

NEWSLETTER

OUTREACH 1997
The Voice of the NGO Community at CSD

Countdown to Earth Summit II

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CSD 5 SPECIAL EDITION

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COMMENTARY...

Balalaikas out of tune?

President Razali of the GA has made great efforts to allow NGOs full participation in the Special Session on the Earth Summit in June. Last Friday, in a meeting in the ECOSOC Chamber, a draft resolution about NGO participation was discussed by many of the major "actors". [The full text of the resolution appears on page....] On the very brink of achieving consensus, the draft resolution was blocked, ostensibly on the finer points of formalities of the UN. And perhaps not surprisingly, it was blocked by a super-power: the Russian Federation.

'Democracy, participation, transparency and implementation...' Show me one bureaucrat or politician who has not used these words during the last month in a convincing way and I will show you a person out of tune with today's thinking. What is more, people in the international community believe that these words and what they actually

entail, are integral parts of tomorrow's agenda and tomorrow's societies.

Time and again we have seen delegates representing the North and the South, the East as well as the West, come to the rostrum in the UN and praise NGOs for their untiring work in implementing Agenda 21. Fifty years of diligent NGO work has made the UN more transparent and more of a global people's organization--which was the original and intended idea of the United Nations. Surely any delegation to the UN will sign on to this statement. NGOs have been recognized in a series of global conferences for their work, and -- if we are not totally mistaken -- even agreed language in an variety of UN texts advises the inclusion of NGOs into UN work and into each and every delegation. Consensus documents even warn against co-opting the free and democratic spirit of NGOs in this process.

What is happening, Russia?

You have embraced the ideas of participation and democracy, haven't you? You have recognized the value added to any societal development by NGOs, haven't you? You are supporters of UN reforms which include all these concepts, aren't you? So why are you blocking NGO participation in June? Are you afraid of something? Your actions are making us wonder. Please tell us that you are part of today's forward looking and progressive society, and not the frozen times of a bygone past./

Tune your balalaikas!

We previously made a strong plea for countries to play in tune in June at the Special Session. Maybe the Russian balalaikas just need some fine tuning to fully harmonize with the rest of us.

Why can't we all play in tune and move toward global democracy, NGO participation and transparency.

Beginning this June!

...jgs

INTERVIEW WITH AN NGO...

The editors speak to Bill Pace, Executive Director of the World Federalist Movement and convener of the NGO Legal and Institutional Caucus

Q: What was the resolution on NGO access which was proposed last week?

A: The draft resolution will assure a much more formal participatory role for NGOs in the Earth Summit+5 UNGASS than we have ever had in Special Sessions before. However, it has not been adopted yet, it is restricted to this session only, and the situation remains that, except for the period of June 23-27, 1997, NGOs still have no formal rights to participate in the follow-up to the global agendas and action plans being debated in the General Assembly or other bodies of the UN. There remains the very real danger that the General Assembly, which is conducting all of its "high-level" negotiations in

closed meetings, (including the Sub-group on NGOs!!!) has embarked upon a path of reversing transparency of its deliberations and the gains made by NGOs in consulting and contributing to the policy-making and implementation processes. This is very worrisome.

Q: Can you be more specific about the Earth Summit II resolution?

A: The draft resolution (for the participation of major groups, including non-governmental organizations, in the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly) presented by GA President, Ambassador Razali of Malaysia, on Friday April 4, 1997 was agreed to by the EU and G-77 and other countries. However, the USA and Russian Federation expressed concerns.

Earlier in the week President Razali attempted to secure support for a resolution which would have assured NGO participation in all Special Sessions which are held following up the world conferences. However, governments publicly and privately criticized this proposal, so the one presented Friday was restricted only to the 19th Special Session - Earth Summit II.

The problem arose when the General Assembly decided that they would hold 5 year reviews of the world conferences in GA Special Sessions - (and many countries are supporting the idea that future world conferences should be held as GA Special Sessions)- but, as the USA, Russia and others have stated, there are no provisions in the Charter for NGOs to participate in the General Assembly. Thus, we had the situation where governments are going to review and perhaps hold future world conferences in a forum in which NGOs have either no rights or drastically diminished rights compared to the rights of participation we have had in the (ECOSOC) commissions and recent world conferences. This would be a disaster.

What President Razali and the governments will approve, should they adopt the proposed resolution, is that NGOs will be allowed to address the GA Plenary in the Special Session, and to attend and speak in the ad hoc Committee of the Whole, where the final negotiations on the UNGASS declaration will be conducted. Thus, though NGOs will have no official negotiating role, the NGO participation will be in line with our "consultative" role in the UN, and NGO contributions will be part of the official record. This is important. We have been calling for "special arrangements" for special sessions throughout the last year.

Q: Who will get to speak?

A: President Razali stated that he would seek recommendations from the NGO's representative processes, such as the CSD NGO Steering Committee, the "major group," regional and sectoral caucuses (women, youth, etc.). He specifically endorsed utilizing the "self-organizing, self-selection processes" developed by the NGOs. The GA President, based upon recommendations, will make the final decision and issue invitations to speak.

Q: What are the USA and Russian objections?

A: The USA objection was, I believe, well-intentioned if poorly formulated. The USA is pointing out that the language "major groups, including NGOs" is confusing. It is not clear to most governments what the difference is between NGOs and major groups. It should read, I believe, that "NGOs, including representatives of Major Groups identified in Agenda 21" will be allowed to participate and speak.... But, this mistake is just being passed down document by document.

Russia's objection is much more serious and fundamental. They keep raising the point that they do not believe the Charter allows NGOs to speak or participate in the General Assembly. The danger is that, though this interpretation is incorrect in practice, the argument Russia is making is convincing more and more governments it is a mistake to extend NGOs consultative rights to the GA. There is a huge problem of ignorance about the practice of NGOs in the GA over the last fifty years.

Draft Resolution - 3 April 1997

Participation of Major Groups, including non-governmental organizations, in the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly

The General Assembly,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 51/181 of 16 December 1996 by which the General Assembly recognized, inter alia, the important contributions made by major groups, including non-governmental organizations, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and in the implementation of its recommendations,

Also recalling that by the same resolution it invited the President of the General Assembly, in consultation with Member States, to propose to Member States appropriate modalities for the effective involvement of major groups in the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly,

Decides that major groups, including non-governmental organizations, will be invited to participate in the plenary meeting of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly in the debate on an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21;

Also decides that major groups, including non-governmental organizations, which cannot be accommodated in the debate on an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 in the plenary meeting of the nineteenth special session, may be invited to address the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the special session;

Invites the President of the General Assembly to extend invitations to representatives of major groups, including non-governmental organizations, to participate in the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly;

Decides that arrangements concerning the participation of

major groups, including non-governmental organizations, in the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly will in no way create a precedent for other special sessions of the General Assembly.

Thank you Denmark and Norway!

OUTREACH labored strenuously to publish every day during the Intersessional. Small things like lack of staples, lack of printing paper, no available printer and an overworked staff often delayed the arrival of OUTREACH into the busy meeting rooms of delegates and NGOs.

The simple reason for this rather depressing situation was lack of funds. The editors of OUTREACH made several applications for support in late March to allow us to speed up the production of OUTREACH as well as upgrade the quality of its contents.

The Danish and Norwegian Governments, through their Ministries of Foreign Affairs, responded quickly and generously to our application and provided funds enough to publish OUTREACH on a daily basis through both CSD 5 and the Special Session in June. In addition, we will also publish OUTREACH on a weekly basis between the sessions. With this support OUTREACH will be also be posted on the Internet and will be faxed out to a great number of NGOs all over the world who do not have Internet accessibility.

On behalf of the CSD/NGO Steering Committee and the editors of OUTREACH: Thank you again to the two Scandinavian democracies.

NGO VIEWPOINT

Bold, Measurable Actions Required

-by Clifton Curtis, Political Advisor
Greenpeace International

With all due respect to the challenges associated with the previous four sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, this year's session is far and away the CSD's most important gathering.

A lot needs to happen in less than three weeks, in order to prepare, effectively, for the General Assembly's one-week Special Session at the end of June. Now is the time for action - the kind that shows that governments, on behalf of all of us, are truly serious about achieving sustainable development.

With effective action as the objective, it also would help if all CSD participants would agree to join in a few moments of Earth Summit-related meditation or contemplation each morning, before coming to the UN, between now and 25 April. For that purpose, the meditation should include repeating a four-part, circular "mantra" at least 10 times: Urgent Situation; Far Too

Little Being Done; Bold Actions Needed; Measurable Steps Required; (Repeat)...; (Repeat)....

Overall, there is a lot of similarity in the reports and studies detailing what's been happening to the planet, and to quality of life, since the Earth Summit, five years ago. That's the good news, if you will. The bad news is that it's pretty bleak reading.

It's not doomsday, as a rule, but most of the basic indicators, the critical trends, make it clear that we're headed in the wrong direction - farther away from, rather than toward, sustainable development. Two examples say it better than I can.

First, the official documents for this CSD meeting include the S-G's "Critical Trends" report (E/CN.17/1997/3). As part of its prognosis, it states (page 4) that: "Global catastrophe does not appear to be imminent. But projections cited in this report clearly indicate that pursuit of business-as-usual development patterns is most unlikely to result in sustainable development in the near future. That is, on current trends, we appear unlikely to achieve a desirable balance of economic growth, equitable human development and healthy, productive ecosystems."

Second, there is UNEP's new Global Environment Outlook, which states (page 3), among many other things, that: ".from a global perspective the environment has continued to degrade during the past decade, and significant environmental problems remain deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric of nations in all regions.

Progress towards a sustainable future is just too slow. A sense of urgency is lacking."

Over simply stated, one can characterize the attention given to environmental issues as falling into one or more of three stages: sounding the alarm, making commitments, and implementation - or action. Internationally, the "sounding the alarm" stage was especially evident in the 1970s and 1980s; the commitment stage became more and more pronounced as we moved into the 1990's - with the Earth Summit probably the pinnacle of that stage; and the post-Earth Summit era finding decision makers increasingly focused on implementation.

There are still many issues where the alarm needs to be sounded. It also is clear that stronger commitments are required. But what's really needed now - as UNGA President Razali Ismail called for in remarks at UNEP's recent Governing Council - are concrete actions.

With that objective in mind, clear deadlines and targets need to be set. Proposals for action need to be put on the table and promoted at this CSD, initiatives which will grab hold of people. If there is disagreement, it should not be over who can not accept someone else's proposal. Instead, the debate or competition over ideas - and leadership - should be over whose proposals are the most inspirational, far reaching and responsive to the urgent threats we face.

This is the sort of logic that underlay the "Priority Issues" statement that my organization, Greenpeace, has put forward for consideration at this CSD, and at "Earth Summit 2." It's the same logic that underlay the action proposals contained in the joint, draft NGO statement that was circulated at the CSD intersessional - a document that contains NGO "Recommendations for Actions and Commitments" on nearly 50 issues. Accomplishing the needed actions on issues like climate change, forests, toxic chemicals, fisheries, finances, corporate accountability and others, will not be easy. But all the evidence points to the fact that, if we do not act now, it will only be a lot harder and more demanding later. Moreover, there are lots of creative solutions out there, now. They offer pathways into the future that allow us to "step lightly on the planet" while, at the same time, providing economically and socially beneficial returns on our investment.

What really needs to happen during this 3-week CSD is for the interventions by governments, IGOs and NGOs to play off of each other, pushing consensus in the direction of the "highest common denominator" of decision making, rather than the lowest. That is possible, doable, and the time is now.

(Repeat)...Urgent Situation; Far Too Little Being Done; Bold Actions Needed; Measurable Steps Required; (Repeat)....

NEWS FROM THE CONFERENCE ROOM (at the Church Center)

Over this past weekend, NGOs met at the UN Church Center to discuss and improve upon the NGO common position paper Towards Earth Summit II. Substantive changes have been made on various points and they will continue to meet throughout the first week of CSD 5 to fine tune the document. Upon completion, it will be available in Conference Room E. OUTREACH will keep you posted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NGO REGISTRATION

Registration of NGOs will take place at a Registration Desk located in the Public Lobby of the General Assembly Building (enter through the Visitor's Entrance located on 1st Avenue and 45th Street). For security purposes, all representatives are requested to bring a photo ID (i.e. passport or drivers license), as well as a copy of their letter of accreditation from their organization. Passes will not be available for persons whose names have not been communicated in advance.

Schedule for registration:

Tuesday, 8 April

9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Wednesday, 9 April

10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Monday, 14 April

9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Tuesday, 15 April
9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

NOTE: At all other times, please call the NGO Section at (212) 963-4843 or (212) 963-4846 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. for information on how to secure your passes.

REQUESTS FOR MEETING SPACE
8-25 April

IN THE UNITED NATIONS BUILDING...

Contact:

Ms. Zehra Aydin, Major Groups Focal Point
2 UN Plaza, 22nd Floor
tel.: (212) 963-8811
fax: (212) 963-1267

Procedure:

- 1) Fax your request to the above number before 4:00 p.m. the day prior to the requested date.
- 2) Costs for the rooms vary, depending on type of room and service needed, i.e. sound (cost runs \$60.00 per hour - if your meeting runs over even by 5 or 10 minutes, be prepared to pay for the full second hour).
- 3) Ensure that contact person and contact number are presented clearly in your fax.

NOTE: Space is extremely limited due to an increased level of participants and decreased allocation of space.

AT THE CHURCH CENTER, 777 UN PLAZA...

Contact:

Ms. Sharrye Moore (not Ms. Linda Arnold as indicated in the weekend edition of OUTREACH)
tel.: (212) 682-3633

Procedure:

- 1) Pick up forms to reserve space at the Church Center on the 2nd Floor of 777 UN Plaza (corner of 44th Street & 1st Ave.)
- 2) Fill out the form and hand it in to Ms. Linda Arnold before 4:00 p.m. prior to the requested meeting date.
- 3) FOR ALL BOOKINGS AT THE CHURCH CENTER AFTER 6:00 P.M., A \$60.00 SECURITY CHARGE WILL APPLY.

Important:

As of 8 April, daily NGO strategy sessions will be held every morning from 9:15-10:30 a.m. in conference room D. At all other times, NGO activity will be based in Conference Room E.

The HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT CAUCUS will be held from 2:00-3:00 p.m. in Conference Room E on the following dates:

Tuesday, 8 April	Thursday, 10 April
Monday, 14 April	Tuesday, 15 April

Wednesday, 23 April Thursday, 24 April

NGO CONSULTATION ON INCREASING ACCESS TO THE UN GENERAL
ASSEMBLY

AND ITS MAIN COMMITTEES AND ALL AREAS OF WORK OF THE UN

WHEN: Wednesday., 30 April
10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
WHERE: UN Headquarters
(room to be announced)

Representatives of NGOs in Consultative Status with ECOSOC and those Associated with DPI are invited to participate in a day of discussion on specific issues that are likely to be raised at meetings of the Sub-Group on NGOs of the Open-Ended High-Level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System, which is examining ways to increase NGO participation in the work of the UN General Assembly, its Main Committees and the UN System as a whole. All UN Missions are also invited to send Representatives.

This Consultation is being organized under the auspices of the NGO Committee Chairs of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (CONGO). For further information, call the CONGO office in NY at (212) 986-8557.

PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY:
LOCAL INITIATIVES FOR CITIES & TOWNS

From 1-5 June 1997, an international conference will be held in New Castle, Australia to examine and encourage environmental awareness in local communities. The outcome of the conference will be presented to UNGASS in June. For more information, contact the Conference Managers, Capital Conferences Party Ltd. in Australia at: tel.: 612 9252 3388; fax: 612 9241 5282; email: capcon@ozemail.com.au

HOW TO SUBMIT AN ARTICLE TO OUTREACH...

OUTREACH will be serving the NGO Community particularly at CSD 5 and Earth Summit II in June. We will make efforts to include statements made by NGOs during the sessions as well as articles you wish to see published. The editors reserve the right to choose and edit any contribution. All contributions must be submitted, with a proper by-line, NO LATER THAN 4:00 P.M., to be considered for publication the following day.

Note: Where possible, it is preferred that contributions are made in "ready format," i.e. that they are submitted on a IBM compatible diskette or sent via e-mail, indicating clearly that it is a submission to OUTREACH. To submit electronically, send to < wfuna@undp.org >, marked 'submission to OUTREACH'.

RIO GRINDS...

Stirring it up

Although it was announced in the weekend edition of OUTREACH that Rio Grinds would begin today, it appears that after five weeks of hiatus, it will need a good strong cup of java in the morning to get going.

Given the current UN Staff Union Boycott of what one had hoped was the estimable supplier of the Vienna Cafe, it seems we may have to bring our own brew in from the outside.

OUTREACH '97
CSD NGO Steering Committee

World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)

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OUTREACH 1997
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