

Roundup

United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)
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Preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) to be held from 26 August to 4 September in Johannesburg (South Africa), will bring together United Nations Member States, non-governmental organizations, business and other Major Groups to focus on actions to achieve sustainable development and to strengthen the implementation of Agenda 21, adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). The Summit will take account of new emerging global trends and strive to build commitment at the highest levels of government and society for action to achieve sustainable development.

In preparation for the WSSD, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued a 63-page report, *Implementing Agenda 21*, (E/CN.17/2002/PC.2/7) which presents recent major economic, social and environmental trends, and assesses progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21. The report ends with a set of suggestions for the international community to redirect its efforts to move the sustainable development agenda forward.

MODEST PROGRESS

The report reveals that attempts to promote human development and to reverse environmental degradation have, in general, not been effective. "Some progress has been made in adopting measures to protect the environment. But the state of the world's environment is still fragile and conservation measures are far from satisfactory," the report notes. A lack of resources and political will, a fragmented and uncoordinated approach to sustainable development, and continued wasteful patterns of production and consumption combined have

thwarted efforts to implement sustainable development. The world has also changed since UNCED, with recent trends such as globalization, the information and communications revolution, and the spread of HIV/AIDS all posing new challenges to the international community.

IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

The report assesses progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21 under three broad themes: combating poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods; sustainable consumption and production; and protecting the integrity of life-support ecosystems.

Combating Poverty and Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods

The report highlights the links between sustainable development and rural and urban poverty, agriculture, demographic dynamics, health and education. During the 1990s progress was made in health care, child and maternal mortality, hunger reduction, access to education and access to safe water and sanitation. However, not as much progress was made in reducing poverty globally. The report states that people in poverty have been disproportionately affected by environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters and disease. The struggle against poverty is the shared responsibility of all, the report argues and refers to the Millennium Declaration in which world leaders committed themselves to a number of poverty-related goals. These included to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day and to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water. As a practical approach to combat poverty and promote sustainable livelihoods, the report

environment should not be seen as a case of a "Northern agenda" imposed on the South. Of the 70 or so national constitutions that contain provisions on the right to a healthy environment, it was emphasized, almost all are in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

A representative of the Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED) presented the outcome of a skills-share meeting held on 1 December in London, organized in cooperation with the UK-based NGO Capacity Global. The declaration that emerged from the meeting entitled "Towards Environmental and Human Rights" will serve as a basis for campaigns in the build-up to WSSD. The declaration reaffirms that "the right to a safe and healthy environment and a right to an adequate standard of living free from poverty are fundamental human rights reflected in many international agreements." The text reaffirms "the primacy of human rights prerogatives over commercial and financial interests" and notes with concern that "a major obstacle to effective governance is the lack of coherence between national ministries (such as financial and environmental ministries) and their respective representation in multilateral bodies." It calls on governments assembling at WSSD, among others to:

- Pursue the legal definition and interpretation of substantive environmental human rights and develop respective binding global instruments;
- Promote synergies between human rights and environmental provisions through improved cooperation between UNEP and OHCHR and other relevant bodies, with a view to develop effective and transparent procedures to monitor and report on the compliance with established international environment and human rights obligations, and develop effective means for access to justice and redress; and
- Apply the UN Charter and human rights provisions related to the duty of international cooperation in the protection and promotion of all human rights to hold the governments of major industrialized countries and the governing bodies of international trade and financial institutions accountable for breaches in human rights obligations resulting from their economic policy and rule-making decisions or omissions.

At its 58th session on 18 March-26 April 2002, the Commission on Human Rights will review the outcome of the 16 January expert seminar and decide

on a formal contribution to the WSSD preparatory process. In the meantime, a number of developing and developed country delegates said they would bring some of the ideas and suggestions heard during the seminar to the WSSD preparatory process in New York.

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This edition of NGLS Roundup was prepared by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS). The NGLS Roundup is produced for NGOs and others interested in the institutions, policies and activities of the UN system and is not an official record. For more information or additional copies write to: NGLS, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland, fax +41-22/917 0432, e-mail <npls@unctad.org> or NGLS, Room DC1-1106, United Nations, New York NY 10017, USA, fax +1-212/963 8712, e-mail <npls@un.org>. The text of this NGLS Roundup and other NGLS publications are also available online (website: www.unsystem.org/npls).

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