

UNITED NATIONS



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**OPENING REMARKS  
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ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Intersessional Meeting of UNCSD**

**New York, 15 December 2011**

Honourable Ambassadors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome all of you to this, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intersessional Meeting in the preparatory process for Rio+20.

This is a critical meeting. We have important work to do. The Conference is only six months away. We have now a Compilation Text consisting of the submissions of Political Groups, Member States, Major Groups and UN agencies and intergovernmental organisations.

All told, there are 672 contributions to the Compilation Text which are available on the Rio+20 website. One hundred of those are from Member States, more if we consider that a number of Member States chose rather than making individual submissions to have a common submission as a Political Group. The response of Major Groups is also impressive, almost 500 submissions in all.

So we have a rich basis for our discussions here over these two days. We now need to consider how to take the next step to move from a hefty Compilation Text – [if printed back-to-back, it would be about 10 inches thick!] – to a zero draft of what Member States have said should be a focused political Outcome Document and we need to do this by early January – that is, in the next three weeks.

In order that the Rio+20 Bureau can do its work effectively, and we in the Secretariat can support them in that work, we seek guidance from you in these two days on the desired structure, format and contents of the zero draft.

As we work on preparing the zero draft, we must remember that it is a negotiating draft and not a negotiated draft. We count on the leadership of Ambassador Kim and Ambassador Ashe in providing you with such a draft, with Secretariat help, which is balanced and reflects the diverse views and options.

I would like to urge all delegations to be open and receptive. We should approach these discussions in a positive spirit of collaboration. The international community must work together constructively if we are to build the future we want.

We should be especially encouraged given the very good news from Durban. Both the Secretary-General and I welcome the significant agreement made there. The international community has once again shown that multilateralism works.

In fact, we should all be energised by the advances and the constructive spirit. This augurs well for Rio+ 20. With political will and determination, we can look forward to a balanced and meaningful outcome at Rio, to help guide the future we want.

We need to decide how ambitious we want to be at Rio. The Secretary-General and I have reiterated many times that for the United Nations this is a hugely important Conference.

At stake is no less than the effectiveness of multilateralism in addressing humanity's common future.

But our repeating this importance will not make it so. That depends on the political will and the level of ambition you set for the Conference.

We all know that we face huge sustainable development challenges in the coming decades. Thanks in no small part to Rio 1992, the international community has processes underway to address some of the most pressing challenges – the climate change, biodiversity and desertification conventions; the forest principles and the permanent forum on forests, to name a few. The MDGs have further placed emphasis on the need to tackle poverty, promote social development, gender equality, and strengthen the global partnership.

But, in addition to the challenges of 1992, new issues have come to the forefront – food insecurity, volatility in energy prices, global economic uncertainty, and high unemployment.

We know that progress has been far too slow to get to grips with the most pressing problems. That is why, in its wisdom, the General Assembly called for this Conference to renew political commitment for sustainable development, and why it “[e]ncourages Member States to be represented at the Conference at the highest possible level, including Heads of State or Government; ...”

So, I would urge your Governments to be ambitious, to aim high at Rio+20.

The ambitions of the actions agreed at Rio+20 must match the scale of the challenges we face. Only then will Rio+20 prove to be a truly historic Conference, one which makes a real difference to the welfare not only of the living but of future generations.

Now that I've sought to inspire, it's time to perspire. We need to get down to work.

Let me make a few observations on the format, structure and content of the outcome document.

First, early understanding on the format and structure is essential to steady progress in the negotiations. I therefore appeal to delegates to work hard at this Intersessional to provide strategic guidance by tomorrow afternoon on the format and structure you would like for the outcome document.

Second, we do not start from scratch in considering a possible format and structure. We have the GA resolution 64/236 calling for the Conference to provide some guidance.

By now, most of us can recite para. 20(a) by heart:

The objective of the Conference will be to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development and addressing new and emerging challenges.

The Conference themes to be discussed and refined during the preparatory process are: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and the institutional framework for sustainable development; ...

Objective and Themes, how should they inform the format and structure? Do we need anything more than these? That is for you to decide.

If we look back at the outcomes from Stockholm 1972 through Rio 1992 to Johannesburg 2002, what do they suggest for Rio 2012? Is there a logical progression? At Stockholm we had a short declaration, at Rio 1992 a detailed Agenda – or Programme of Action, at Johannesburg a Plan of Implementation.

So, we have Principles, an Agenda and a Plan, what we don't yet have is effective implementation, we still lack effective integration, to ensure we move forward on all three pillars of sustainable development together. How can Rio+20 get us there?

Third, I would like to provide a few observations from my reading of the submissions which may bear on the format and structure as well as the content of the zero draft.

The submissions were rich and varied, but some common messages and common priorities are beginning to emerge.

One of the most interesting – and I dare say unanticipated – developments is the broad interest in measuring progress through a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs for short).

The references to SDGs refer to the need to make them global and universal – applicable to developed and developing countries alike, though in accordance with common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.

There has also been an emphasis on defining goals that address all three pillars of sustainable development.

Most have insisted that the list of goals be short and that they be politically engaging, as are the MDGs.

Indeed, one issue raised in many submissions is exactly how such SDGs would relate to the MDGs and the ongoing discussions on what comes next after 2015.

So, there is much substance on SDGs. How should this be reflected in the zero draft?

Another proposal which enjoys broad support is to reach agreement at Rio+20 on a framework to promote sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries showing the way and all learning from each other's experiences.

There is also strong support for building and strengthening knowledge platforms and partnerships for sharing experiences and lessons learned. Platforms and partnerships have been proposed broadly on green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as well as in a number of priority areas.

Another strong message coming from the submissions is that South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation have come of age. There is ever richer policy and practical experience and lessons to be shared among developing countries on all three pillars of sustainable development.

Among the priority areas that have received strong emphasis in the submissions are: sustainable energy for all, water and oceans. Let me give you a flavour of some of the concrete proposals that have been made in these three areas:

- On Energy. Many submissions have endorsed the concrete goals for energy proposed under the Secretary-General's initiative on sustainable energy for all. These cover all three pillars of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental.
- On Water. There is already an access target under MDG7. One goal proposed would go beyond that to achieve universal access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2030. Some have proposed goals for improving water use efficiency in agriculture, power generation and industry. Maybe a set of goals analogous to those for energy could be considered for water.
- On Oceans. Proposals have been made, among others, for phasing out subsidies that encourage overfishing, for tougher measures to deter illegal fishing, for extending marine protected areas, and for cooperation to monitor ocean acidification.

Other priority areas where concrete proposals for action have been advanced are:

- Food security and sustainable agriculture
- Sustainable cities
- Green jobs, employment and social inclusion
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience
- Biodiversity and forests.

How should these sectoral priorities and related actions be reflected in the zero draft?

- Should each have associated SDGs?

- Should they be encompassed in a “framework for action”?
- How would the actions reflect a serious advance on current approaches and orientations?

Delivering on the actions agreed at Rio will require effective organization, and that is why the second theme of Rio+20 is the institutional framework for sustainable development.

How can a strengthened institutional framework help us better to organize ourselves, to mobilize energies, expertise and resources to deliver on integration and implementation?

The proposals on IFSD are quite varied.

We have made substantial progress, I believe. The proposals fall broadly into two categories: enhancing integration among the three pillars, and strengthening individual pillars with a particular focus in many contributions on the environmental pillar.

On integration, while the landscape is still unsettled, everyone has come with an open mind and shown a pragmatic attitude: “let’s focus on fixing what’s broken, not on reinventing the wheel”.

One common theme of many proposals is the need for a sustainable body, whatever its form, to have an effective review mechanism for assessing progress and providing constructive advice through experience sharing among countries

This would provide a concrete means of addressing the implementation deficit.

Some have suggested strengthening the Commission on Sustainable Development. Others propose transforming the CSD into a Sustainable Development Council under the GA, to give sustainable development and its integrative approach to policy greater political prominence. Still others propose that a strengthened ECOSOC could perform this integrative function.

The second set of proposals relates to strengthening individual pillars. Most attention is given to the environmental pillar. Here, broad agreement exists that UNEP should be strengthened. The question is the level of ambition. While only some seem prepared to contemplate transformation into a specialized agency, more seem open to universal membership. Many also see the need to put UNEP on a stronger financial footing.

Many refer to the need to strengthen the science-policy interface, including data collection and monitoring of the state of the global environment. Bringing greater coherence to the multitude of multilateral environmental agreements is also a high priority for many. A strengthened UNEP is seen to have a central role in performing both these functions.

At the operational level, some have pointed to the need to achieve greater coherence among UN institutions in their support to countries within the organizing framework of sustainable development. In this view, the UN should be delivering as one for sustainable development.

Ambition must also be marked by the means to make dreams a reality. Resources, technology, and capacity are key to sustainable development transformation.

On finance, domestic resource mobilization will need to be supplemented by international support including through innovative approaches.

On technology, international technology cooperation will need to be enhanced, technology transfer accelerated and domestic innovation systems strengthened in developing countries if there is to be rapid progress on building green economies and achieving sustainable development. One idea is to establish a global green innovation and technology partnership.

On capacity building, some have proposed the establishment of a capacity development arrangement to support developing countries in a green economy transformation, including assistance in accessing available funds. There is also a call to strengthen scientific capacities relevant to sustainable development and the science-policy interface.

There is much food for thought and discussion going forward. Let us hope there is also much by way of concrete and ambitious actions on which we can eventually agree at Rio.

Dear Colleagues,

Rio+20 is only six months away. The participation of all countries is critical if we are to achieve success at Rio+20. Developing countries, in particular the least developed countries and SIDS and the major groups, need to be empowered to participate actively in the proceedings of the Conference.

Therefore, once again, I urge countries that have not done so, to make a voluntary contribution to the Rio+20 Trust Fund. We thank those countries that have already made contributions. But additional resources are urgently needed to ensure full participation in Rio+20 and its preparatory process. Your contribution is a vote of confidence for the success of Rio+20.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have taken much of your time but I think it is useful share with you an overview of the state of preparations. We have a full agenda ahead of us.

We shall be seeing a lot of each other in the coming six months. Let's enjoy each other's company and benefit from a free exchange of ideas.

But let us not for a moment lose sight of the gravity of the task before us. There are high expectations for Rio+20. We must resolve to deliver. Failure is not an option.

At Rio+20 we must chart a clear course to the future we want.

Thank you.

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