

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF MALMÖ NGO FORUM
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTERIAL FORUM
29 MAY, 2000**

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, my dear NGO colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, a very good morning to you.

I have the honor to present to you a statement on behalf of 45 environment and development NGOs from both the South and the North, who met at the Malmö NGO Forum on 28 May 2000. While many of my colleagues have not had the time to scrutinize the written text word for word, they have heard and endorsed the substance and spirit of this statement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The word crisis has become a cliché. Yet no other word can capture the extreme situation faced by humanity today. Almost 2 billion people live in desperate poverty, income inequality is worsening by the day, the ecological resources upon which all life depends are being destroyed at an alarming rate, and vast regions are despoiled by war, conflict, and organized violence. All this has happened despite – and, according to some, because of – a half-century of unprecedented economic growth, in which world income grew five-fold and world trade twelve-fold.

I am sure that this is not earth shaking news for you. Most people have long been aware of the gathering crisis. The nations and peoples of the world have struggled for quite some time to find collective solutions to the crisis. It is not an accident that the 1990s turned out to be the “decade of global agreements”.

Yet, it is a source of shock and dismay for us that the 1990s did not also turn out to be the “decade of solutions” – nor indeed the decade of **implementing** solutions. The impressive array of agreements crafted with such effort and innovation has brought us no closer to repulsing the forces that threaten life upon Earth. On the contrary, the sheer volume and diversity of agreements appears to have led to a paralysis of thought and action.

It is time to break this cycle of paralysis. At the threshold of a new millennium, it is time for us to confront the crisis with renewed resolve and conviction.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you begin your deliberations to address this crisis, please remember that what the world needs from you is not the identification of ever larger catalogs of problems and their remedies, nor even the crafting of an even more bewildering menu of agreements. We have known the problems as well as the remedies for a long time and we have enough agreements to last us at least our life times. What the world needs from you are integrated rather than piecemeal solutions, and inclusionary rather than exclusionary processes.

Poverty, ecological degradation, conflict, and insecurity are not separate problems. They are not mutually exclusive, nor do they involve inevitable trade-offs. They are the symptoms of a common underlying malaise, environmental and social injustice. Their solution lies in a single domain – sustainable development – and in a common response incumbent upon all of us individually as well as collectively. Revitalizing the Earth, to provide a sustainable future for humanity and the 5 million species with which we share this planet has to become the centerpiece of all human endeavors.

Poverty cannot be addressed through charity. The only way of addressing it is through the creation of sustainable livelihoods for the poor and even more importantly through tackling the root causes such as inequities of wealth and resources, landlessness and the tenacity of the rich in clinging on to their privileges. These root causes, even if they are sensitive issues, have to be recognized and tackled. Also, it is necessary that financial, human, and technological resources be channeled toward the poor. It is also necessary to invest in the individual and human capacities of the poor. This approach is successful not only in eradicating poverty, but also in protecting the environment, and creating social capital amongst the poor.

Indeed, the very idea of sustainable development – a concept that has been with us through a decade of global agreements – is that, properly conceptualized and done, economic growth, poverty eradication, environmental conservation, and social justice can be compatible. The recognition of the finiteness of the ecological system, upon which all life depends, the agreement on the need to improve the quality of life especially of the poor and vulnerable group, and the imperative of social and economic justice are together constitutive of the idea of sustainable development.

Rio+10 provides an ideal opportunity for addressing this issue in an integrated rather than piecemeal fashion. We urge you to ensure that Rio+10 does not remain merely Rio+10, namely an anniversary of unfulfilled hopes and aspirations. Rather, it should become the culmination of a process that started in Stockholm in 1972, through Rio, and Beijing, and Cairo, and Copenhagen. It should become the final seal on this series of summit conferences, not on a new subject, however, but on the integration of the subjects that have been discussed in the conferences that went before. Instead of Rio+10, it should become the global conference on sustainable development and poverty eradication. We would like to urge you in this forum to initiate the process leading toward this outcome right away.

The achievement of sustainable development requires broad and meaningful participation of civil society groups and organizations in decision-making on environmental matters. This might include, for example, their participation in environmental impact assessment procedures and decision-making processes, particularly those that affect the community where they live and work. It requires them to get access to information relevant to environmental and development issues and which is held by national authorities, including information on products and activities that have, or are likely to have, a significant impact on the environment, and information environmental protection measures. Their participation might require, where appropriate the development of a legal and institutional basis for this access.

Particular attention must be given to the participation of youth, the elderly, women and indigenous peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this endeavor, we must be conscious of the impact of globalization and trade and financial liberalization. We believe that the view of laissez faire economics that supports this process is seriously flawed. It is responsible in large part for the social dislocation and environmental degradation witnessed in recent years. As an alternative to the laissez faire globalization currently championed by several groups, we urge you to champion the cause of environmental, social, and economic justice and equity and rights to be placed at the center of development and economic planning and priorities.

This requires a basic change in global governance arrangements, which today are very much skewed towards laissez faire economics, and which are undemocratic and untransparent and dominated by the economic elite and the major countries, including through the IMF, World Bank and WTO.

A more appropriate global governance implies democratic decision-making, transparency, correct policies that respect people's rights (especially for the poor), a global system of social regulation of the market and support for capacity building.

PEOPLES' RIGHTS

For citizens and their associations to meet their environmental and social roles and responsibilities, they must possess certain procedural rights and civil liberties. These include but are not limited to access to environmental information, the right to know, freedom of environmental information, freedom of environmental speech, access to environmental justice, including in a court of law, and the right to participate in decision making.

To effectively address trans-boundary environmental costs, all concerned people, regardless of nationality, must be availed these rights in the country from which the environmental impacts originated. NGOs are prepared to support the establishment of appropriate procedural rights regimes by helping to establish appropriate international regimes. Governments can develop supportive national level legislation. Finally, intergovernmental organizations can work with governments to develop relevant regional and global instruments.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL REGULATION

Given the dynamism of global corporate economy (including foreign direct investment), there are growing calls for closer collaboration between governments and businesses.

We endorse the principle of partnership that underlies such calls. However, we need to stress that partnership requires not a blurring of roles, but the establishment of appropriate institutional, regulatory, and other conditions to ensure responsible corporate behaviour. Business should not be allowed to unduly influence government policies for their own narrow commercial interests at the expense of the public. Similarly, the UN and its agencies have to guard against going into the kind of partnerships with business where business influences or even dictates UN policies and programmes. Otherwise the credibility and integrity of the UN and its agencies will be called into question by civil society.

Given the growing weakness of nation-states on all matters with international implications, there is a need to internationally regulate the market and the corporations to ensure their responsible behaviour. There is an increasing need to strengthen and establish, across the world, international, multilateral environment agreements, including the element of regulating the business/ corporate sector. Such agreements would ensure that the benefits of development are distributed equitably across boundaries and societies. In addition, they would ensure that good corporate environmental behaviour is practised in all countries, including those that may not at the moment have in place strong or stringent policies and laws.

We call for the initiation of a global process to develop mechanisms to regulate the activities or operations of the corporate/ business sector. We also call upon the international community to establish specific policies and enforcement mechanisms. In this regard, we call upon the international community to support the strengthening of the capacity of developing countries to implement multilateral environment agreements and other relevant instruments.

An Important idea is that companies must be held responsible for the damage they cause. In this regard a system of liability should be established at national and global levels. An example is the national liability regime that produced the recent tobacco cases in the US.

NGOs are committed to working with environmental ministries to establish such standards and to act as watchdogs to ensure their compliance and enforcement.

CRITICAL ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Environmental degradation, deepening poverty, and globalization call for a pro-active, critical and independent media, an integral part of the emerging civil society. This is not only to increase awareness but also to sensitize them by raising environmental concerns publicly, including the implication of bad practices. Endowed with properly trained professionals, the media can mainstream best environmental practices, approaches to indigenous knowledge, scientific innovation and eco-friendly technologies.

NGOs AND THE UN

We appreciate the initiative taken by UNEP to establish a permanent dialogue with NGOs. However, we would like to challenge UNEP to develop an open, multi-stakeholder, sustained process for civil society involvement at a much higher level than the present situation.

The Rio+10 process in particular needs to be based on the direct involvement of NGOs and civil society movements in determining the agenda. A civil society consultative body or secretariat could be encouraged to facilitate strong NGO participation. There is at present, often strong NGO coordination on a national level, but poor coordination on the international level, including with respect to UNEP.

UNEP should call upon civil society to suggest creative use of its products, including the GEO reports, the study on "Cultural and Spiritual Values of Bio-diversity", and other documents on social, legal, economic, and political aspects of environmental conservation.

There are a number of strong models for civil society participation, in particular the CSD multi-stakeholder dialogues. These dialogues are integrated into the main negotiations and deliberations of the CSD; they do not occur as a symbolic suffix or prefix to the conference. These should be adapted by UNEP.

FROM AGENDA TO ACTION

Rio+10 must be a major milestone toward achieving sustainable development. We call on the international community to take full advantage of this opportunity. Instead of treating it as just another review of progress since

1992, it should be used to forge an agreement on an integrated agenda of sustainable development, including poverty eradication, environmental conservation, and human development. It should be organized as a summit on sustainable development. Toward this end, there should be a concerted preparatory process, taking full advantage of interim events such as the Millennium Assembly, UNEP Governing Council 2001, and the Financing for Development conference.

We would be remiss in not reminding governments of their responsibility to use the opportunity presented by Rio+10 to fully implement existing international commitments from Agenda 21, the world conferences of the nineties, and international environmental conventions. In particular, we call upon governments to ratify the major environmental conventions forged since Rio, including the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, the biosafety protocol, and the forthcoming treaty on persistent organic pollutants. In moving from agenda to action, it is also important to invite governments to commit themselves to clear and measurable actions on concrete environment and development issues, including water, forests, fisheries, poverty, and the environmental and social impacts of trade liberalization.

For all of this, we need benchmarks and baselines of progress for implementing international commitments. NGOs are well positioned to play a central role in this process by monitoring the actions of governments and international organizations.

Finally, this requires an investment in institutions and capacities, especially among poor countries. It would include sustainable livelihood programs for poor communities, the development of participatory capacity for stakeholder involvement in planning and decision making at the national level. It would also involve investment in capacity issues that further reinforce the north-south divide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, as NGOs, we offer a partnership to governments, businesses, and UN agencies, especially UNEP, to help place the sustainable development agenda squarely at the center of all discussions. In fact, we would suggest formalizing the linkage between NGOs and UNEP as a whole, and particularly strengthen the relationship with its NGO unit to work towards Rio+10.

On behalf of the NGO community, I wish you good luck in your deliberations.