

Civil Society statement from European Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UNEP 7th Global Civil Society Forum (31st Oct. – 2nd Nov. 2005)

More than 60 representatives from civil society organisations in Europe and Central Asia, meeting in Geneva from October 30 to November 2, 2005, to discuss among others, the coming work programme of UNEP, emphasising the themes of production and consumption, chemicals, energy and tourism.

Introduction.

UNEP was among the first entities of the United Nations system to see the potential in cooperating with civil society. As UNEP found its founding platform during the Stockholm Conference in Sweden in 1972, civil society was present and provided the new and emerging UN unit slated to work on the environment with much of its novelty and infused it at the same time with considerable enthusiasm and energy.

UNEP at its twenty-second session of the Governing Council/ Global Ministerial Environment Forum, discussing a strategy on how to cooperate with civil society stated that:

“The objectives of this strategy can therefore be stated as follows:

- For UNEP: To seek greater collaboration with civil society in the fulfilment of its mandate to respond to global environmental concerns.
- For civil society: To effectively network with other groups, build internal capacity through raising awareness of UNEP's activities at national, regional and international levels.”¹

The representatives from civil society at this the European Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UNEP 7th Global Civil Society Forum are pleased to respond to this challenge with the following statement outlining their concerns as seen from their regional perspective:

Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns

In 1992 Agenda 21 stated: “the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances”.

Nothing that has happened in developed countries since that time has changed matters significantly for the better, and the rapid growth in many developing nations is adding to stresses on the planetary ecosystems.

With these points in mind it is essential that action is taken now to deliver on the commitments to more sustainable consumption and production made in 1992 and re-emphasised at Johannesburg in 2002.

A core theme of Agenda 21 is to "improve the quality of life for everyone within the Earth's carrying capacity". Given that only limited resources are available to fulfil this goal, it is necessary to develop

¹ page 6: Twenty-second session of the Governing Council/ Global Ministerial Environment Forum Nairobi, 3-7 February 2003, Items 4 (c) and (d) of the provisional agenda, Policy issues: Coordination and cooperation within and outside the United Nations, including non-governmental organizations: The role of civil society “ENHANCING CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE WORK OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME: STRATEGY PAPER

economies, which are less consumptive through different and more efficient production and consumption patterns. To reach this goal is not simply a question of scientific or technical improvement. It is a matter of the values that drive societal development and of the political will to make the necessary changes. This means developing a wider vision of welfare, where satisfaction of needs, rather than consumption per se, is the aim.

Consuming and producing sustainably depends on accepting the responsibility to live in harmony with the greater community of life. It also means that responsible politicians need to move from commitments to action.

There is a range of areas where action is needed. A common theme is that such action will need clear and agreed targets, timetables and benchmarking procedures. We note that UNEP and UN DESA, and other UN agencies, have facilitated and are working on a 10 year framework of programmes for sustainable consumption and production, and UN DESA has developed indicators to support the monitoring of developments in this field. As a starting point these indicators should be used to report on national and regional progress.

The five key areas where action is needed are:

Ecological fiscal reform including (i) the removal of all perverse subsidies; (ii) the use of eco-taxes to internalize external costs; (iii) price mechanisms to support policy integration; (iv) the selective use of positive incentives; and (v) the development of new measures of progress to enable environmental impacts to be properly accounted for within the current system of accounts.

Clean and eco-effective production supported by (i) green investment; (ii) eco-innovation; (iii) eco – design; (iv) appropriate products standards and labelling programmes; (v) increasing market access for environmental goods and services; (vi) environmentally sound public procurement rules and practices.

Education for sustainable consumption and production via (i) integrating knowledge of relevant consumption behaviour into curricula from pre-school to universities and into life long learning processes; (ii) providing data for reliable information; (iii) reporting on indicators to shape individual and collective consumption behaviour that can make a difference, and iv) promoting environmentally-responsible advertising.

Corporate responsibility and accountability as a legally binding framework including (i) by creating full transparency about the sustainability performance of business; (ii) dialogue between enterprises and the communities in which they operate; (iii) financial institutions to incorporate sustainable development considerations into their decision -making processes; workplace.

Information and public participation for sustainable consumption and production including (i) a broader right to know; (ii) involvement of stakeholders into decision making or at least consultative structures; (iii) support and financing of participation structures; (iv) develop and provide effective transparent and verifiable consumer information tools relating to sustainable consumption and production.

Work to build capacity in relevant organizations, including official ones, in order to provide support for those seeking to move towards sustainable production and consumption patterns, including meeting future demands for more sustainable lifestyle choices

To implement these goals we need national action plans as agreed in Johannesburg, supported by regional frameworks to support, enable and monitor national action. In the UNECE region the 10-year Framework for Sustainable Consumption and Production would be a starting point for such regional action. We consider the Sustainable Consumption opportunities for Europe Project (SCOE) as a promising initiative and tool to implementing the 10-year Framework at the sub-regional and national levels

We finally call on UNEP to start a process of reviewing its own purchasing patterns and develop criteria and an action plan to move towards sustainable consumption patterns, including increasing energy efficiency, clean and efficient transportation and purchase of locally produced, fair-traded and low-chemical produce.

Chemicals statement.

Improper or inadequate management of chemicals, including chemicals in products and wastes and from accidents and releases, increasingly threatens the human rights to life, health, and well being of all people, especially children and future generations. It also threatens the environment, natural resources, habitats and the biodiversity of our planet. Many hazardous chemicals accumulate in women's bodies and are passed on to the developing child during and after pregnancy. Currently, norms used to decide on production or authorization of chemicals, are based on effects on adults, whereas they should be protecting the most sensitive, should be based on the developing child. Our children should have the right to be born without a heavy burden of hazardous chemicals already accumulated in their (tiny) bodies.

Special attention should be given to POPs, PBTs, vPvBs, acutely toxic chemicals, chemicals that are carcinogens, mutagens or adversely affect the reproductive-, endocrine- or nervous system; mercury, asbestos and other substances of significant concern. The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), as the Earth's action plan for achieving, by 2020, that chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment,² is a crucial part of the global effort to protect human health and the environment from these threats. Civil Society Organizations demand vigorous support and implementation of the SAICM by all governments and relevant intergovernmental organizations, and we pledge our own equally vigorous commitment to ensure achievement of the 2020 goal. In this perspective, we welcome the participation of the concerned Human Rights Special Procedures in SAICM.

More broadly, we pledge ourselves to fundamental reform of chemicals management policies and practices throughout the world—including those that will stimulate the design of safer chemicals, products, and production systems—as an essential step to creating a safe and healthy global environment.

All governments and participating stakeholders should agree that:

1. The SAICM represents a political, moral, and ethical commitment to work toward achieving the 2020 goal;

² The 2020 goal was adopted in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Plan of Implementation, paragraph 23.

2. The SAICM should have a broad scope. SAICM should cover all man made chemicals, including chemicals used in pharmaceuticals, food additives and radioactive substances in nuclear facilities and weapons.
3. The SAICM can succeed only if substantial new and additional funds become available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and only if such funds are used effectively;
4. Implementation of the SAICM must include measures to phase-out and require safer substitutes and solutions when a chemical poses unmanageable hazards to health or the environment under its ordinary conditions of use in a country;
5. Implementation of the SAICM should embrace core principles and approaches of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, and other relevant international agreements, including the precautionary principle, liability and compensation, public participation, the principle of “no data, no market,” comprehensive right-to-know laws, the polluter pays principle, and others; the SAICM should provide guidance on how these principles and approaches should be applied to sound chemicals management;
6. The institutional arrangements for implementation of the SAICM must be living, fully participatory, multi-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder. They should build upon the participatory practices of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), but they should provide more authority, be better integrated into the United Nations system, and create a secretariat with sufficiently robust resources and mandate to ensure successful implementation.

Additionally, Civil Society Organizations urge the GMEF/GC to make every effort to:

7. Minimize and phase-out anthropogenic sources of mercury and methyl mercury in the environment, including through the development of a new, legally binding global instrument on mercury and the addition of methyl mercury to the Stockholm Convention’s list of persistent organic pollutants;
8. Secure the ratification by all countries of the Stockholm Convention and other chemicals and wastes agreements including the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent; the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, including its Ban Amendment; the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention); the ILO Convention 170 Concerning Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work; and relevant regional chemicals and wastes agreements;
9. Encourage donor countries and donor agencies to provide new and additional financial and technical assistance that enables developing countries and countries with transitional economies to implement fully all of their commitments under international chemicals and wastes agreements and initiatives;
10. Promote establishment of a chemical safety focal area within the Global Environment Facility (GEF) with new and additional funds to encompass not only the GEF’s present POPs Operational Program, but also to include additional operational programs that support implementation of other

chemicals conventions, as well as integrated approaches to chemicals management called for in the SAICM;

11. Support and strengthen the capacity of the UNEP Chemicals Branch to facilitate the implementation of chemicals-related multilateral agreements and initiatives and to assist governments and civil society in global actions for the sound management of chemicals.

Energy Statement: Northern Perspective

- Energy is both an engine of development and a source of many of the problems our world faces today.
- Approximately 80 percent of all energy used in the world comes from fossil fuels, which are one of the major contributors to environmental and health problems, (there are for instance 1, 6 million deaths annually world-wide from indoor pollution)³ at the local, regional, and global levels.
- All long-term scenarios assume there will be a strong increase in global energy demand, which will be driven largely by increased demand in developing countries.
- Currently about US\$1.7-2 trillion is invested annually into developing energy resources, mostly fossil fuels. Subsidies for conventional energy production and consumption are estimated at US\$240 billion annually.
- International discussions on energy began with Agenda 21, and energy has been at the forefront of the international agenda since WSSD, with commitments made in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and other initiatives such as the Bonn International Conference for Renewable Energies in 2004 and REEEP.
- We call on Governments to take further action to fulfil these commitments to promote clean energy and energy efficiency, enhance investment in renewable energy technologies, and increase technology transfer and capacity building in developing countries.
- Upcoming processes, particularly the 14th and 15th sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development and UNFCCC in Montreal, will provide a forum for renewing and furthering these commitments.

Calls for action:

Balancing the playing field to tackle climate change

- We call on governments to redirect the huge subsidies and investment currently flowing to fossil fuels and nuclear power towards low environmental impact energy sources and energy efficiency. This will make considerable contributions to the uptake of renewable energies.

Energy Efficiency

- Perhaps half of the forecasted growth in global emissions could be avoided by greater energy efficiency alone. Much of these savings could be done at a net financial profit.
- Governments have a considerable role to play in educating and building capacity about energy efficiency and the use of energy saving technologies. This must be coupled with the establishment of regulatory frameworks and standards.
- However, energy efficiency alone does not offer a long-term solution to the energy problem. As a result, we call on governments to adopt a strategy, which involves a mix of actions, including conservation measures, renewable energy and radical subsidies reforms.

³ World bank report on "Environment Matters 2005"

Facilitating the Uptake of Renewable Energies

- Technological options that provide sustainable energy and significantly reduce emissions over the long-term already exist, such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydropower, bio-energy, etc. However, what is lacking is a favourable policy environment required for the implementation of such technological options.
- Governments have a key role to play in educating and steering society towards sustainable, environmentally friendly forms of energy through the development of an appropriate long-term policy framework that balances energy supply and demand options.
- Governments must give incentives and create an enabling environment to develop and improve technologies, thus ensuring that technologies will be more competitive.
- Market forces are not able to take long-term strategic decisions for the benefit of society as a whole.
- UNEP could play an important role in convening and facilitating a process where governments could share experience with different policy approaches for overcoming compartmentalised decision-making.

Energy options:-

Bio-energy

- Bio-energy, such as biomass fired combined heat and power plants, biofuels or biogas from waste or sewage has the potential to play a major role in global warming mitigation measures and sustainable energy policies. A significant advantage of bio-energy is the ability to derive heat, electricity or transportation fuels. Bio-energy resources also promise to be more regionally distributed than fossil fuel resources.
- We call on governments to promote clean fuels and equipment for heating and productive uses, (household use – to municipal use), recognizing that bio-fuels can play a significant role in addressing this need, particularly in rural areas.
- Biomass should be considered in the first place as a source for cogeneration of heat and electricity, as this yields the best fossil carbon substitution effects.
- Competition for land and pressure for non-sustainable land management can be greatly ameliorated by improving the yield of biomass crops, and conversion and utilization efficiencies. These must be a high priority for research and development (R&D) and commercialization policies
- We call on governments to develop strong social and environmental criteria to guide the development of an international bioenergy market.

Hydropower

- Though hydropower offers promising potential as an energy source, adverse effects must be managed through the promotion of multi-stakeholder dialogues involving civil society, government and other relevant actors to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) in specific national or regional contexts.

Nuclear power

- We do not accept government strategies to promote nuclear energy as a low-CO₂, and therefore environmentally friendly, energy source. Keeping in mind that issues of nuclear energy waste disposal have not been resolved, nuclear energy remains a security and health threat. Furthermore, it is a non-renewable resource.

- We call on UNEP to develop a clear position on this issue which reflects the environmental impacts of nuclear energy.

Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)

- We caution against emphasis on CCS as a way to justify the continued use of fossil fuels. CCS faces daunting technical, regulatory, economic, environmental, and public acceptance hurdles.

Managing the Transition to Alternative Energy Systems

- We call on governments to adopt transparent and participatory approaches to support policies on alternative energy sources which may have adverse consequences for local constituencies, as in the case of wind power
- Governments should create or strengthen the role of already existing national councils for sustainable development. These advisory councils could be charged with facilitating a national wide multi-stakeholder process aimed at creating a commonly shared vision of where the country should be in the medium to long term, as well as recommending concrete steps to reach this vision. Inclusive planning processes of energy and infrastructure systems can greatly contribute towards a system that is sustainable and resilient as well as more flexible to change.
- Governments should put in place social assistance programmes for citizens who may be adversely affected by the transition to cleaner energy

Energy and Environmental Policy Coherence

- Governments are responsible to ensure that all their policies are internally consistent and coherent. Energy and environment policies need to be fully integrated in the wider policy of sustainable development.

Renewable Energy Uptake in Developing Countries

- Governments must recognize that access to energy for the poor is a major sustainable development issue. Therefore, developed countries should further international cooperation to transfer renewable energy technologies and capacity building to developing countries.
- Open energy markets, viable regulation of grid access for producers, and a stable investment climate are best achieved by feed-in laws like those that are now in places as diverse as Germany, Spain, China, Algeria among others. This requires a political determination by governments to decentralize the energy sector, if necessary abolish monopolistic control of the grid and the energy markets in general, and to push subsidy reform. It also requires a massive effort by governments to force multilateral development banks to stop funding fossil fuel projects.

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