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MAI BEATEN; NGOs VICTORIOUS; CSD- 6 SUCCESSFUL

My delegate friend smiled as he saw my caption for the last OUTREACH this CSD. "There is a lot of truth in that. A lot of truth. You have come of age this time. Well prepared, with good strategies, good argumentation and reasonably well coordinated. You've done good."

And in many ways we had. Indirectly the whole NGO community felt good about the news from the OECD headquarters. Global grassroots democracy had worked. Concerted efforts from more than 900 NGOs and several governments, convinced by their electorate and lucid economic studies, were awarded a temporary victory when the decision was made to postpone the entire MAI agreement for at least a year. Rumor had it, it was already dead.

But, NGOs, always a bit wary of too easy a victory too soon, have taken on a cautious line. We'll be watching this process as scrupulously as ever. Too many sinister ghosts from the past have too often been brought back to life.

"You have just corroborated what I said." My delegate friend was pouring us a farewell drink. This late night talk and friendly evaluation was about to take on something resembling tradition. " You know, the way you NGOs are able to bring pressure on decision-makers all over the world, at all

levels of society, and I am not only talking about exerting pressure on governments,"-- he seemed engrossed for a moment in his own thoughts, making an effort to elicit exact words to continue his sentence -- "the sheer force and democratic semblance that NGO pressure carries, could subsequently earn you the label -- "the fifth Estate." And if you earn your stripes, you must always rise to the challenge."

I thought about the two hectic weeks that had passed. Everybody present seemed pleased with the dialogue sessions, the process around it, the outcome from it. That is -- everybody except the G-77. But the NGOs had reason to feel victorious. The Major Groups Review on Voluntary Agreement was our suggestion, the governments picked it up, the Chair included it in the texts -- and, as was to be expected, the Group of 77 stalled the whole thing. I gave vent to the frustrations of the whole NGO community at CSD.

This has almost become a rule: an adopted NGO suggestion triggers a blocking G-77 action. These nations have to let go of their medieval-like interpretation of governing and let "accountability, transparency and participation," the very pillars of UN reform, penetrate their ways. I talked to delegates from these countries about the suggestion on the Voluntary Agreement and they reassured me: no, no - we are not against this, we just need time to find the correct approach to deal with it. Their actions belie their kind words. They obviously don't want it.

My delegate friend put a soothing hand on my shoulder. "Look, responding to direct democracy is not easy for any governing system - let alone the G-77 systems. Besides, bureaucracies always develop a perception of self-perfection and will always think they come up with the best solution. And then, when NGOs come up with suggestions that are being taken seriously by a number of governments, this obviously threatens their sense of fulfillment and control."

And when perceived as the fifth estate, we not only challenge complacency, we threaten it. Any journey begins with a small step, and the journey to UN reform seems endlessly long. I was at a loss for a useful simile when it came to travel all the way to democracy. For the time being, that road seems to be consistently blocked by the same group of nations.

"Five years ago it would have been close to inconceivable to have this large number of Ministers and Deputy Ministers address the CSD. This is real progress. An ever increasing number of nations are committed to working on environment and development issues." I suddenly felt slightly uncomfortable. My delegate friend seemed to know me so well, that he could read my mind. Was it ominous when official delegates could read the thoughts of NGOs? I shrugged -- we all know how important it is for international processes that ministers sometimes descend upon them to add to its political status and prestige. And an ever-increasing number of Ministers actually know what they are talking about.

My friend viewed me through his glass. "Curb your sarcasm. You know I am right. Look, a majority of the high-level representatives, Ministers as well as Deputy Ministers, talked convincingly about the suggestion to keep environmental education on the agenda. Reporting annually to the CSD on education for sustainable development and environment and having UNESCO act as task managers in this process, have probably given education more status than ever before. For one week, education has become the concern of both environment and foreign affairs ministries. This is a first. Getting education onto the annual CSD agenda also challenges the UN system to work on an interagency basis. I dare say you noticed how many of the delegations sent this message to the UN. And with this text in the final document, we will revisit this area every year.

"I am a bit surprised though, at how gentle NGOs appeared when discussing water management issues. I found that some of the statements coming from various delegations were as radical and as critical as the NGOs." I thought, maybe we did not pay enough attention to this. Maybe we got side-tracked by other issues. We certainly did try to keep track of things, but probably fell short in a few

areas. In addition, the Toper Task force on UNEP took place in the midst of everything. The two weeks were filled to the brim.

"You know what I worry about?" My friend's voice broke into my thoughts. "I worry that you NGOs this time spent so much time in getting seats at the negotiating tables, that you sometimes forgot what you should have said." His question shook me awake. I could not decide whether he was honest or facetious. None the less, if this is the impression we now give, we certainly need to rethink our positions.

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A Viewpoint From OUR side!

Too often people assume that the "normal" point of view is the one from the developed countries against which all other points of view should be compared. OUTREACH interviewed Ambassador Rogatien Biaou from Benin. Ambassador Biaou is Deputy Director of the Cabinet of Benin, Vice Chair of CSD 6 and a member of the Bureau of CSD 6. This is his view as told to OUTREACH coeditor, John Maskell.

We in the Developing Countries are very concerned about the social dimensions of freshwater. We recognize that water is an economic commodity, but for us, even more importantly, it also has social implications. We have three principal concerns regarding freshwater. First, our concern is capacity building for all activities regarding the supply of freshwater to rural areas of developing countries, particularly in Africa and the Least Developed Countries; specifically, to reduce the burden of lack of sanitation and increase the access to local drinking water. Second, we seek to promote the transfer of technologies to reduce pollution of water resources, particularly industrial pollution. Third, we struggle for the establishment of new financial mechanisms for developing countries to fulfill their commitments in the fields of integrated management of freshwater with respect to development, protection, use and distribution of freshwater.

We feel negotiations are going in the right direction for the realization of our concerns. However, there is a related problem related to human resources. We have great difficulty reaching our objectives without training programs to develop the management and operational skills of local people. We need financial resources for training with respect to education, public awareness, and the transfer of technology.

The subject of review of voluntary initiatives by major partnership groups, along with government, has been discussed a lot. We feel it is not enough to just review voluntary initiatives. There needs to be a framework, guidelines and clear commitments from Developed countries and companies. We feel we can't count on voluntary initiatives. We cannot assess them in terms of our own development programs. So unless there are some voluntary initiatives in developing countries, the discussions don't really involve us.

We welcome the suggestion and interest by industry in working with individual countries as partners in developing watershed management practices and I think developing countries at CSD should support this kind of idea. We could be very interested in this kind of partnership, but as an academic exercise, we are not interested. We don't see how developing countries may benefit or how voluntary initiatives can meet any of our needs unless they involve initiatives in developing countries.

Regarding the participation of NGOs in the CSD processes, we appreciate very much the contribution of NGOs to CSD6 and we commit ourselves to working with our civil society partners

such as NGOs, the private sector and labour. I am happy to clarify that "we," means, as far as I am concerned, Benin, The Bureau of CSD, the members of CSD and the UN System as a whole. The Bureau of CSD is pleased to be developing ways and means of increasing NGO participation in UN processes, and, in fact, there have been resolutions in the General Assembly encouraging member states to engage and include their civil society.

But it is not enough to just participate in articulating and adopting decisions. We have to implement them. And in order to implement them we need active support of civil society in partnership with Government.

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US Dollars Violate Russian Environmental Law- Endangering Millions

The people of Chelyabinsk seek the support of the international community to actively participate in the identification of viable sustainable alternatives to polluting industries. We urge the US government to stop spending 2 or 3 million US taxpayer dollars to fund construction of the Mayak nuclear armament plant for storage of weapons grade plutonium and production of Mixed Uranium-Plutonium Fuel (MOX) to recycle spent-plutonium (nuclear wastes). This is of great concern to the members of the Oblast community. The plant is being funded by the US government in violation of Russian environmental law as there was no Environmental Impact Study ever done before this investment was made.

This use of taxpayer dollars is devastating to our people, who are already suffering as victims of environmental pollution. Standards for US governmental actions in our homeland must not be allowed to violate the norms and standards that exist for industrial operations conducted within the borders of the US under US federal law. The US government must not be allowed to export US taxpayer dollars to violate Russian law and further endanger our people and our environment.

Chelyabinsk was one of the former Soviet Union's main military production centers, which included nuclear weapons manufacturing. Accidents, nuclear waste disposal and day to day operations of the Mayak reactors and radiochemical plant have contaminated a vast area of the province. In the early 1950's there were so many occurrences of death and disease from the nuclear waste dumping in the Techa River that 22 villages along the riverbanks in a 50 mile kilometers zone downstream from Mayak were evacuated. In 1957, a nuclear waste storage tank accident was kept secret and 10,700 people were evacuated. The severe environmental contamination of this region led to dramatic increases in cancer rates, birth defects, and sterility. Over the past 33 years, there has been a 21% increase in the incidents of cancer, 25% increase in birth defects and 50% of the population of child bearing age are sterile.

Prior to the construction of this facility there was no information provided to the people in the affected community. Our community has long been a region of strategic military importance and has a history of secrecy. Most of the information about plutonium contamination and plutonium impacts is still classified, although plutonium contamination has affected 400 kilometers around Myak facility, affecting an area 10 times larger than expected, and impacting downwinders with 100 times greater global contamination.

Over 1 ½ million of our people have already had exposure to the highest level of radiation. Nuclear scientists are telling the world that this is an old problem but I want to tell you that plutonium releases from nuclear spent fuel is still continuing. Our community is already contaminated by

plutonium and our population is opposed to this storage facility because our land is already very contaminated. This proposed facility is located near the famous Techa River and the Lake Karachay, already used as storage for 120 million Kuri of radioactivity. This is dangerous to the drinking water supply of millions of people.

We urgently seek the support of the US and the NGOs participating in CSD to help us by demanding that the US government stop using your taxpayer dollars to fund our ecogenocide. This facility must be stopped before it is too late.

During the WEDO workshop on Industrial Hot Spots we became aware that the US has spent over 350 million US taxpayer dollars to fund relocation of 12,000 traditional Dineh (Navajo) Indigenous people in Arizona from their ancestral homeland and is currently seeking to complete the relocation of the 3,000 that remain, living in the shadow of a coal mine owned by a multinational company. Perhaps it is time that the NGOs and the US public find out how the US has been spending their taxpayer dollars both at home and overseas. We urgently seek your assistance and urge you to contact us via e-mail: chel@glas.apc.org

By Natalie I. Mironova, President, Movement for Nuclear Safety, and Member of Highest Ecolical Council of the Russian State Duma (Editorial assistance provided by Marsha Monestersky, Co-Chair of the Human Rights Caucus) back to top

Environmental market large and expanding: Arms exports an economic loser

The Peace Caucus presented a workshop with Miriam Pemberton concerning a comparison between the economic benefit of environmental products and services and the arms industry. The Environment won – hands down.

A recently completed study finds that the environmental technology market is double the size of the world's arms market. In spite of this, the major arms producing country, the USA, continues to spend many times more promoting US arms exports as promoting the export of envirotechnology.

The carefully researched report, A Tale of Two Markets: Trade in Arms and Environmental Technologies, by Miriam Pemberton and Michael Tenner, documents several findings which call into question the economic wisdom and competitiveness of current economic trade practices which are heavily weighted towards manufacture and export of arms while neglecting the growing stronger market opportunity in environmental technology.

The report adds an economic argument to the moral and strategic case against arms exports. By concentrating resources on arms trade the report shows that we are losing a stronger market opportunity in environmental technology. The report will be released May 7, 1998, and will be available from:

The National Commission for Economic Conversion and Disarmament, 733 15th Street, Suite 1020, Washington, D.C. Tel: 202-234-9392, ext. 214; Fax; 202-319-3558; E-mail; ncecd@igc.apc.org

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Sustainability Based on Fair Trade

Last night's Panel on Sustainable Agriculture Food Industries, co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Caucus, gave a taste of things to come in CSD 7 and 8. Addressing both themes of sustainable production and consumption and

sustainable agriculture and rural development, 7 panellists demonstrated how industries that rely on, and support sustainable agriculture and producer communities, are beginning to flourish because of increasing consumer demand for these types of products and processes. A common theme running through the discussion was the need to recognise the social role of people in their communities as well as the environmental and economic concerns of sustainability.

Many definitions of sustainability seem to leave out that most essential ingredient; people.

Without making a provision for the families, communities and farmers who sow, plant, grow, create, prune, trim harvest or manufacture goods, we in the North are deluding ourselves about the true value of sustainability. When asking a small farmer from El Salvador what is important to him and his family, he replied, to be able to feed his family and live his life with dignity. Fair Trade is one such way of recognising the role people play in creating truly sustainable agriculture.

An example given was of the coffee industry and how Fair Trade provides a sustainable alternative to conventional trade. Coffee is a commodity and is in fact the most valuable source of foreign exchange to Latin America after gas and oil. The coffee supply chain often begins with an isolated small farmer who is paid a pittance for her/his crop, it's then traded from one middle level trader to the next until it arrives on the New York City market where it is traded like pork bellies and copper. It's no surprise to note that the pound of gourmet coffee bought at the local store can cost up to \$11.00 or more while the farmer receives less than one dollar.

Fair trade seeks an alternative to conventional trading practices by adhering to the following principles in the production and marketing of coffee:

Pay a fair price to the producer

With a guaranteed minimum to ensure farmers a living wage including a floor price of \$1.26 that Fair Traders cannot go below. When the market is high quality, organic and a further fair trade premium is paid to the farmer.

Buy directly from democratically run communities

Fair traders work directly with democratically organised producer groups who are governed by the farmers themselves. This ensures the benefits of trade actually reach those who had a hand in the creation of the goods and not only the middle level traders.

Provide advance credit

Fair trade makes vital advance credit available to producers where credit has been either unavailable or offered at prohibitive rates. In fact, 60% of the value of a contract has to be provided upon signing to allow the farmer and his/her community to be able to manage their finances from a long-term perspective.

Fair trade coffee is beginning to make an impact in northern markets, it has between 3-5% of the market in Europe and in the US, Equal Exchange, a worker owned co-op has sales of around \$6 million in Fair Trade coffee.

As a vital ingredient in the sustainable equation Fair Trade can provide a long term economic base for producers whilst protecting their communities, the environment and providing those in the south with a better chance of a life lived with dignity.

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GOSEA (Global Organisation of Students for Environmental

Action)

During the VOICES conference in Istanbul in September 1997, students from all over the world were gathered to create the first global charter on the environment for students. When the conference was over the participants strongly felt that it was important to continue to co-operate in order to exchange experience and organise common projects. The organisation GOSEA, Global Organisation of Students for Environmental Action, was formed. The first major GOSEA-meeting was held in Stockholm early in April 1998. 330 students from 50 countries attended the conference and a number of concrete projects were initiated and carried out.

GOSEA today is a rapidly growing network consisting of members from sixty different nations. Information about events and projects related to environmental issues are spread to students from all over the world through the GOSEA-Internet-list. Four times a year, a GOSEA newsletter, with information about ongoing projects in different parts of the world, is published. By the use of Internet discussions about the structure and future of GOSEA are held.

If you want to join GOSEA, or if you would like more information, please write to the GOSEA-list:

GOSEA-L@NIC.SURFNET.NL or contact the Swedish Ecodemics: info@swedish-ecodemics.a.se Box 5903, 114 89, Stockholm, SWEDEN, Tel: +46 - 8 - 458 10 11 Fax: +46 - 8 - 674 54 87 back to top

North-South Youth Cooperation:

A new initiative to promote cooperation between the North and South.

To ensure that youth organizations play an active and effective role in policy formulation and the monitoring of the implementation Agenda 21, the North–South Youth Cooperation on Tuesday, April 28, 1998 held a dialogue at United Nations Conference, to begin preparing a Two Year Plan of Action.

Some projects proposed for the joint world-wide youth Action Plan are already planned, as is continuous youth participation in CSD matters at all levels. Two important examples are the case of the Ogoni people in Nigeria who are dealing with environmental devastation of their lands by multinational oil companies, and the question of investment as they affect human rights in Tibet. The North-South Youth Cooperation is also interested in working towards the upgrading of the CSD status.

The conference attracted over 20 organizations from North and South. Linda Docter (official youth delegate of the Dutch on behalf of the Dutch National Youth Council for Environment and Development and chair of the Youth Caucus at CSD 5) spoke on the positive experiences in youth participation for sustainability in the Netherlands and the possibilities for improving youth participation at CSD's. Goodluck Diigbo (National President of the National Youth Council of Ogoni People, Chair of the Human Rights Caucus) stressed the need for youth involvement in sustainable international economic cooperation. Teresa Turner (International Oil Working Group) highlighted the fact that there is an important role for youth organizations in the monitoring of activities of the oil industry. Other youth present brought up various other cases to be taken up in the Action Plan and welcomed the initiative.

The conference was sponsored by the Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED), the Dutch National Council for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO), and the

International Oil Working Group (IOWG).

For more information, please contact: North-South Youth Cooperation Goodluck Diigbo, C/o IOWG P.O. Box 1410, Cathedral Street, New York, NY 10025, US

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Will Major Groups (ever) review voluntary initiatives?

From the Corporate Responsibility and Accountability Caucus

By the end of the two weeks of CSD6, the proposal from the NGO Taskforce on Business and Industry for a Major Groups Review of the effectiveness of voluntary initiatives is still alive but still undergoing last minute "improvements." As of 10:15 p.m., Thursday night, governments had not yet agreed on the final text describing the process for defining the process. As the night wears on, NGOs and other interested parties anxiously await news of whether the proposed Review will be lost or found amid the permutations of precautions and compromises.

At this time, the industry negotiating group has arrived at the following: UNDESA, UNEP, and UNIDO ... with NGOs, Trade Unions, and Industry ... will define the process and scope of the Review of Voluntary Initiatives and Agreements. The results of that discussion will then be reported to governments. The governments will then take the report and formulate a decision on how to move on at CSD-7.

This may look very different in the morning. Some observers express concern that with all the talk about process, the actual review may never happen. Others worry that it may happen, but end up more an advertisement than evaluation. Still others fret that it will end up constrained through carefully crafted qualifications compromising the NGO and trade union concerns that prompted the original proposal.

Of critical concern to NGOs and others is the fate of the idea of Major Groups taking the initiative to dialogue directly with governments on how industry is to become more responsible and sustainable. This idea follows from the UNGASS prescriptions for the CSD to "strengthen its interaction with representatives of major groups" and for industry to report on its "promotion of corporate responsibility and accountability." The proposed Review represents more than another academic exercise; it is a convergence of different perspectives and a testing of governments belief and trust in the multistakeholder concept.

The questions now are whether interaction or inaction will be strengthened. To what degree will the process be managed to enhance understanding or avoid uncomfortable differences? To what degree will the interacting groups -- in conjunction with governments -- create their own process in sharing their different vantage points? To what degree will voluntary initiatives reach the light of authentic scrutiny? Only time will tell.

By Jeffrey Barber, Peter van der gaag and Jagjit Plahe

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Fresh water: Barely a trickle

The document on strategic approaches to freshwater management has been facing impervious barriers in different national landscapes. Even after the numerous international meetings on fresh water management, the last one in March, in Paris, the CSD document may fall short of radical but urgently needed and binding measures to be taken by governments. Much of the time has so far been spent on adding or deleting words near to the hearts of or disliked by the delegates

For example, the delegates spent nearly two hours to arrive at a sentence that would reflect the need for the data on how women and men differ or do not differ in the management and use of water. They talked about the need for gender differentiated, gender dissaggregated, genderwise data and data collection with a gender perspective (under section A). In one of the previous texts women were 'dumped' along with all disadvantaged sections of the society. For many the text on water was also probably a kind of exercise in `gender sensitization`.

The mention of market based mechanisms for freshwater use still lurks in the document. It talks of transparent and well targeted subsidies for specific groups, particularly people living in poverty. The main thrust thus is to make water as an economic good in the terms of free marketers while the subsidies come as a sop to those who cannot afford to pay for water. It should be up to the local communities to decide the management of water resources rather than the governments at the central level to decide who should get water and who shouldn't.

The issue of polluter pays principle also a tricky one. The Industry and probably the wealthy will get away with polluting water by paying for it. The value of water cannot be measured in economic terms alone. As the survival of humanity depends on the very source of life, water one has to look beyond monetary measures to make its use sustainable. Market mechanisms can at best be an addition to the need for a people oriented approach to water.

The document does not sufficiently emphasize traditional knowledge of people in water management and the need for modern technologies not to totally undermine traditional and cultural practices related to freshwater management.

The rough sailing of the freshwater paper, especially on issues related to financial resources and mechanisms, is a reminder of the fact that good intentions need to be supported by necessary funds. The North-South divide and the divisions within the North and the South makes one wonder if at all we are serious in doing some thing about the impending catastrophe and possible conflicts arising from imminent freshwater scarcity.

Nations of the world are not water tight compartments! Maybe a watered down document is better than no document at all? After all, we can't make water.

By Krishnan

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Steering Committee Co-Chair election for the period 1998-99

CSD is an extremely busy time for NGOs. In addition to all the CSD issues, a number of procedural matters relating to the life of the Steering Committee itself are dealt with. Elections to fill all different positions for this complex body take place, and NGOs show what a painful road democracy sometimes can be. Hours are spent on finding the right procedural solution, and the Steering Committee has over the years slowly developed as a transparent, accountable and participatory coalition.

The election this year resulted in the re-election of Esmeralda Brown as Southern Co-Chair. Ms.

Brown works daily with United Methodist Office for the UN. Felix Dodds of the United Nations Environment and Development-UK (United Kingdom) Committee was elected Northern Co-Chair. Esmeralda Brown has been Southern Co-Chair since the beginning of the Steering Committee. Felix Dodds has also been actively involved in the Steering Committee since its inception, but is elected Northern Co-Chair for the first time this year.

Michael McCoy of the US based Citizens Network has served as the Northern Co-Chair until now. OUTREACH would like to thank McCoy for having served for the Northern NGOs all these years, and wish him good luck with his future projects, whatever they may be. back to top

New Steering Committee Caucus established called "Eco-Talk Caucus." Aims to become the most sustainable of all Caucuses.

In an unprecedented decision taken by one vote, the NGO Steering Committee agreed to accept to establish a new caucus. The task of this caucus is to deal with ecological talk and discussions, to find the right eco-habitat for this kind of information exchange. The caucus will always have a balanced view of gender, as is required by the process committee. "Eco-Talk" has, among other things, promised always to pronounce words relating to males and females in equal numbers. On representation, the Caucus states that people living in the north may represent the south provided they have visited the south, and people living in the south may represent the north, provided they have visited the north. Whether or not this applies to east-west relations, is still not clear. The rationale for the representative decision, was to eradicate all doubts concerning humanity being one family. This decision was said to baffle the process committee, which will look into this matter over the next year or two to decide on the validity of such a ruling.

The most sustainable resolution by the Eco-Talk Caucus, was sent to the Steering Committee for serious consideration: All discussion and talk that is uttered by the Steering Committee during its morning session, should be recycled during the afternoon session. Sustainable efficiency would be one of the net gains.

(from our Outraged Scribe.)

We apologize

OUTREACH accidentally translated the acronym OECD wrongly the other day, calling it an organization for cultural cooperation. For that we apologize. We do not understand how we could apply any Culture to this organization.

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