



UNITED NATIONS NON-GOVERNMENTAL LIAISON SERVICE/NGLS

## *UN General Assembly Special Session to Review Agenda 21*

### OVERVIEW

On 23-27 July 1997 the United Nations held its 19th General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) at UN headquarters in New York to review implementation of Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development adopted five years ago in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), known as the Earth Summit.

Heads of state and government, ministers and other high-level officials, and for the first time, representatives of the nine Major Groups addressed the GA plenary while negotiations continued among UN member states to elaborate a Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. In addition to the formal inter-governmental negotiations, NGOs and Major Groups worked in caucuses to develop their positions and strategies, and panels and presentations were convened to explore the themes of sustainable development and Agenda 21.

At 1:15 in the morning of Saturday 28 June, the session adopted a Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 after a week of intense activity and months of difficult intergovernmental negotiations. Many were disappointed because they said the UNGASS results do not measure up to the requirements for achieving sustainable development, although neither a week nor six months of negotiations could compensate for weaknesses in implementation during the five years since commitments were made at the Earth Summit.

A majority of the 53 heads of state and government who addressed the plenary acknowledged that more action was needed to implement Agenda 21, despite growing public awareness and the establishment of ministries of environment or national bodies for sustainable development. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of Brazil, noted that, "In the five years since the Rio conference, changes in global politics and economics have not brought commensurate progress against poverty and the

predatory use of natural resources. Sustainable development must be re-established as a priority in international relations."

Representatives of developing countries emphasized hindrances such as the lack of international cooperation and backsliding on financial commitments. Julia Carabias, Mexican Minister for the Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries, noted that the polarization between the developed and developing countries remains five years after Rio. "The first group," she said, "postpones binding commitments; the second feels a growing tension between the transformation required by sustainable development and the limited capacity to assume it." Developing countries said foreign direct investment (FDI), while important, does not finance sustainable development and cannot serve as a substitute for official development assistance (ODA). The Ambassador of Tanzania, on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries (G-77), said FDI was only going to about 12 of the newly industrialized countries: "While FDI is increasing for 12 countries, ODA is decreasing for 120 countries. It is not possible for FDI to replace ODA."

Many industrialized countries, especially members of the European Union (EU), acknowledged the importance of doing more to assist poorer countries. "The downward trend in ODA must be reversed," said Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of Italy. British Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed concern about the fall in aid flows since 1992. "My government," he said, "supports the UN target [of 0.7% gross national product for ODA]...We are committed to improving further the quality of our assistance, reversing the decline in Britain's development assistance, and refocusing our efforts on combating poverty." The EU accepted the importance of reducing unsustainable consumption and production patterns in EU countries. Netherlands Prime Minister Wim Kok, speaking on behalf of the EU and other countries said, "Our search for sustainable development implies a change in patterns of production and consumption. Within Europe, we will discourage the inefficient use of scarce raw materials and

energy....Conspicuous and wasteful consumption by the affluent is a stress on resources and an injustice to the poor."

Ambassador Razali Ismail (Malaysia), President of the GA 51st session and of UNGASS, underscored the need for a sober assessment and honest acknowledgment that "progress to operationalize sustainable development remains insufficient." He said lack of agreement in many areas points to "the enormous difficulties of overcoming short-term and vested interests that would enable concrete commitments to specific targets and to global programmes." UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan identified major issues that require attention, including clean water, fish stocks, forests, climate change and desertification, and noted the importance of the reform process underway at the UN in effectively implementing Agenda 21. He said Agenda 21 was unprecedented and that "we must act in unprecedented ways to implement it."

The negotiations and difficulty of reaching meaningful results revealed many deep-seated differences among member states. Prime Minister Blair's references to the third Conference of the Parties (COP-3) to the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), to be held from

#### ***SOME QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE SPECIAL SESSION***

*In addition to providing a global forum for actors to examine issues of sustainable development, the special session helped to set the stage for the third Conference of the Parties (COP-3) in Kyoto and to stimulate national measures and preparations to strengthen political will and action on climate change. The session also provided the occasion for a clear statement on the importance of reversing the decline in official development assistance (ODA). Governments at the highest political level reminded each other of the imperatives of addressing poverty, the uneven results of globalization, and the fact that environment and development cannot be considered separately but are inextricably linked.*

*The session raised to the fore questions about whose responsibility it is to implement agreements reached at the Earth Summit and how to deal with difficult questions on which there is no international consensus.*

*"The United Nations must deal with the hard-core issues of economics and the driving forces of unsustainability, such as financial resources and their availability, and the implications of an unequal playing field and their effect on implementation of global programmes," said GA President Razali Ismail. "The United Nations cannot be allowed to deal only with the so-called soft issues. The political and financial marginalization of the United Nations will not only weaken its ability to ensure implementation of the Rio commitments, but those of the other summits too."*

1-12 December in Kyoto (Japan), illustrated the EU's disagreement with the United States on climate change and emissions. "At Kyoto," he said, "industrialized countries must agree legally-binding targets for significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions during the first decade of the next century. The biggest responsibility falls on those countries with the biggest emissions. We in Europe have put our cards on the table. It is time for the special pleading to stop and for others to follow suit." United States President Bill Clinton, speaking a few days later, acknowledged his country's impact on resource use: "Here in the United States, we must do better. With 4% of the world's population, we produce 20% of its greenhouse gases. Frankly, our record since Rio is not sufficient....We will bring to the Kyoto conference in December a strong American commitment to realistic and binding limits that will significantly reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases."

Member states also expressed disagreement on the role of the private sector and foreign direct investment. Spanish President José María Aznar said the participation of the private sector is fundamental: "It has and receives a great part of the new technologies. Direct foreign investment is a powerful tool for transformation. This requires a flexible multilateral framework, and in the receiving countries an adequate body of law and mobilization of internal resources. Development cooperation is an effective supplementary tool to the former." Robert Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe and a key figure within the G-77, expressed concern about such perspectives and said, "The World Trade Organization has assisted transnational corporations with global economic opportunities but has not inculcated in them responsibilities on the environment, as we are witnessing cut-throat competition and corporate avarice undermining the whole process of sustainable development. This special session should resolve to arrest this trend and ensure that such transnational corporations comply with laid down international norms on the environment and sustainable development."

GA President Razali challenged governments of the North and South to tackle what he called the real obstacles to implementing Agenda 21. "Since Rio we have seen a further continuation of North-South trench politics," he said. "Governments and NGOs from the developed world vigorously promote environmental protection, without shouldering the greater burden of adjustment on consumption and production patterns....Developing countries continue to emphasize their right to development, without placing sufficient stress on social equity and transparent participatory decision-making. Neither approach bodes well for the future."

It became clear that substantial agreement could not be reached on all items. However at the urging of President Razali and some member states and NGOs, delegates did not renegotiate Agenda 21 or succumb to a "fudging" of responsibilities. "The issues of sustainable development are too critical to be blurred over as a political expedience," said President Razali, who felt an honest appraisal was a result in itself.

Member states, while failing to reach new agreements on a number of issues, did confirm the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) as the central forum for reviewing progress and generating momentum for further implementation of Agenda 21 and other commitments made at UNCED. Member states also outlined the commission's programme of work for the period 1998-2002.

Annual themes for the next four sessions of the CSD will be consumption and production patterns, and poverty. The sectoral theme for the 1998 session will be strategic approaches to freshwater management; cross-sectoral themes will be transfer of technology, capacity building, education, science and awareness-raising; and the economic sector/major group will be industry. Outstanding chapters of the programme of action for the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States will also be reviewed. In 1999 the commission will consider oceans and seas, consumption and production patterns, and tourism. In the year 2000, it will consider the sectoral theme of integrated planning and management of land resources, and the cross-sectoral themes of financial resources, trade and investment, and economic growth. The economic sector/major group will be agriculture. A Day of Indigenous People will also be held during the year 2000. Sectoral themes for 2001 will be atmosphere, energy and transport. Cross-sectoral themes will be international cooperation for an enabling environment, and information for decision making and participation. In 2002, the CSD will hold a comprehensive review of the implementation of Agenda 21 and related issues.

The special session continued the tradition of UNCED and the CSD by using innovative approaches for the participation of NGOs and Major Groups. Agenda 21 identified Major Group categories as business and industry, children/youth, farmers, indigenous people and communities, local authorities, NGOs, scientific and technological community, women, and workers and trade unions. The CSD process developed various approaches, such as panels to present issues and side events, most involving Major Group representatives. The fifth session of the CSD, held from 11-18 April, made Major Group dialogue sessions an integral part of its official proceedings (see *E&D File*, Vol. III, No. 14). At UNGASS 12 representatives of the nine Major Groups addressed the special session plenary for the first time in UN history (Major Group speeches available online at [gopher://gopher.un.org:70/11/ga/docs/S-19](http://gopher://gopher.un.org:70/11/ga/docs/S-19)).



The subject of forests, which was intensely debated at the Earth Summit and resulted in a Statement of Forest Principles, was also discussed at the special session in 1997. The CSD established an Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) in 1995 to concentrate multilateral discussion of a range of forest issues within one forum. The

*At the special session British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President Bill Clinton, among others, acknowledged the importance of NGO involvement in helping to mobilize public support for far-reaching policy changes on climate change. President Clinton told the plenary that, "In the United States, in order to do our part, we must first convince the American people and the Congress that the climate change problem is real and imminent."*

most controversial item the IPF addressed was whether to recommend a convention or a legally-binding instrument on forests.

A number of NGOs were against establishing a legally-binding instrument such as a Convention on Forests; they saw no reason to develop a convention until there is clear understanding of what it would achieve. Instead, they preferred to see the 130 measures already suggested by the IPF implemented and to consider further ways to enforce deforestation regulations, rather than replacing them with potentially more industry-friendly regulations. Others felt the opportunity for committing to legally-binding actions on sustainable management and use of forests had been missed; they said that although the two-year IPF process was useful in clarifying key issues, more concrete action is needed now. Reasons cited by many NGOs that opposed the establishment of a convention included the likelihood that business interests might have undue weight in forging an accord.

A consensus, which was reached after intense negotiations prior to and during the special session, recommended that the intergovernmental policy dialogue on forests be continued through establishment of an ad hoc open-ended Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. The forum, under the aegis of the CSD, is to work in an open, transparent and participatory manner with a focused and time-limited mandate to identify the possible elements of, and work toward a consensus for international arrangements and mechanisms. The programme states that forests are an integral part of sustainable development and are essential to many indigenous people and other forest-dependent people with traditional lifestyles, as well as forest owners and local communities.



The most contentious issue related to climate change was the question of setting precise targets for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions below their 1990 level in a specified time period. UNGASS provided an important opportunity to raise the political profile of current negotiations to strengthen the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which opened for signature in 1992, and to push industrialized countries to commit to specific targets and timetables for greenhouse gas emission reductions.

Member states accepted scientific evidence that global warming caused by human activity is a clear danger, and they expressed a willingness to address the issue at COP-3.

There was widespread agreement that it will be necessary to consider legally-binding targets for the developed countries and economies in transition, which will result in significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions within time-frames such as the years 2005, 2010 and 2020.

The EU has already made firm commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15% from 1990 levels by the year 2010. Oil producing countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Nigeria and Venezuela insisted that the economic effect of response measures on developing countries be taken into account. A 20% carbon dioxide reduction target by the year 2005 was demanded by the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). The alliance includes 38 states most vulnerable to the rise in sea level and increased storm severity that would result from significant climate change. The United States emphasized emission budgets, the participation of all countries, and with support from Australia the need for flexibility in implementation. Many countries expressed frustration that the US, which produces 20% of global greenhouse gases, has not committed to binding limits on the production of carbon dioxide and other compounds.

The US and Japan indicated concern that the EU will set itself an emissions target for the union as a whole, rather than on individual states, and will trade emission targets among its members. Friends of the Earth (FoE) noted that the EU's Structural Funds, which account for a quarter of the EU budget, have allowed some richer European countries to claim lower emissions by setting up renewable energy projects in Spain, Greece and Portugal. FoE and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), who said the EU's greenhouse gas reduction target is too small, are calling for the protocol to be decided at Kyoto to include a target of 20% reduction by the year 2005. Several environmental groups, including Greenpeace and FoE, called for research and development funds as well as energy development subsidies to be transferred from nuclear power and fossil fuel to renewable energy efficiency programmes. "It is time to start funding the solution, not the problem," said a Greenpeace representative.

The EU opposed a US-proposed joint implementation plan to barter greenhouse gas emissions for technology transfers to the developing world. The plan aims to set up a compact between developing countries and industrialized countries that are exceeding internationally-agreed quotas on greenhouse gas emissions. Under the

plan's terms, an industrialized country setting up an energy efficient green power project in a developing country could claim the resulting reduced greenhouse gas emissions for itself. The EU does not oppose technology transfers but objects to their use as a bargaining tool. Many developing countries, including China and India, felt that the proposal was unworkable and unethical; they argued that industrialized countries should already be transferring technology. Friends of the Earth UK agreed since it said that the concept of joint implementation represents a new form of "environmental colonialism." In addition Friends of the Earth International expressed concern about rapid emissions growth from developing countries, especially China and India. According to a European Commission green paper, emissions from developing countries are expected to grow by 24% between 1990 and 2010, accounting for more than half the global total by the year 2010.



Ten paragraphs in the programme deal with the role of financial resources and mechanisms in implementing Agenda 21. These include ODA; the role of multilateral financial institutions; donor commitments to funding Global Environment Facility (GEF) operations; resources for operational activities of the UN system; mobilizing higher levels of foreign private investment in developing countries; efforts to resolve the external debt problems of heavily-indebted countries; and the role of the UN Secretariat, international financial institutions (IFIs) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in considering the interrelationship between indebtedness and sustainable development for developing countries.

On the question of ODA, the programme calls on developed countries to fulfil their commitments to reach 0.7% of GNP for ODA as soon as possible and to reverse downward trends in the ratio of ODA to GNP. According to the programme, ODA is essential for the prompt and effective implementation of Agenda 21. "ODA plays a significant role in capacity-building, infrastructure, combating poverty, and environmental protection in developing countries, and a crucial role in the least developed countries," it said. "ODA can play an important complementary and catalytic role in encouraging private investment and, where appropriate, all aspects of country-driven capacity building and strengthening."

The EU, with support from some NGOs, tabled a proposal for an international tax on airline fuel as a means to raise money for sustainable development and to establish a link in the public mind between transport options and sustainable development, particularly environmental protection. However, agreement on the issue could not be reached, and governments decided to call for a continuation of studies in the appropriate fora, including the International Civil Aviation Organization, on use of economic instruments for the mitigation of the negative

*"The fight against poverty must be placed on top of our agenda. Sustainable development will not be achieved until all human resources are mobilized. Empowering women is a part of this."*

Poul Nurup Rasmussen, Prime Minister of Denmark

environmental impact of aviation. The EU may implement such a tax within its own borders.

Many countries noted that levels of FDI in the developing world far surpass ODA and acknowledged that FDI flows are concentrated in selected developing countries, which leaves the least developed countries heavily dependent upon ODA.

Some NGOs questioned why many Northern governments do not discuss time-bound commitments for reaching the 0.7% GNP target for ODA, while the G-77 is expected to agree with time-bound commitments on substantive issues. Many NGOs felt that the special session should broaden Agenda 21 to encompass issues such as globalization and the relationship between trade and environment, corporate responsibility, monitoring corporate activities, and identifying issues that private sector growth is unlikely to solve.



The increase in the number of people living in absolute poverty since the Earth Summit, particularly in developing countries, was also highlighted. Member states agreed that poverty eradication should be "an overriding theme of sustainable development for the coming years." They called for the timely and full implementation of all relevant commitments and targets agreed upon since the Earth Summit, including those related to the UN system and the international financial institutions. The connection between environmental degradation and poverty-related behaviours such as searches for food, fuel, migration and urbanization were also underscored in the course of the discussion. Member states called upon interested donors and recipients to work together to allocate increased shares of ODA to poverty eradication and to use the 20/20 initiative, among other things. Full implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) was also deemed essential, with priority actions including improving access to sustainable livelihoods. The programme further stresses that empowerment of women is a critical factor for the eradication of poverty.



Many speakers, including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, expressed fear that conflicts over water rights could lead to regional political disputes and even wars in the next century. French President Jacques Chirac noted that water consumption doubles every two years and increases twice as fast as the population. "Fresh water," he said, "is becoming increasingly scarce. A lack of water, a source of life, can be a source of conflict. Each year, 25 million human beings die of diseases related to unclean water."

*"There is a liquid more precious than oil. Water."*

Rapid urbanization and inadequate infrastructure mean up to one-third of the world's people do not have access to clean water or modern sanitation facilities. Deforestation, desertification and overly-intense irrigation are taxing groundwater supplies and threatening water resources. Several UN agencies warned that a global water crisis could take place by the year 2025 if water use and management patterns are not altered. The programme stresses the need to strengthen regional and international cooperation for technological transfers and financing of integrated water resource programmes and projects, in particular those designed to increase access to safe water supply and sanitation. The text also emphasizes the importance of an enabling national and international environment that encourages investment from public and private sources to improve water supply and sanitation services, especially in fast growing urban and peri-urban areas, as well as in poor rural communities in developing countries.



The programme stresses the need for sustainable patterns of production, distribution and use of energy. It also emphasizes the importance of evolving commitments for the transfer of relevant technology, including time-bound commitments to developing countries and economies in transition to enable them to increase use of renewable energy sources and cleaner fossil fuels and to improve efficiency in energy production, distribution and use. To advance this work at the intergovernmental level the CSD will discuss energy issues at its ninth session. The text also recognizes the need to gradually reduce and eliminate subsidies for energy production and consumption that inhibit sustainable development, which is a policy NGOs have long advocated. However, a provision that such policies take into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries, particularly least developed countries (LDCs), was insisted upon by mainly oil producing countries.



**Women**

Professor Wangari Maathai of the Green Belt Movement of Kenya and the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), addressed the GA on behalf of women as a Major Group. She said women are not a special interest group but represent over 50% of the world's human population. She also reviewed the 12-point Women's Caucus agenda, which reflects women's concerns about poverty; biodiversity; globalization; depletion of water, air, forests and soil;

and unsustainable production and consumption patterns. As a response to the government impasse on commitment to financial resources for the implementation of Agenda 21, she raised the issue of militarism and noted that it had been consistently left out of official discussions, including the Earth Summit and UNGASS. Global militarism uses billions of dollars of government resources and creates millions of refugees, she said, and degrades the environment with land mines, depleted uranium weapons, nuclear testing and toxic pollution. These views reflected a concern expressed by many NGOs.

Prof. Maathai also expressed dismay that although a number of governments stated that sustainable development could not be realized without the empowerment of all women in society and their full participation in decision making, very few women were representing their countries during the special session.

### ***Indigenous Peoples***

Joji Carino of the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests, and Andrea Carmen, Executive Director of the International Indian Treaty Council, addressed the special session on behalf of indigenous peoples as a Major Group. Ms. Carino, who noted the link between sustainable development and environment, cited the indigenous perspective that "today the imbalance in our human relations is directly feeding the imbalance in our relations with the Earth." Andrea Carmen noted that indigenous peoples "have always been in the forefront of this struggle to protect the sacred, interconnected web of life we are now calling biological diversity," and cited as a critical component of Agenda 21 and the Convention on biological diversity (CBD) a commitment by the states parties to work in partnership with indigenous peoples. Ms. Carino questioned whether governments are prepared to recognize indigenous peoples' full human rights and self-determination as an integral component of sustainable development, and she suggested that a criterion for measuring progress in implementation of Agenda 21 be actions taken to secure indigenous peoples' rights and well-being.

Both speakers called on the GA to ratify the Draft Declaration On Indigenous Peoples, establish a permanent forum with the UN for indigenous peoples, and take action under the CBD to protect indigenous peoples from bio-piracy, gene prospecting and intellectual property theft. They underscored what they described as the devastating effects of unsustainable mining, oil drilling and other resource extraction, which they said have not been addressed in Agenda 21 or the CSD.

Ms. Carmen said Western intellectual property rights systems and some international trade agreements defy basic principles that emerged from the Earth Summit and contain no provisions for safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples. She said these include agreements being codified globally through the World Intellectual Property Organization, Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights

(TRIPS) imposed by the Uruguay Round and regional trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). "Indigenous peoples," she said, "see a grave danger in putting the world's food supplies in the hands of companies intent on producing profitable new bio-engineered strains, while unsustainable practices are reducing the variety of plant and animal species found in their natural habitats." She said a critical weakness in Agenda 21 and the CBD is "the lack of effective mechanisms to oversee and control the impacts of globalization, including activities of multi-national corporations, international financial institutions, multi-national military operations, the Multilateral Investment Agreement (MAI) and international trade agreement bodies."

### ***NGOs***

Dr. Thilo Bode, Executive Director of Greenpeace International, said governments have failed to act to implement Agenda 21, despite the alarm that has been raised. "Business as usual is no longer an option," he said. "Whatever promises you made at Rio, the condition of the world has worsened, in many cases at a faster rate than five years ago....Glaciers are melting, forests are retreating, we are changing the seasons, we are running out of fish in the sea, we are poisoning our children with persistent organic pollutants and are accumulating nuclear waste to the peril of future generations. As carbon emissions increase, we find ourselves running out of sky." He called upon governments to agree that the special session would mark the beginning of the phase-out of fossil fuels and their replacement with renewable energy. He also urged governments to seriously consider the NGO Recommendations for Actions and Commitments at Earth Summit II [UNGASS] on important sectoral and cross-sectoral issues.

Martin Khor, Director of Third World Network, observed that the spirit of the Earth Summit "seems to have vanished." He noted what he called the unfulfilled promises of Agenda 21 commitments five years later and cited the decline in ODA and the new intellectual property rights agreement at the WTO. He said the agreement is creating new barriers to the South's access to environmentally-sound technology and is accelerating the practice of bio-piracy. He underscored NGO concerns that "the 1994 Marrakesh Agreements of the WTO appear to be overriding the 1992 Rio agreements of UNCED, and the WTO is now institutionalizing globalization." Mr. Khor said that due to this private sector approach, the role of the UN in social, economic and environmental issues is being steadily eroded and instead transferred to the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) and the WTO, which represent a different model of international cooperation. He called on political leaders to "take control of the globalization process and channel it towards the goals of sustainability" as a first priority.

He praised the diverse NGO community for going ahead with implementation of Agenda 21 despite what he described as a lack of political will by governments. He

also praised local communities and environmental activists who are battling toxic dumps and hazardous industries located in their neighbourhoods; indigenous peoples "who are desperately guarding, sometimes with their very lives, the remainder of the world's rainforests and other ecosystems;" farmers who are switching to organic farming despite lack of support; consumer and consumer movements fighting against unhealthy products and unsustainable consumption patterns; campaigners and scientists who are "exposing the dark side of genetic engineering...[and] waging a campaign against the patenting of life and the cloning of nature's creation;" and women who "are all too often in the forefront of the communities' fight for survival."

#### **Scientific and Technological Community**

Yolanda Kakabadse, President of The World Conservation Union, addressed the plenary on behalf of the scientific and technological community as a Major Group. She discussed the evidence of linkages between health, human well-being and environmental quality and noted that "as a result of unchecked environmental degradation, we anticipate an increasing number of human health crises involving the spread of infectious diseases, growth in malnutrition and increasing health problems associated with global atmospheric change." She called for investment in the development of scientific capacity and in improving access to technology. While she noted that some benefits are derived from research undertaken for and by industry, she called for independent, objective scientific research and assessment. "We cannot depend upon private sector funding for scientific support," she said. "Research for sustainable development should be supported both through direct investment and through policies which provide incentives, such as tax benefits and subsidies."

Ms. Kakabadse also highlighted the weakness of global environmental institutions as a major constraint that should be taken into account when restructuring the UN system. She said concerns of the scientific and technological communities include the introduction of alien and genetically-modified organisms into the environment; the need to target concentration levels of greenhouse gases and to adopt concrete emission reduction targets; and the global contamination from toxic chemicals used in industry and agriculture. She concluded by calling for the elimination of persistent organic pollutants as a top priority, as specified in the 19th UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council.

#### **Youth**

Sheku Syl Kamara, representative of Peace Child Sierra Leone, addressed the plenary on behalf of the world's youth as a Major Group. He emphasized education, funding and partnerships and described a failed effort on the part of his group to raise funds to bring together youth and political leaders for a peace conference. He called upon governments to commit financial support to youth initiatives as promised in Agenda 21. He noted that young people need to be educated about the principles of sustainable development so that it does not become a

*"All the 288 municipalities in Sweden are working on local Agenda 21 plans."*

Pierre Schori, Deputy Foreign Minister and Minister for International Development Cooperation, Sweden

"forgotten priority" in the coming years. "If we are going to learn how to sustain life on this planet," he said, "you have to make education on sustainability a central concept of school curricula." He cited the grinding poverty that youth in countries such as his own have to cope with as a major cause of emigration to the North and urged governments to place sustainable development at the heart of their policies to support youth initiatives that will encourage young people to stay in their countries and generate home-grown prosperity. "The gross inequality in the distribution of the resources of the Third World," he added, "has resulted in the destruction of the environment—the last means of survival of the absolute poor."

#### **Workers and Trade Unions**

Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the International Conference of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), addressed the plenary on behalf of workers and trade unions. He noted that the trade union movement has always worked to attain sustainable development and that unions, along with governments and employers, are in a position to mobilize millions of workers worldwide to effect significant shifts away from unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Mr. Jordan said trade unions can also be instrumental in breaking down "the barrier of fear caused by concern over job losses due to environmental transition."

He urged governments to ensure the workplace is at the centre of the sustainable development agenda; recognize trade unions for their strategic position and capacity to contribute to the search for solutions; promote partnership among employers, unions and governments; link national reporting and monitoring systems to workplace activities; make compulsory eco-management and workplace audit practices; utilize codes of conduct where legal measures are not yet in place; integrate employment and social justice perspectives; and make the International Labour Organization (ILO), through its labour standards and reporting mechanisms, central to implementation plans. He acknowledged that the trade union movement recognizes that drastic measures to deal with climate change could have unprecedented impact on workers in the coal, oil, gas, forestry, transportation and fishing industries, as well as throughout manufacturing and service industries. "We also know," he said, "that without equally dramatic action, the impact on workers and their families of massive climate change could be catastrophic." He stated that many workers have already been displaced by climate-based changes, particularly in developing countries, and he underscored the need for a global climate policy that will "ensure the rights of these people to further economic development" and "be equitable if it is to enjoy global support."

### **Local Authorities**

Councillor Collin Matjila, President of the South Africa Local Government Association, addressed the plenary on behalf of the World Assembly of Cities and Local Authorities Coordination and the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives. He noted that governments and the private sector rely heavily on local government for the day-to-day viability of key areas such as waste and freshwater management. He said that although little attention is paid to local government, more than 2000 local governments in 64 countries have begun work with their communities to implement every aspect of Agenda 21. Mr. Matjila underscored the participatory planning process of local Agenda 21s, which he said are working to involve all sectors of the community as partners, especially women and youth. He said many local governments have taken the issue of climate change seriously and have implemented the convention by setting and achieving concrete targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions. He cited the importance of Habitat II in 1996 and urged governments to build upon its precedent, when local governments were invited for the first time in UN history to participate in official deliberations. Mr. Matjila noted that more than 70 countries are now engaged in a formal process of decentralization, which he said reflects the "global reality of cooperative governance." He said the UN should find ways to institutionalize in its deliberations recognition and involvement of local government, and the international community should ensure that local Agenda 21 and similar sustainable development efforts are protected under international trade agreements. Finally, he said he supports proposals to review subsidies and identify economic instruments that might contribute to sustainable development.

### **Farmers**

Denise O'Brien, a US farmer and representative of the World Sustainable Agriculture Association, addressed the plenary on behalf of the world's farmers. She said that "the basis for food production on small and medium-sized farms is eroding, as is the rural society that food producers have sustained." Ms. O'Brien reminded governments of the NGO Sustainable Agriculture Treaty drafted by farmers at the Earth Summit, which says, "It is necessary to break with the dominant predatory model of agriculture in favour of new patterns of sustainability which are equitable and participatory, to guarantee the full control of the means of production and natural resources in the hands of the people who work the land, insuring them a permanent source of income and high levels of productivity."

Ms. O'Brien cited the shared experiences of farmers who met at the 1996 World Food Summit, where women farmers issued a statement declaring the need to, among other things, democratize access to resources, especially land, water, seed and intellectual property; promote sustainable agriculture and common-based resource management; establish local, people-based trade systems and infrastructure; empower women through equal representation in decision-making bodies at local, regional,

national and global levels as well as access to credit and other financial support; and concession of the right of indigenous peoples to their ancestral land. She also highlighted the shared experiences of *La Via Campesina*, a growing international farmer, peasant, farm worker and indigenous peoples' movement. The group, which met in April 1996 in Mexico, asserted that "each nation should declare that access to food is a constitutional right and guarantee the development of the primary sector to ensure the concrete realization of this fundamental right."

Ms. O'Brien underscored farmers' concerns about sustainability of the industrial model of agriculture, which she said has caused social, economic and environmental devastation in rural areas. She noted transition efforts to more ecological production methods; farmers have been supported in this transition with projects by several governments such as Denmark, Germany and Sweden's Organic Transition Payments Initiatives, which have been extended to farmers in 15 EU countries. Ms. O'Brien also emphasized the problem of transnational corporate resistance to the use of sustainable development principles. "Farmers who work the land must have the right to practice sustainable management of natural resources and to preserve biological diversity," she said. "Genetic resources are the result of a millennia of evolution and belong to all humanity. Farming communities must have the right to freely use and protect the diverse genetic resources, including seeds, which have been developed by them throughout history."

### **Business and Industry**

David Kerr, Chair and Chief Executive Officer of Noranda, and Eugenio Clariond Reyes of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), addressed the plenary on behalf of business and industry. "The responsibility of securing sustainable development," Mr. Reyes said, "has to be also the job of government's economic authorities." He said that until now environmental ministries have had responsibility for implementing Agenda 21, and economic, fiscal and trade instruments have been in the hands of financial ministries or other areas of government that generally exclude environmental authorities. Mr. Reyes, who emphasized the development of "eco-efficiency" in the business world, said it not only makes sense in terms of the environment but in terms of business because "competitiveness relies on resource productivity." He also underscored the importance of implementing the ISO 14,000, which is the International Standards Office list of basic, voluntary industrial standards from an environmental perspective.

Mr. Kerr praised the progress he said business has made in the past five years in implementing Agenda 21. He noted that "business, through free trade, is spreading technologies, skills and processes required for development, and given the right global frameworks, for more sustainable development." He said a business that is not profitable over time ceases to exist and cannot contribute on any issues. "So in this sense," he

observed, "competitiveness in the marketplace must be a first concern of any business." It is for this reason, he said, that businesses are in fact taking an interest in sustainable development: environmental regulations are getting tougher; cutting waste and using natural resources more effectively cuts costs; self-regulation and pacts with governments are preferable to creating new environmental laws; banks are scrutinizing environmental records of companies since they are concerned about legal liabilities due to pollution clean-up bills; and the public is using its buying power to encourage business toward environmental and social responsibilities.

He called on governments to implement certain conditions to enable the business community to contribute to sustainable development, such as free and open markets; stable and predictable trade rules; international standards of quality and environmental performance to avoid barriers to trade; policies to encourage the rapid dissemination of technology to overcome many social and environmental problems; and economic instruments that motivate and encourage actions toward the goals of sustainable development.



The Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 is arranged in four sections and an annex containing the work programme of the CSD from 1998-2002.

**Section A: Statement of Commitment**

Efforts to negotiate and agree on an ambitious political statement were abandoned in favour of a simple and uncontroversial Statement of Commitment as a preamble to the programme. It contains six paragraphs reaffirming that Agenda 21 remains the fundamental programme of action for achieving sustainable development. It also reaffirms all the principles contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the Forest Principles, and it expresses conviction that the achievement of sustainable development requires integration of economic, environmental and social components. While the statement highlights the purpose of UNGASS to accelerate implementation of Agenda 21, it expresses concern that the "overall trends for sustainable development are worse today than they were in 1992." Therefore, member states committed themselves to ensuring that the next comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in the year 2002 demonstrates "greater measurable progress in achieving sustainable development."

**Section B: Assessment of Progress Made Since UNCED**

The 15-paragraph section, which assesses progress made since UNCED, was fully agreed by governments in negotiations prior to UNGASS. The section addresses the process of globalization that has taken place in the last five years and underscores the impact on sustainable development of world trade, foreign direct investment

and capital markets. It notes that few developing countries have been able to take advantage of such trends and states that income inequality among and within countries has increased. It cites UNEP's Global Environment Outlook, which says that "increasing levels of pollution threaten to exceed the capacity of the global environment to absorb them, increasing potential obstacles to economic and social development in developing countries."

The section says that progress has been made in terms of institutional development and international consensus-building, and a number of countries have succeeded in curbing pollution and slowing down the rate of resource degradation. However, only marginal progress has been made in addressing unsustainable consumption and production patterns, and progress has been insufficient in controlling transboundary movements of hazardous and radioactive wastes. Also, the section says while there has been progress in material and energy efficiency, particularly in non-renewable resources, overall trends remain unsustainable. Areas highlighted as requiring much more work include finance, technology transfer, technical assistance and capacity building.

The section says that achievements since UNCED include entry into force of the conventions on climate change, biodiversity and desertification. Agreements on straddling and migratory fish stocks and the small island developing states (SIDS) Programme of Action have also been adopted, as well as elaboration of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of Marine Environment and Land-based Activities, and entry into force of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). But many of these agreements have barely begun to be implemented according to the section. It does point out the success that Major Groups have achieved by taking committed action, sharing resources, building consensus and reflecting grassroots concern and involvement. The section underscores the value of the recent major UN conferences, which it says have advanced international commitment for achieving long-term goals and objectives of sustainable development, and the role the UN system has played in implementation of Agenda 21.

**Section C: Implementation in Areas Requiring Urgent Action**

This section contains three parts: integration of economic, social and environmental objectives; sectors and issues; and means of implementation.

*Integration of Economic, Social and Environmental Objectives*

The first section addresses eradicating poverty; changing consumption and production patterns; making trade, environment and sustainable development mutually supportive; population; health; and sustainable human settlements.

Paragraph 17, which was one of the most contentious in the negotiations, states that economic development,

social development and environmental protection are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development. The paragraph reaffirms the position of developing countries that "sustained economic growth is essential to the economic and social development of all countries, particularly developing countries." It also says democracy, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, and transparent and accountable governance in all sectors of society are essential parts of the necessary foundations for realizing social and people-centred sustainable development.

With regard to poverty eradication, the text calls for a number of priority actions to be taken for full implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the Social Summit. The actions include providing universal access to basic social services; progressively developing social protection systems to support those who cannot support themselves; empowering people living in poverty and their organizations; and addressing the disproportionate impact of poverty on women.

The text calls for urgent action to change consumption and production patterns. It stresses that unsustainable patterns of production, particularly in industrialized countries, are identified in Agenda 21 as the major cause of continued deterioration of the global environment. The text says that these countries should take the lead in achieving sustainable consumption. It also acknowledges the need to strengthen international approaches and policies that promote sustainable consumption patterns on the basis of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, applying the polluter-pays principle, and encouraging producer responsibility and greater consumer awareness. Recommended actions in this area include measures to internalize environmental costs and benefits in the price of goods and services, and promoting the role of business in shaping more sustainable patterns of consumption. The text calls upon governments, particularly developed countries, to encourage business and industry, among other groups, to develop and apply environmentally-sound technology.

On trade and environment issues, the text refers to the need to eliminate discriminatory and protectionist practices in international trade relations, particularly those affecting developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It says the root causes of environmental degradation should be addressed in a way that does not result in disguised barriers to trade, which is an argument long supported by indigenous peoples' groups. Actions that should be taken include timely and full implementation of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations and full use of the Comprehensive and Integrated World Trade Organization Plan of Action for the LDCs. The text also calls for promotion of a multilateral trading system that is open, non-discriminatory, rule-based, equitable, secure, transparent and predictable.

A paragraph on health identifies as an overriding goal implementation of the Health for All strategy to enable

all people to achieve a higher level of health and well-being and to improve their economic productivity and social potential. The text suggests actions such as the provision of safe drinking water, accelerated research and vaccine development, and increased immunization programmes. Disagreements about language relating to the uses of lead were overcome in the text with the following phrase: "Given the severe and irreversible health effects of lead poisoning, particularly on children, it is important to accelerate the process of eliminating unsafe uses of lead, including the use of lead in gasoline worldwide, in the light of country-specific conditions and with enhanced international support and assistance to developing countries through the timely provision of technical and financial assistance and the promotion of endogenous capacity-building." The text also calls for strategies to make parents, families and communities aware of the adverse environmental health impacts of tobacco.

#### *Sectors and Issues*

Part two on sectors and issues contains sections on freshwater; oceans and seas; forests; energy; transport; atmosphere; toxic chemicals; hazardous wastes; radioactive wastes; land and sustainable agriculture; desertification and drought; biodiversity; sustainable tourism; small island developing states; and natural disasters.

With regard to radioactive wastes, the text states that countries generating such wastes have a responsibility to ensure their safe storage and disposal. It says that in general radioactive wastes should be disposed of in the territory of the state in which they are generated as far as is compatible with the safety and management of such material. The text advises the international community to make all efforts to prohibit the export of radioactive wastes to those countries that do not have appropriate waste treatment and storage facilities. It also stresses the need to support clean-up of sites contaminated as a result of all types of nuclear activity and to conduct health studies in regions around those sites to identify where health treatment should be provided.

The text urges the international community to recognize the vital importance of international partnership and cooperation in combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. It says that in order to increase effectiveness of existing mechanisms, the international community, in particular developed countries, should support a global mechanism that would have the capacity to promote actions leading to the mobilization and channelling of substantial resources for advancing implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD).

#### *Means of Implementation*

The section on means of implementation takes account of financial resources and mechanisms; transfer of environmentally-sound technologies; capacity building; science; education and awareness; international legal instruments, including the Rio Declaration on

Environment and Development; and information and tools to measure progress.

**Section D: International Institutional Arrangements**

This section contains four sub-sections on greater coherence in intergovernmental organizations and processes; the role of relevant organizations and institutions of the UN system; the commission's future role and programme of work; and its methods of work. The section focuses on the need for better policy coordination at the intergovernmental level and on enhancing collaboration among the secretariats of decision-making bodies. It makes reference to means of advancing the collaborative work of the conferences of the parties to conventions related to sustainable development, including consideration of a common location of convention secretariats and integrating national reporting requirements. The commission's proposed multi-year programme of work appears as an annex to the programme.

**Before the Special Session**

In December 1992 the UN General Assembly decided to convene a special session to review and appraise Agenda 21 in five years time (resolution 47/190). Negotiations, which began during the CSD Ad Hoc Open-Ended Intersessional Working Group in February/March 1997 (see *E&D File* Vol. III, No. 13), resulted in a draft proposed outcome of the special session. The draft provided a basis for work at the fifth session of the CSD (CSD-5), which met from 8-25 April 1997. CSD-5, chaired by Dr. Mostafa Tolba (Egypt), also reviewed recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests.

Informal consultations were held from 16-21 June 1997 prior to the special session in order to achieve consensus on a draft political statement and draft proposed outcome.

**During the Special Session**

The Committee of the Whole, chaired by Dr. Tolba and vice-chairs Bagher Asadi (Iran), John Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda), Idunn Eidheim (Norway) and Czeslaw Wieckowski (Poland), oversaw negotiations on the draft of the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the draft of the Political Statement by Heads of State and Government. Two working groups were established: one on cross-sectoral issues, chaired by Mr. Ashe and Celso Amorim (Brazil), and the other on sectoral issues, chaired by Derek Osborn (UK). A contact group on the CSD programme of work (1998-2002) was chaired by Czeslaw Wieckowski. Informal consultations and contact groups were necessary to resolve contentious issues such as forests, climate change and radioactive waste. Ministerial meetings were also convened to address issues requiring high-level political input. A group of G-77

countries expressed reservations about establishment of the informal ministerial working groups to consider outstanding finance, forest and climate change issues. The countries, which objected to a perceived deviation from the main negotiations, also noted that a number of developing states did not have ministers available to attend such meetings.

Over 1500 individuals representing 207 accredited NGOs to UNGASS participated in the special session, in addition to those in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) or affiliated with the UN Department of Public Information (DPI). NGOs were able to monitor in person the proceedings of the plenary as well as the Committee of the Whole, or to watch the plenary via video in a large conference room or on TVs situated in the building. NGOs, agencies and governments convened numerous side events and workshops, and a Global Gathering—Expo '97 was set up outside UN headquarters by the CSD NGO Steering Committee to mark the special session. The expo, which began prior to the special session and ran throughout the proceedings, was comprised of exhibitions and performances by people from around the world.

NGO representatives monitoring the special session formed numerous caucuses. These groups met, often daily, to draft proposed amendments; devise lobbying strategies; review their impact and success in influencing governments; share information and analysis; and plan future work. The wide variety of caucuses reflected not only the broad concerns of NGOs but their expertise on many issues and considerable experience in organizing themselves to effectively work with delegations and the UN system. Many NGOs met with their national or regional delegations, and groups such as francophone NGOs formed a caucus that met with francophone delegations on a regular basis. The Women's Caucus, facilitated by the Women's Environment and Development Organization, worked to ensure that a gender perspective and commitments made at previous UN conferences, such as the 1995 Fourth World Women's Conference, were reflected in the programme. NGOs also held daily strategy sessions, and the CSD Steering Committee, which facilitated NGO organizing and monitoring throughout the CSD process, convened an orientation session for NGOs prior to the special session.

*“When no faction can agree on texts, may I please advise the delegates to consult with the NGOs to find new wording.”*

Chair Mostafa Tolba, at the close of the

The Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD), with assistance from NGLS, provided NGOs with two small conference rooms for meetings, as well as a larger conference room for NGO plenary meetings, dialogue sessions with governments, and panel discussions with UN agencies and governments. DPCSD and NGLS facilitated the scheduling of NGO caucus meetings to maximum advantage, and computers were also provided for NGO use.

### **Business Roundtable**

A UN-initiated roundtable lunch was held on 24 June with the heads of ten of the foremost natural resource-based corporations in the world to explore partnerships for sustainable development. The lunch, which was co-hosted by GA President Razali and Bjorn Stigson, Executive Director of the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, was attended by 37 guests. They included UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, heads of UN agencies, several heads of state and environment ministers, and chief executive officers from corporations such as Waste Management, 3M, Noranda, and Grupo IMSA. Representatives from the NGO and academic communities were also present.

Some NGOs said they question the sort of partnership the UN is seeking in welcoming corporate leaders, and they noted that the private sector and business tend to undermine rather than contribute to sustainable development. Others said corporations have power whether they participate in UN activities or not and expressed concern about what they described as increasing consolidation of global power and transnational corporations' lack of accountability. NGOs also observed that UN fora such as the CSD are some of the few places where they and other civil society groups have solid rights of participation that enable them to advance issues such as corporate accountability.

### **Special Events**

Approximately 70 special events coordinated by DPCSD were held concurrent to the official negotiations. These

included government events, such as a panel on Agenda 21 for the Amazon region sponsored by the Brazilian government; briefings with government ministers, such as an NGO dialogue with Denmark Environment Minister Svend Auken; an NGO dialogue session on energy, science and technology with the Chinese delegation; UN agency presentations, such as one by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) on the greening of industry, which included topics like eco-labelling, clean production, markets, management and industry response; a UN Population Fund (UNFPA) panel on population, women and the environment; a panel on consumption patterns and human development convened by the UN Centre for Human Settlements, UNCHS (Habitat) and DPCSD; and a World Bank launching of its Green Top Ten measures, which the bank says are necessary to safeguard the environment. NGOs co-sponsored several UN agency presentations and panel discussions, such as a programme on changing consumption and production patterns and the launch of a report on unlocking trade opportunities in developing countries, organized by DPCSD and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED); briefings by academic institutions such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology on global partnerships in technological innovations for sustainability; and many co-sponsored Major Group events, such as a World Conservation Union/WBCSD launching of guidelines on biodiversity.

During the events, NGOs focused much of their attention on UN reform and the impact of globalization on the future of the organization. The Third World Network convened several special events dealing with the WTO, World Bank and the private sector, as well as addressing follow-up to the conventions. The US Citizens Network and the Sustainable Societies Caucus convened a panel on integrating economic and environmental policies, which discussed the Multilateral Investment Agreement, WTO and the role of dispute resolution. Several groups held panels on strengthening institutions for sustainable development, which focused on legal and institutional issues.

An NGO-organized International Human Rights Tribunal heard testimonies from a variety of groups, particularly indigenous peoples, on abuses primarily by multi-national corporations. Among those testifying were the Dine people of the southwestern United States, who are fighting British-based Peabody Coal; the Ogoni people in Nigeria who are opposing Shell, and sisters Judith and Elizabeth David, who have filed a landmark case related to the Omai Gold Mine disaster in Guyana. The case, if successful, would hold a Canadian corporation liable in domestic courts for human rights and environmental violations abroad.

### **CONTACTS**

*DPCSD web site (<http://www.un.org/dpcsd/dsd>) or Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) on the Linkages web site (<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/>).*

*To obtain a copy of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, contact NGLS, Room FF-346, United Nations, New York NY 10017, United States, telephone +1-212/963 3215, fax +1-212/963 8712,*

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