

OUTREACH 1997

The Voice of the NGO Community at CSD*

Countdown to Earth Summit II

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ANXIOUSLY AWAITING THE LAST DAY

AT A GLANCE

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COMMENTARY

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CSD NGO Steering Committee

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"Which tune in June, USA?"

Why does not the US play any more good old-fashioned evergreen songs?

The US has come a long way since it marched out of Rio in 1992. Then again, haven't we all? But maybe the US has taken the longest strides -- at least up until this Intersessional started. I mean, despite Reagan, the US went along with strong measures to protect the ozone layer in 1987. I'd like to think that this was because environmental sense overrode short-sighted market gains, and not the fact that American firms had developed technology that replaced CFCs.

And just think of how poorly the US performance under Bush was rated by the world in Rio, who tried to substitute the green-house effect with the White House effect. This was definitely no show-stopper and only earned Bush the reputation as the most isolated US President at an international conference after World War II. A rather dubious solo performance.

But how elated we felt over the environmental commitment of the Clinton Administration. This was more than corroborated by Al Gore's insight shown in his books on environmental problems.

And how saddened we feel today at the close of this environmental interlude -- which actually is the overture to a pastoral symphony played out in tune in June.

The US performance during the Intersessional has played like a sad piece of music. Ambassador Richardson's meeting with the NGOs prior to the Intersessional was like listening to a fanfare, a happy tune performed by a confident player, a virtuoso soloist. But when he reappeared in the plenary on Monday, he was sadly lacking harmony with the rest of the players. He almost fell flat. All he delivered was a round of empty words, not even slightly reminiscent of something that could connote a happy song. This was after all, a too often played US melody. And believe me, absolutely not an evergreen.

The next US movement was played out in concert with an attentive international NGO audience present. "Yes, we have no position, we have no

position today. The other players have not made their notes nor positions clear," the delegation rapped. The NGOs were left with a feeling that the US really was missing a conductor.

The following day in the plenary, we watched another solo performance by the US. But this almost sounded like "Anything you can do, we can't do either." And when the Chair swung the baton and said, "we'd rather hear what you could do with us, US," the NGOs nodded in accordance and thought, slightly aghast, "Has the US delegation not even read Al Gore's books?"

The curtain is about to fall for the Intersessional scene. What will the next play be like? When will the US get its act together and play in tune with the rest of us? Will it be "April in New York" or just another cacophony in June?

Signed: "A somewhat saddened, but still hopeful listener."

VISION...

"Some people see things as they are and ask why? Others dream of things that never were and ask why not?"

Senator Robert Kennedy

"The fundamental political conflict in the opening decades of the new century, we believe, will not be between nations or even between trading blocs but between the forces of globalization and the territorially based forces of local survival seeking to preserve and redefine community."

Global Dreams

Richard Barnet and John Cavanagh

"The indicators a society chooses to report to itself about itself are surprisingly powerful. They reflect collective values and inform collective decisions.

Vision (con't)

A nation that keeps a watchful eye on its salmon runs or the safety of its streets makes different choices than does a nation that is only paying attention to its GNP.

The idea of citizens choosing their own indicators is something new under the sun - something intensely democratic."

Donella Meadows

"Yeah, Yeah, Yeah"

The Beatles

RIO GRINDS... overheard at the coffee bar

The worry of some in the coffee bar this week is will those of us attending this CSD Intersessional be remembered in the words of T.S. Eliot 'These were a decent people. Their only monument: the asphalt road and a thousand lost golf balls.' We understand that there will be a new book coming out for the CSD. 'Better than Sex - Confessions of a UN Groupie'

A tall rigid man with a bald spot masquerading as an NGO and answering to the name of AI was seen being led from Conference Room C where he had apparently been overheard making phone calls to prominent funders on behalf of the DNC.

Czar Strong has been looking at innovative ways of privatizing UN agencies: an offer from McDonalds to run FAO is understood to be being taken seriously; contracting out the Climate Change Secretariat to Shell is under serious consideration; an offer from a south-east Asian logging company to run the CBD is understood to have been made; a possible merger of WHO and Philip Morris is on the cards.

NEWS FROM THE

CONFERENCE ROOM

NGO Statement on Section III (condensed)

Barbara Bramble - US National Wildlife Federation

NGOs are concerned. This discussion on the structure of the document and not its substance. There has been a loss of the sense of urgency that this whole process was designed to address, back in 1989 when UNCED was initiated.

Do government delegates not understand that there is a confluence of catastrophes going on in the world and we were sent here to do our best to address them? The danger signs are everywhere:

- There has been an alarming rise in breast cancer.
- Scientists are seeing the disappearance of many frog species and the alarming appearance of deformed legs in other species.
- The total number of poor people is rising not falling.
- Water levels are beginning to rise, storms are threatening vulnerable populations, and there are big cracks in the Antarctic ice sheets.
- Fish populations in many of the world's most productive fisheries have already crashed below harvestable levels.
- Forest cover is still being lost at an increasing rate.
- The Rate of Change is now accelerating beyond our capacity to react.

Einstein said "God does not play dice with the world." But we are.

So the NGOs want you to know that this year's CSD and Earth Summit II will have failed miserably if it does not specify the actions required for every section in the paper, with a measurable target and a timetable, and clear delineation of who is to be responsible for action.

We do appreciate the work of the Secretariat and the Co-chairs who have obviously labored to pull together the recommendations that have been discussed here in the last week. But most of the good ideas that are mentioned do not translate into action.

The NGO documents contain some recommendations to make results of the CSD and Earth Summit II more action oriented. We want to see a real program of work for each item that is mentioned, with responsible parties identified. We also want to see targets and timetables for them.

The Co-Chairs paper calls for 'the next concrete steps for international action must be expeditious conclusion of convention on Prior Informed Consent and Persistent Organic Pollutants.' There are obviously no dates for the first actual reductions in release of those chemicals, much less their

elimination. As NGOs we can count the latter as progress.

The next step surely must be a global harmonized system for the classification and labeling of such chemicals, and the development of a Framework Chemicals Convention into which the POPs and PIC instruments, along with others can fit.

So each section in the document should lay out sign posts for international or domestic actions and who should implement such actions, and by when.

Paragraph 18: Integration of Economic and Environment Objectives

We are pleased to see that the paper does have an important action item, with a target and a timetable, for the production of national sustainable development plans, and an invitation to pursue local Agenda 21. We agree wholeheartedly, but the date is too far away. The five year review period is an important pattern. There should be a strong 'beat' on the drum of sustainability every five years. The deadline must be the year 2002.

Equally important is the process by which this work is accomplished. Governments must ensure that all major groups are actively involved at all levels of decision making in the formulation and implementation of these strategies. This should also include the indigenous peoples.

And the national sustainable development plans will not be successful unless the process meets the rising international norms for transparency, accountability and the public's right to effective participation. These norms are now accepted and implemented at most of the international financial institutions such as the World Bank.

Paragraph 19: Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns

NGOs have recommended the use of the concept of 'environmental space' (or the 'environmental footprint') which was articulated and evaluated at HABITAT II and accepted there as a way for nations, as well as local communities to proceed. This concept involves calculating, then setting targets to reduce (taking into account the equity approach to meet the needs and aspirations of the poor) the ecological pressure caused by wasteful consumer choices.

Inclusion of this should strengthen the sub para 'd' of Para. 19 and transform this general good idea,

News from the Conference Room (con't)

i.e. the adoption of targets for energy and materials efficiency, into a real action plan. Then all that is needed is a deadline, which we would recommend, as above, to be 2002.

Paragraph 20: Making Trade, Environment and

Sustainable Development mutually supporting

A specific point needs to be made with regard to the section on Trade. Throughout this section, while the potential impact of environmental and social agreements on trade is assumed to be a problem to be avoided, the equivalent impacts of trade agreements on environmental and social goals are ignored. Let me give you one example of how those points could be balanced more appropriately in a revised text:

- Further work is needed to ensure that the implementation of environmental measures does not result in disguised restrictions on trade, particularly those that have adverse effects on existing market access opportunities of developing countries, **and equally, to ensure that globalization promoted by liberalized trade does not undermine the environmental and social goals of the Earth Summit and the other recent global conferences.**

For the first action item, we recommended that the governments should agree, here and in the Earth Summit II, to convene a meeting of Trade and Environment Ministers, just before the next ministerial meeting of the WTO.

In addition, we hope to see a clear understanding among the delegations that environmental conventions are not within the purview of the WTO, and thus cannot be bound by WTO-related requirements. This should be clarified now in this document and at Earth Summit II.

We feel the CSD has the competence, which WTO does not, to examine the sustainable development impacts of Trade.

Therefore the CSD should operationalize its 1994 call for an environmental review of the Uruguay Round, and also further the work of the Expert Panel on Trade and Sustainable Development (endorsed by the CSD in 1995), by establishing an Intergovernmental Panel on Trade and Sustainable Development (or a sub-commission of the CSD) to examine and make recommendations

on ways to reconcile trade with the environmental and social development objectives of sustainable development. We urge governments to commit this panel to the following purposes:

- expand efforts to eliminate negative effects of trade on developing countries by reconciling WTO rule making and global trade practices with the post-Rio agenda;
- implement the HABITAT II agenda which calls for governments to create 'regulatory and legal framework...to promote socially and environmentally responsible corporate investment in partnership with local communities;' and
- work for international codes of conduct for corporations; ISO 14000 and EMAS systems are useful, but cannot substitute for sound, binding regulations and performance based standards and codes of conduct.

Also we urge governments to speak out and act consistent with the agreements of the CSD, when they have their WTO hat on, for example in promoting openness and transparency in WTO procedures.

Statement on Finance

Rob Lake, UNED-UK

It goes without saying that financial issues are at the heart of the success of Agenda 21. Given the overwhelming technical and political importance of financial resources, we are somewhat disappointed that the Co-Chairmen's paper does not indicate any significant steps forward or highlight clearly enough some of the fundamental principles which we believe are important. As in other areas of the paper, targets, timetables and specific actions are lacking.

On ODA, we urge all countries again to reaffirm their commitment to reaching the 0.7% target, and to set a target of doing this by the next review of Agenda 21 in the year 2002. It would be useful to indicate that better targeting of ODA to meet environmental and social objectives could help to restore public confidence in the value of ODA in some developed countries.

On the balance between ODA and FDI, it is essential to stress more clearly that these two mechanisms are not necessarily suited to the same tasks. There will be certain sectors and activities which present little or no attraction for the private sector, but which are of central environmental and social importance. These include biodiversity conservation, soil and watershed protection, and development and diffusion of sustainable agriculture technology, particularly for marginal and especially poor areas.

Moreover, clear statements are necessary on the need for ODA's capacity to meet real needs to be improved, for example by providing small-scale finance over long periods and through flexible

delivery mechanisms that maximize community participation, such as national environmental funds.

The GEF negotiations starting on 12 March will have reached their planned mid-point by the time of Earth Summit II in June. We all know that the budgetary situation in many developed countries is difficult. But surely announcing commitment to a replenishment of the world's environment fund that is not just 'adequate' but represents an increase in resources would be an ideal way for developed country leaders to demonstrate their commitment to global environment at Earth Summit II. We would like to see the output from this Intersessional reflecting this commitment.

The possibility of widening the GEF's mandate, for example to include desertification, has been discussed. Clearly funds are needed to tackle both desertification and other environmental problems. But we would urge caution. Widening the GEF's scope without guaranteeing very substantial extra resources could simply leave the GEF doing more things less well. This would not be a desirable outcome.

We agree that further work is needed on FDI. This should focus on how to maximize the contribution to sustainable development of foreign private flows to developing countries. It should also examine the design of an appropriate policy environment for attracting FDI, the strengthening of host countries' social and environmental policy and regulations, and their enforcement capacity, as well as the creation of certainty and stability concerning the regulatory environment. Attention should be given in international investment regimes, such as the Multilateral Agreement on Investment being negotiated within the OECD, to designing mechanisms for screening all FDI to ensure that it contributes to sustainable development. Following the model propounded by NAFTA, states should not change or relax environmental regulation to attract foreign investment. Voluntary industry codes should not substitute for or undermine regulatory regimes.

News from the Conference Room (con't)

Domestic resource mobilization is obviously essential. It is therefore disappointing that the language of the Co-Chairmen's paper on this issue is weak. All governments should be urged to pursue better policies of the kind referred to in paragraph 42 of the paper.

The paper's references to the elimination of environmentally damaging subsidies are welcome. But it should be made clear that this embraces all damaging subsidies - including for example, those for fisheries and forestry.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we believe that the Co-Chairmen's paper leaves unanswered the crucial question of how many of the issues it raises - and which I have referred to here - are to be taken forward and international consensus and

implementation pursued. We would therefore repeat our proposal that an intergovernmental process should be established under the aegis of the CSD, such as a Panel or Sub-Commission, aimed at reaching global consensus on a range of financial issues and formulating concrete recommendations for action at the international and national level. These include innovative financial mechanisms, the balance between and respective roles of ODA and FDI, the co-ordination of subsidy reductions, and the creation of a policy environment and international mechanisms that maximize the contribution of FDI to sustainable development.

Such a body might operate through a series of focused sessions concentrating on specific issues of relevance to countries at different stages of development, and therefore having different needs along the spectrum from ODA to FDI. Experience could be exchanged, understanding of appropriate solutions developed and dialogue encouraged. Special sessions could be held on areas requiring international coordination, such as the introduction of international environmental or other taxes.

In the meantime, we would again urge the EU to move forward to innovative international finance by introducing excise duty on aviation fuel and channeling some of the revenue to the implementation of Agenda 21 in developing countries. Urgent further investigation is also needed of the practicalities of a charge on international currency transactions. This meeting, the CSD and the Earth Summit II must produce a convincing outcome on finance. All countries, developed and developing, have responsibilities to shoulder. We hope they will all rise to the challenge.

NGO VIEWPOINT

US struggles to build bridge to the 5th CSD

After a meeting on Tuesday night with the US delegation, several NGOs approached "OUTREACH" with the following report.

Five days after their highly-productive

meeting with delegations from the E.U., international NGOs met Tuesday evening for the first time with the delegation from the United States. NGOs entered with hopes that the positive momentum would carry on. Very quickly, however, it became clear that the US and NGO perceptions of reality were separated by an alarming gulf.

It seemed as if the US was trying to displace their lack of a clearly defined priorities onto other nations. Instead they indicated that they had done more than most nations in the area of environmental connection: the air quality had gotten cleaner; the Great Lakes were no longer burning; there had been significant successes in land-fills, toxic chemicals, and transfer of technology. The NGOs felt that the US neglected to mention, however, that those accomplishments were gained through the use of precisely the kinds of targets and timetables and enforced regulations that his government has since been furiously resisting in international negotiations.

The US made a strong commitment under Agenda 21, to make this a better planet to live on but the NGOs were not given any specific commitments as to how the US would accomplish this.

One leading NGO mentioned the suspicion often expressed by US as well as non-US NGOs, that US arguments for reform and restructuring were merely smokescreens to hide a wholesale slashing of agencies and programs. 'Why are Americans always talking about the need for reforms that require a reduction in funds, but never supporting those programs once they are properly restructured,' an NGO inquired.

The NGOs were determined to try to help out the somewhat beleaguered and non-comprehending US delegation by asking 'Can you at least try to include the phrase 'within regulatory contexts,' when you talk about the virtues of the private sector?'

The real driving force in the 21st century will be the private sector, was again stated the US, in what has become a recurring theme not just at the CSD, but in all US foreign policy proclamations.

Any hope by NGOs that the meeting had produced an immediate effect on US sensitivity were squashed the next day, however. When the US was called to address the Intersessional discussions on the Co-Chair's Paper, the US would «not accept 0.7 percent ODA; could not accept targets and timetables for CO2 emissions; and indeed would not address program targets of any kind.»

It was only the intervention of the Chair that lifted the delegates' fast descending sense of despair by gently, but firmly, responding to the US that the Chair would not accept any more statements that spoke of 'not accepting,' but would appreciate from now on only statements of what countries *would* accept and suggest to make the Paper and the Special Session a success.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

The Sixth International Conference of The World Information Transfer will be held at United Nations Headquarters on 17 -18 April 1997. Running parallel to CSD V, this conference, which is being co-sponsored by the Government of Chile, will focus on "Environmental Degradation: Its Effect on Children's Health." Further information can be obtained by contacting the following: tel: (212) 686-1996; fax: (212) 686-2172 email: wit@igc.apc.org

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