renewables by 2010.
- Stop transport growth by 2010 and promote a substantial modal shift towards trains, public transport and non-motorised modes.
- Chemical policies based on the principles of prevention and precaution and shifting the burden of proof, leading to the stop of the production and use of all hazardous substances by 2020.

International activities:

- Richer countries in the region need to assist the other countries in developing sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Establish open transfer of environmentally sound technologies between all countries

All ECE countries should ratify the following conventions and protocols by 2002: Kyoto on Climate Change, POPs, Cartagena on Biosafety, Basel Convention Protocol on Hazardous Waste Exports.

Need to follow up protocols on (more) POPs, Endocrine Disruptive Components, Climate Change, within the next 4 years.

In all these areas, we want, not only to see agreements in principle, we also want the UN ECE region to commit itself to concrete targets and timetables, as well as a transparent and effective monitoring and review arrangements. It is essential also to create the necessary trust for a Global Deal with countries of the South.