

Statement on Behalf of UNEP's Major Group Facilitating Committee and Regional Representatives to the OECPR regarding Post 2015 Development Framework including the Sustainable Development Goals

March 2014

The following Major Groups have endorsed this statement during the OECPR: *Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, Local Authorities, NGOs, Science and Technology, Women*

1. We echo UNEP in its statement (Note #1) that the post 2015 development framework including the SDGs represents a 'historical opportunity to shift from development siloes to a more integrated approach'. We believe that a **human rights-based approach** to environmental protection and economic development is indispensable to achieving a set of sustainable development goals that are balanced, coherent and comprehensive.
2. UNEP has emphasized that a key aim of integrated SDGs is, '**leaving no one behind and providing a life of dignity**'. In this regard, it is important to recall that **marginalized groups** in the world, including women, young people and indigenous peoples in the developing world, continue to **suffer from policies that are still labelled as 'environmentally friendly'**. Moreover, there is continuing increase in **land grabs** and land concentration resulting in human rights violations in all the continents of our planet. At the same time, so-called '**innovative and green technologies**', such as genetically engineered organisms, nuclear energy, and geo-engineering, may have even greater **impacts** on the environment, people's livelihoods and all living organisms, thus calling for precautionary measures. This reality demonstrates that '**business as usual**' disguised in '**green/as clean**' will not help overcome systemic inequities.
3. Addressing **planetary boundaries** and the **thresholds of the global commons** are a central element in the design of SDGs. We believe that **reduced consumption** from especially hyper-consuming societies is desperately needed to secure the environmental integrity of our planet. But that is not enough - essentially one must move towards **sustainable consumption and production**. The protection, improvement and wise use of **global support life systems** also need to consider the current trends in economic policy, including trade and investment agreements, which are already causing detrimental effects in local economies around the world. Smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples as well as local ecosystems are at risk from exploitive practices.
4. We also notice that UNEP's Post 2015 Note refers to the **responsible management** of the planet's finite natural resources while at the same time calling for economic growth. In this regard, we need to emphasize that **economic growth does not guarantee sustained and inclusive development**. The key for SDGs is to provide **equality of opportunity** for all in economic policies that are designed to avoid environmental degradation. The necessary **pre-condition** to economic development is **economic empowerment** based on **democratic governance principles**: citizens must have legal identity, the right to own land, and the right to participate in decision-making processes that affect them. It needs to place **human rights**, in particular the right to a **healthy environment** and the rights of **indigenous peoples** to free and prior informed consent, ahead of any short-term economic growth interest. **Access to Education** without any kind of gender bias must be the basis of every developmental agenda with the ultimate objective of achieving the goal of "putting every child in school". In addition, governance and authority must be **respectful of the rule of law**, the protection of property rights, free speech, individual

liberty, **freedom** from discrimination, and freedom from arbitrary government action. We ask that the SDGs recognize the critical **contribution of women's participation** and rights to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and that the SDGs should ensure the rule of law to address impunity – particularly regarding sexual and other forms of gender-based violence. In order to create a truly enabling environment for responsible use of natural resources, local governance and local accountable institutions are key.

5. We must never repeat the mistakes of the past and **prioritize short-term economic development at the expense** of sustained and equitable social development, environmental protection and peace. Hence, in the light of emerging global partnerships, we call for **'inclusive' transparent partnerships** and mechanisms for **accountability** that are about solidarity and **common but differentiated responsibilities**, and not partnerships endorsing an unregulated/unmonitored private sector. We caution that **private-public partnerships** can seem financially attractive because of accounting that hides fiscal risks and costs. These types of partnerships risk **worsening inequality** in income and access by socializing costs while privatizing benefits.

6. Greater resilience and securing future generation's livelihoods will only materialize if the **local capacities and knowledge of communities are recognized**. The **rights of Future Generations** can be safeguarded only with the institutionalization of **Ombudspersons** and the appointment a **High Commissioner for Future Generations** who should have a clear mandate of protecting natural resources and stop their wanton destruction in the name of economic prosperity. Failing which, obtaining the desired balance between the three dimensions of sustainability cannot become a reality.

7. Further respect and recognition needs to be paid to **traditional knowledge and local governance systems of indigenous and rural communities**, and this of course, includes the **recognition** that not every system is regarded as 'capital', let alone natural resources. These knowledge and governance systems constitute the **basis for the survival and livelihoods** of millions of people around the world. Transforming environmental systems or services into **tradable commodities** would only result in speculation and **manipulation** by the financial sector, thus aggravating inequities and threatening life support systems. Thus, the resilience that SDGs seek to build will only crystallize from **respect to traditional knowledge and local capacities of communities**.

8. SDGs should provide holistic, inclusive, and visionary solutions to meet the complex social, economic, environmental, cultural and institutional challenges of cities and human settlements. In particular SDGs must enable coordination, policy coherence and integrated territorial approaches at the local, subnational, national and global levels.

9. We agree with UNEP's assertion that any further commitments need to build on existing agreements and that the principle of non-regression needs to be at the forefront of the effort of constructing meaningful SDGs. We call for strengthened accountability mechanisms at the international, regional and national levels.

10. To conclude, we wish to emphasize that the environment and human rights cannot be an afterthought in the design of the SDGs, but instead the central element of the post-2015 development framework. An integrated approach to economic development, human rights and the environment is the only way to secure robust SDGs that can secure the integrity of ecosystems, respect local knowledge, enhance resilience, and deepen democratic governance.