The First Universal Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum and the 14th Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum
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Statement from the Scientific and Technological Community

Rio+20

The scientific and technological community was largely disappointed with the Rio+20 outcome. Throughout the Rio+20 preparatory process, science presented evidence on dangerous changes to our environment, and the need to act with urgency to manage and avoid threats to our sustainability. However, the urgency for action is not reflected in concrete terms in the *Future We Want* outcome document.

More specifically, we were also disappointed that governments often failed to draw from new knowledge from science in the design of policies. They also failed to recognise science as a vital part of the solution to the sustainability challenges we face. Science will be needed to advance the on-going process for reaching existing targets, and to set new concrete SDGs, monitor progress and implement solutions.

Another area of concern was the focus on technology development and transfer in the outcome document. These indeed play a vital role. However, the crucial relationship between scientific research and knowledge, development and innovative technologies was not recognised. Moreover, knowledge from across the natural and social sciences is needed to identify, assess and monitor new technologies for their impacts, to ensure that proposed solutions are environmentally, culturally and socially appropriate. More generally, it needs to be recognized that global sustainability will not be achieved through technology alone. Sustainability is primarily a social and cultural challenge and needs to be addressed through appropriate means. These include knowledge from across the spectrum of human experience, from the arts and humanities as well as from the natural and social sciences.

Looking forward – UN processes

More positively, the Rio+20 agreement does explicitly highlight a number of opportunities to strengthen the science-policy interface, and Rio+20 also triggered a number of processes that show promise for the future. Moreover, many other interesting activities were launched on the fringes of Rio+20.

We are working with the UN to ensure that good scientific advice and expertise is available for the Open Working Group developing the **Sustainable Development Goals**. A first stage in this process is an expert group meeting in New York 20-21 March, organised by UNDESA, the International Social Science Council (ISSC) and the International Council for Science (ICSU). The Earth System Governance project has also received a substantial grant to work on the SDG process from a political science viewpoint. We hope the findings will be appropriately reflected in implementation of Rio+20 mandate.

The **Sustainable Development Solutions Network** also potentially provides a good avenue for getting scientific research into the Post 2015 and SDG processes.

We ask that the **UN high-level political forum** that will replace the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) provides a concrete mechanism to improve science advice into the UN and to improve the effectiveness of its functions learning from the good practice of individual communication, country policy performance review and special rapporteur systems introduced in the Human Right Council or the Aarhus Convention.

The **strengthening of UNEP** also hopefully offers avenues to improve the science-policy interface, as this is again specifically mentioned in the Rio outcome document in para 88(d), alongside improving stakeholder engagement with the Major Groups generally. In this respect, we call for support to the mechanisms to promote multi-stakeholder dialogues, good practice analysis, pilot project and strategic research by forging a nexus of policy, science and field actions toward achieving sustainability.

The **10 YFP of Sustainable Consumption and Production** also requires a great deal of input from the scientific and technological community, from across the natural and social sciences looking at both technological and behavioural change.TheGlobal Research Forum on SCP, launched during Rio+20, is an important forum for interdisciplinary research and policy design, which can support research for, developing indicators, and evaluation of Programmes under the 10YFP for a transition to SCP.

The scientific and technological community have been working intensively over the past years on the **Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services** (IPBES). We are overall pleased with progress, and that UNEP will take the lead on the next stages of this important project. Concerns remain over stakeholder engagement and the make-up of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel which is mostly composed of male, natural scientists, with under-representation of women scientists, the social sciences, and local and indigenous knowledge experts.

The **Science Advisory Board** that the UN Secretary General has asked UNESCO to create is another new development not specified in the Rio Outcome document, but agreed on at the fringes of Rio+20. We are working with UNESCO to ensure that this board has a high level of expertise, and appropriate balances of disciplines (natural and social sciences), countries and gender.

The scientific and technological community have also been working on the **GEO**, an important science and policy interface that enables monitoring of the state of the environment globally and can play an instrumental role in monitoring progress of the newly proposed SDGs goals. A continuation of GEO or another similar form of scientific report periodically is now even a must especially with a UNEP with a universal membership.

Access to information, participation in decision making and judicial proceedings over environmental matters are also a key matter of concern on which we hope progress will be made in the wake of Rio+20. We support a call for developing regional conventions in this respect.

Finally the scientific and technological community also launched its **Future Earth** project at Rio+20, in partnership with UNEP, UNESCO and others. This aims to develop knowledge for responding effectively to the risks and opportunities of global environmental change and for supporting

transformation towards global sustainability in the coming decades. One of the next big activities for Future Earth is to develop mechanisms which ensure stakeholder engagement in all stages of scientific research including agenda setting, data collection, communication and evaluation.

Conclusion – the need to enhance science-policy links

In conclusion, while the Rio+20 outcome may have been disappointing, there is now a wide range of activities taking place across the UN system that show promise for the future.

It is essential that these be informed by the very best knowledge from across the natural and social sciences, and knowledge coming from other stakeholder groups, so that the full range of environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable development can be addressed in an integrated fashion.

It must be noted that, despite the wealth of processes and activities taking place, it is often difficult to find clear entry points for scientific knowledge. In some cases these do exist, but the processes are often ad hoc and not rationalised or transparent. The UN system, including UNEP, needs to focus its attention on how to ensure that high-quality, transdisciplinary scientific and stakeholder knowledge is clearly and transparently utilised. The scientific and technological community are very eager to work with you on this project.