

Summary of second Informal Intersessional Meeting for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

The Second Intersessional Meeting of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) was held in New York from 15-16 December 2011.

Opening Session

At the opening H.E. Mr. John Ashe, Co-Chair of the Bureau for the Preparatory Process of the UNCSD, convened a formal Special Meeting of the Preparatory Committee for UNCSD for the purpose of electing new members of the Bureau. The Preparatory Committee elected H.E. Mr Kim Sook of the Republic of Korea as Co-Chair, and Mr. Bedrich Moldan of the Czech Republic and Mr. Keith Christie of Canada as Vice-Chairs by acclamation. The Committee also agreed on the accreditation of intergovernmental organizations accredited with the World Summit on Sustainable Development to the UNCSD preparatory process.

In his opening remarks, H.E. Mr. Kim Sook reminded delegations that the second intersessional meeting was the last meeting before the preparation of the zero draft of the outcome document. In order for Rio+20 to be different from previous conferences its focus should be on implementation. He called on delegations to work towards a substantive consensus for the benefit of humanity, the planet, and future generations.

In his remarks delivered by H.E. Mr. Tariq Ali Al-Ansari, Deputy Chef de Cabinet, H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly, emphasized the need for Rio+20 to agree on an ambitious results-oriented global programme of action that includes clear timeframes and specific targets, and that can be achieved through international cooperation and partnerships between Governments on one hand, and between Governments, business and civil society on the other hand.

Mr. Sha Zukang, as Conference Secretary-General, referred delegations to the Compilation Text available on the Rio+20 website, consisting of hundreds of submissions of Political Groups, Member States, Major Groups and UN agencies. Mr. Sha stressed the importance of the task ahead to move forward from the rich basis of the Compilation Text to a zero draft for a focussed political Outcome Document and he invited delegations to discuss and provide guidance on its desired structure, format and contents. He also re-emphasized the need for additional voluntary contributions to the Rio+20 Trust Fund to ensure the full participation of least developed countries in the Conference and its preparatory process.

Also at the opening, statements were made by the representatives of **Argentina** (on behalf of the Group of 77 and China), the **European Union and its member states** (also on behalf of the acceding country Croatia), **Tanzania** (on behalf of the African Group), **Nepal** (on behalf of the Least Developed Countries), **New Zealand** (on behalf of Pacific Island Forum Members), **Papua New Guinea** (on behalf of Pacific Small Island Developing States), **Lebanon** (on behalf of the Arab Group) **Grenada** (on behalf of the members of the Association of Small Island States - AOSIS) and **Barbados** (on behalf of CARICOM). Key points made in their statements are summarized below.

It was stressed that the participation of developing countries is key for the success of the Rio+20 preparatory process and Conference and must be ensured. Reiterating concerns over insufficient voluntary contributions to the Rio+20 Trust Fund, the Group of 77 and China has presented to the Bureau a proposal to change the schedule of meetings of the preparatory process of the UNCSO.

The challenges and repercussions of the global food crisis and the global economic and financial crisis for developing countries were also stressed and the persistent gap in implementation was reiterated, as many commitments by the international community have not yet been fully met. Rio+20 should provide an important opportunity for unsustainable development to be reversed through greater international cooperation, a more holistic approach, refined strategies, sharper policy perspectives and greater financial commitments.

It was noted that since Prep Com 1, good progress has been made towards a better understanding on the objectives and the challenges of the Rio+20 Conference. Developing countries will continue to be supported in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and it is expected that Rio+20 can mark the start of a profound, world-wide transition towards a global green and inclusive economy and more effective sustainable development governance.

Reflecting on the outcomes of the regional preparatory consultations, it was mentioned that more actions are needed to close gaps in the implementation of international commitments and the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring progress was suggested in this regard. It is also expected that a transition to a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication may offer new development and trade opportunities.

It was emphasized that Rio+20 should keep poverty eradication and inter-generational wellbeing as its main objectives. In this regard LDCs face disproportionate negative impacts, stemming from geographical and structural challenges as well as from external crises such as food, fuel, financial and economic crisis and climate change.

It was noted that islands are uniquely dependent on oceans for their livelihoods, food security and economic development. As climate change and ocean acidification pose serious threats to coral reef ecosystems, the “blue” economy and the health of the oceans are seen as important global sustainable development issues also to be addressed at Rio+20.

It was stated that Rio+20 needs to adopt a balanced approach to sustainable development, to reconfirm (without negotiations) the agreed Rio principles, to facilitate the participation of civil society, including women and young people, in public policy decision making processes. It was also noted that enhancing sustainable development is essential, in particular where people are suffering from foreign occupation.

The vulnerability and the particular economic and geographical challenges faced by small island developing states were also emphasized. Without external funding support many of the SIDS cannot achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It is also expected that Rio+20 will agree on convening the third global conference on

SIDS in 2014 to review progress in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA) and the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI).

Discussion on the compilation document: comments and guidance for the zero draft outcome document

Renewing commitment to sustainable development: General objectives and reaffirmation of principles:

There was a broad consensus on the Rio+20 Conference objective to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development.

It was stated that Rio+20 provides a valuable opportunity to bring the sustainable development agenda back to the centre stage of global development.

Many delegations underlined that renewed commitment includes a reaffirmation of Rio Principles (without re-negotiation or dilution) including the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.

Several countries stressed that Rio+20 is expected to advance full consideration of the concept of sustainable development in all policy and decision making at all levels. Inclusion of equity concerns is an essential dimension of sustainable development.

A majority emphasized that poverty eradication is and will continue to be the foremost global development challenge and must remain the overarching priority in development efforts.

A majority also underscored that states need to act collectively and strengthen multilateralism. Rio+20 may promote a new spirit and greater commitment to international cooperation. It could pave the way to put in place an enabling global environment that gives a level playing field to developing countries.

Many delegates emphasized there is no one size fits all, and national circumstances should be reflected in policies on sustainable development. Ample flexibility and policy space should be recognized.

Some delegations stated that greater harmony between human beings and nature, respect of Mother Earth, and promotion of a holistic approach to sustainable development are needed.

Many delegations underlined that attention should be given to the specific vulnerabilities of small island developing States (SIDS), least developed countries (LDCs) and Africa. Support was also expressed for convening the Third Global Conference on SIDS in 2014.

Progress to date and addressing gaps in implementation

Many delegations stated that Rio+20 must address the challenges and obstacles impeding sustainable development and progress on implementing outcomes of previous Summits. Rio+20 is widely expected to establish a framework of actions to bridge the implementation gap.

Emerging issues (general)

A number of delegations underlined that Rio+20 is widely expected to address the current multiple crises and confront global challenges. Bold solutions should be found for global crises, including fuel, food, economic and financial crises as well as climate change.

Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

Many delegations underlined that a green economy is a tool to achieve sustainable development not a substitute for it and should not result in new conditionalities or green protectionism. It also needs to be inclusive.

Some delegations emphasized that green economy could offer new development opportunities and/or win-win solutions. Win-win strategies need to be identified and formulated where greening activities are synergistic with economic growth for poverty reduction.

Many underlined that the Outcome document needs to state general principles for a green economy, including the need to respect the specific circumstances of each country. A universal model doesn't exist. Green economy should adapt to local circumstances.

It was said that it is necessary to consider all risks associated with the green economy, in order to minimize risks and optimize benefits.

Roadmap

Some countries support a green economy roadmap and some emphasized that it should contain clear means of implementation.

A toolkit and best practices were mentioned by many countries. It was also said by some that evolution of a green economy should be facilitated through a menu of policy options and a toolbox of instruments with ample flexibility and policy space for countries to allow them to make their own choices.

A number of participants underlined that green public procurement should be promoted.

A number of delegations stated that the private sector should support a green economy, and should be closely involved in investment and technology.

Indicators

Several countries mentioned alternative indicators to GDP, Green accounting (related to indicators), Sustainable consumption and production, including the full product life-cycle and value-chain assessment, and ecological footprints as important new ways of measuring “wealth”.

Priority areas

Several participants stated that it is critical that issues of core development concern such as food security and sustainable agriculture, universal access to modern energy services, access to clean drinking water, natural resource and land degradation, challenges of urbanization, public health, human resources development and employment generation are addressed in all their dimensions.

Regarding oceans, a number of issues have been stated such as piracy, acidification of oceans, deterioration of coral reefs and marine life, implementation of UNCLOS, IUU, investment in marine renewable energy, deep seabed mining reduction of harmful subsidies in the fishing sector to avoid over-fishing and protection of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Many also underlined the importance of blue economy as a large number of people rely on marine resources for their daily livelihoods.

Several delegations mentioned the importance of sustainable cities including linkages with water and energy, but also waste, infrastructure and transport.

Other priority areas that have been mentioned include sustainable consumption and production, with many specifically mentioning the 10 Year Framework of programmes discussed at the 19th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD19); desertification; management of waste and chemicals (2020 goal); forests; climate change including several references to the outcome of the 17th Conference of Parties of UNFCCC in Durban, South Africa; drought; transport fuel alternatives and innovations; as well as global tourism.

Thematic debate on priority issues at Rio+20

In the spirit of promoting sustainable development and dialogue between all concerned stakeholders, the host country proposed to organize four days of thematic debate on the following eight priority themes:

- Poverty eradication, food and nutritional security;
- Energy;
- Water;
- Oceans;
- Sustainable cities;
- Economics of sustainable development (including sustainable patterns of consumption and production);
- Innovation for sustainable development;
- Decent work and migration.

The thematic roundtables would be organized in Rio during the period between the 3rd Preparatory Committee Meeting (13 – 15 June 2012) and the UN Conference on

Sustainable Development (16-19 June 2012).

Sustainable Development Goals

Strong support was expressed to set up sustainable development goals (SDGs). One delegation mentioned that SDGs should not be negotiated, but based on agreed goals. It was also said that they could be a vital and concrete result of Rio+20 and are cross-cutting, so they can bridge the two themes.

A number of delegations stated that discussions on SDGs should consider partnerships as one of the most appropriate mechanisms for their effective implementation.

Participatory decision making

A number of participants stated that it is necessary to have a multi-stakeholder outcome.

Several delegations underlined that people should be put in the center of sustainable development. Partnerships need to be strengthened with women, indigenous people, local authorities and parliaments. Rights of indigenous people should be protected.

Strong emphasis was placed by many on the importance of women and gender equality for achieving sustainable development. A number of participants stated that gender equality is a cross cutting issue and that sustainable development will not be possible without empowering women.

Several participants stated that governments should commit to enhancing transparency, and Rio Principle 10 should be implemented.

Specific / other proposals

One country proposed to adopt the World Earth Charter. One major group recommended countries to establish an Ombudsperson for Future Generations (at the national level), and a UN High Commissioner for Future Generations (at the global level).

One major group recommended establishment of a World Environmental Court.

Institutional Framework for sustainable development

A number of delegations stated that form should follow function. There is a need to strengthen coordination and coherence of institutions dealing with sustainable development at all levels and to integrate the three pillars in institutional settings at all levels.

The importance of setting up mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of sustainable development commitments in a strengthened institutional framework was underscored by many.

Many countries support proposals for strengthening UNEP through scaled up financial resources, an enhanced mandate and universal membership.

A number of countries supported transforming UNEP, into a specialized agency, but also some cautioned that UNEP's transformation requires in-depth study, taking into account broad international consensus. Strengthening coordination and synergies among multilateral environmental agreements within clusters was also mentioned by several delegations.

Some countries opposed making UNEP a specialized agency.

Many delegations expressed a strong willingness to consider establishment of Sustainable Development Council, with equitable representation and broader participation of stakeholders. Some also stressed the need for the voice of small states to be heard and cautioned against creating new reporting burdens on countries, particularly the small states.

There was also mention of strengthening coordination of UN agencies at the national level and delivering as one.

Means of implementation

A majority of delegations stated that means of implementation are critical. New, additional and predictable financial support, transfer and sharing of technology, capacity building and a development oriented international regime on trade, intellectual property rights, debt relief, financing and global governance are critical for developing countries to pursue sustainable development. It was also underlined that existing commitments, including on ODA, should be honoured.

Some proposed establishment of an international mechanism/joint project between developed and developing countries on transfer of technology.

Investment in science and technology should be enhanced according to some participants.

A number of delegations proposed establishment of a sustainable development fund and technology transfer mechanism.

Capacity building

A number of countries proposed establishment of a Capacity Development Scheme to facilitate transition to a green economy.

Greater information sharing and establishment of "Centres of Excellence" have been proposed by many countries. There was also a call for a "Global Technology Sharing Facility" as well as a proposal for establishment of a global knowledge platform on green economy and transfer of green technology together with a green growth network.

Some also proposed establishment of a mechanism to foster international scientific cooperation and research on global sustainability issues.

There was also a proposal to establish south-south and north-south cooperation on green economy and poverty eradication.

Partnerships

A number of delegations stated that Rio+20 presents a unique opportunity to revitalize and strengthen partnerships so that they can be more effective, inclusive and accountable vehicles for implementation as well as to strengthen international cooperation.

Partnerships have been recognized by a number of participants as one of the most participatory approaches to the implementation of sustainable development since they allow voluntary participation of a broad number of partners, setting common and concrete goals, with achievable targets and addressing the economic, social and environment aspects of sustainable development.

Launching of strategic or dedicated partnerships at Rio can enhance international collaboration and facilitate the implementation of actions in priority areas agreed at Rio, according to some delegations. Some delegations even gave concrete examples such as mountain partnerships or “Green bridge initiative”

Follow-up mechanism

Some delegations suggested establishing a monitoring mechanism on progress of sustainable development, including the option of strengthening the monitoring function of CSD.

A few delegations suggested the establishment of a peer review mechanism, while one delegation referred to a “compendium of commitments” in which partnerships may feature prominently, and yet another proposed the Rio+20 outcome could establish a complementary long-term global registry of voluntary national, sub-national and multi-stakeholder commitments on sustainable development, accompanied by an appropriate follow-up mechanism.

Structure and format of the zero draft of the outcome document

The second day of the meeting was devoted to a discussion on the format and structure of the outcome document of Rio+20, with a view to inform the Bureau on the preparation of the zero draft of the outcome document.

Several delegations had commented on this aspect in their interventions during the first day of the meeting, and did not take the floor during the second day. The points relating to structure and format of the outcome document made in their interventions are reflected in this summary.

There seemed to be general agreement among delegations on the need for a short, precise, concise, action-oriented, and forward-looking outcome document. Many delegations mentioned that the outcome document had to focus on implementation and on integration of the three pillars of sustainable development at all levels.

There also seemed to be a general agreement on the need for re-affirming, and not re-negotiating, existing commitments made in the past, especially the Rio Principles, Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), the Mauritius Strategy and the Barbados Plan of Action. Many delegations mentioned that the outcome of the Conference should be built on the Rio Principle 7 of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities.

There was broad support for the Conference to define a clear mandate and process for universal SDGs. However, different opinions were expressed as to whether SDGs should be a part of a Green Economy roadmap, or part of a broader framework and connected to sectoral issues.

Several delegations called for a clear outcome document that resonates with the general public and galvanizes action by all stakeholders. There were several calls for an outcome document that includes goals, deadlines, and responsibilities of actors.

Regarding the number and structure of outcome documents from the conference, different positions were expressed, which can be grouped in three categories.

a) a majority of delegations called for a single document with a structure based broadly on General Assembly resolution A/RES/64/236, namely: renewing 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; (ii) green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; (iii) institutional framework for sustainable development; (iv) means of implementation; (v) framework for action and follow-up mechanism. Several delegations also specifically underlined the importance of a clear language on means of implementation in the outcome document, as well as the need for a section devoted to an examination of the state of delivery of past commitments.

b) One delegation, supported by a few others, expressed preference for a short, high-level political declaration, accompanied by a compendium of voluntary commitments from all stakeholders. There was also mention of a mechanism for following up on the commitments registered in the compendium. One delegation stated that the outcome document should focus on issues that enjoy a broad consensus.

c) Other delegations proposed a short, high-level political declaration with an action plan as an annex. Positions seemed to differ as to the negotiated or non-negotiated nature of the action plan.

Some countries expressed the view that the outcome document should include a green economy roadmap. Opinions seemed to differ as to where sectoral actions and initiatives would find a place in the structure of the outcome document.

Closing session

Mr. Sha Zukang as the Secretary-General of the Conference summarized the main points and stated at the beginning that the main task of for the intersessional was to hear views on the structure, format and content of the outcome document. The meeting rose to this task.

Referring to the structure and format of the outcome document, he underlined that a majority seemed to prefer one single document with the structure that follows General Assembly resolution A/64/236. Much stress was placed on accountability for delivery on commitments, whoever the responsible actors, and whether negotiated or voluntary.

Regarding the content of the outcome document, Mr. Sha underlined that the starting point should be reaffirmation of all the Rio Principles and prior sustainable development commitments. Eradication of poverty must be in the centre of our efforts to attain sustainable development. Integration of all three pillars of sustainable development was reemphasized as well as coherence of the UN system. He also elaborated briefly on the views expressed on the two themes of the Conference and stressed that, to ensure that the Rio+20 vision and actions are realized, there are three key requirements. First, these must be strongly endorsed at the highest level of government. Second, they must be owned by all stakeholders. And third, actors must have at their disposal the necessary means of implementation. He underlined the importance of participation of major groups and expressed his satisfaction that they had contributed so much during the past two days.

He concluded by saying that the outcome should be strong in will and strong in action. Only in this way will Rio+20 be an historical and ground-breaking conference.