

Asia Pacific Regional Statement to 6GCSF and 23rd GC/GMEF February 2005

“The battle for sustainable development will be won or lost in Asia”

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A. Introduction

55 participants from all the 5 sub-regions¹ met over 2 days in Bangkok. The meeting was facilitated by the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) and the CONGO² Working Group on Asia.

All the participants appreciated the role that UNEP has played as the ‘environmental conscience’ of the region and recognised the need to strengthen and consolidate UNEP programs, projects and initiatives.

The subregions in Asia Pacific have wide variations in socio-economic as well as ecological characteristics to the extent some sub-regions feel a sense of isolation that leads to difficulties of trans-regional cooperation. Others are concerned with degradation of mountain ecosystems, yet others with sea-level rise and impact of climate change and wish to see the Barbados Program of Action for SIDS implemented. The unique and diverse characteristics and circumstances of the Asia Pacific region ensure it a central role in global sustainable development.

- Asia Pacific is the fastest growing region in the world
- More than half the world’s population lives in the Asia Pacific
- The region is home to 70% of the global poor, although it must be mentioned that of the total poor, most are confined to a few countries
- The region is home to global biodiversity hotspots and is one of the most important repositories of biological resources.

In the course of deliberations and reflection, participants identified the need to highlight several issues to the GC/GMEF of UNEP and these are indicated below.

B. Civil Society Concerns and Consensus

Civil society from the Asia Pacific region remains convinced of the following:

- (i) The oneness of humanity on this only habitable planet.
- (ii) The equity of all humankind; men and women, various races and different ethnic groups.
- (iii) The necessity of recognizing our global interdependence and linking peace to environmental/ ecological security and to human security.

¹ North East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia, South Pacific & Central Asia

² The Conference of NGO in Consultative status with the UN.

The consensus that emerged from the meeting was that despite decades-long efforts:

- (a) Environmental degradation is accelerating and global environmental issues are getting more complicated in intensity and scale.
- (b) The design of environmental policy requires clear links to sustainable development particularly in the context of sustainable livelihoods. In this regard, the involvement and engagement of civil society and all other stake – holders in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring is crucial.
- (c) There is a continuing need:
 - To strengthen the institutional mechanisms in government, civil society and other stakeholder organizations,
 - To enhance the capacity of developing countries to participate actively in policy formulation and implementation and
 - To provide space for multi-stakeholder platforms for policy dialogue and policy formulation at the national, sub-regional and regional levels.
- (d) There is a simultaneous need to also focus on cross-cutting issues including the impact of globalization, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, gender, education, health and poverty alleviation and
- (e) To keep close watch on emerging issues and their linkages to the global trade and financial agendas.

C. Civil Society recommendations to the GC/GMEF are divided into 3 main areas:

- I. UNEP's Program of Work for the Biennium 2006-7, including funding.
- II. Civil Society engagement with UNEP including in International Environmental Governance (IEG) and the Intergovernmental Strategic Plan for Capacity building and Technology Support (IGSP).
- III. Asia-Pacific Regional Priorities for Sustainable Development

I. UNEP's Work Program for Biennium 2006 – 2007

Civil Society displayed tremendous interest and enthusiasm in the Draft Work program and expressed a desire to be consulted and engaged in its planning, design and implementation. It was felt that UNEP should act as the focal point for synergising different environmental initiatives such as MDG 7, Decade on Education for Sustainable Development, Water Sanitation and Human Settlements, Health and Hygiene and other programmes.

Based on the Varda Group review and analysis of the Draft Program of Work the following recommendations have emerged: -

- (a) As the period of the Work Program coincides with the CSD 14 + 15 thematic clusters of energy, air pollution and transportation, UNEP should synergize its activities, programs and projects in those areas i.e. work in closer collaboration with civil society and other UN agencies in these areas.

- (b) Since the year 2007 will coincide with the 5th Anniversary of the WSSD and could provide a stocktaking opportunity particularly with regard to assessing the viability of the Type II Partnerships as well as other Initiatives launched in pursuit of sustainable development goals set at WSSD.
- (c) Civil society participants from Asia Pacific also seek to remind the GC/GMEF of the Millennium Declaration Plus 5 Summit scheduled for September 2005 and hope that UNEP takes stronger leadership in confronting the challenges especially those contained in MDG 7.
- (d) One of the biggest gaps in the Draft is the failure to reiterate the JPOI target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010. This is one of UNEP's core areas and civil society urges its reiteration in the Work Program.
- (e) We suggest the following areas of possible enhanced collaboration between civil society and UNEP:
 - Joint launching of GE04 in 2007
 - Co-development and co-distribution of educational materials & de-jargonizing of UNEP publications and their translation into local languages.
 - Joint implementation of specific projects during Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.
- (f) Civil Society would like to see greater involvement of women, local communities & indigenous peoples in UNEP's projects because these have been proven to be sustainable. It also hopes UNEP will invest more in youth participation to ensure inter-generational leadership on environmental sustainability.
- (g) At the same time, civil society would like assurance that there will be greater transparency in UNEP's corporate funding and in its links to business and industry as many of their activities impact heavily, often negatively, on environmental sustainability.

On the matter of funding for UNEP, it is the view of civil society that the proposed US \$239m for the biennium is hopelessly inadequate especially in view of the fact that many governments set aside much much more for military expenditure in their national budgets. Life on this planet rests on environmental sustainability and the fate of future generations hangs in a balance. UNEP has been entrusted with a very difficult and requires adequate resources to carry out its tasks.

II. Civil Society Engagement with UNEP/ IEG/IGSP.

Civil society reiterated the desire to be meaningfully involved from the very beginning in different UNEP initiatives. Civil society welcomes the timely publication of "Natural Allies" and hopes it will contribute to greater reinvigoration of the strategy for engagement between UNEP and civil society. In addition, it is also hoped the Cardoso Report on UN Civil Society Relations, paves the way for smoother relations between UN and civil society as a whole and further helps guide UNEP in this strategic engagement.

Civil society does not wish to see the IEG process distract UNEP's and civil societies energies from the more important tasks of dealing with environment & related issues at grass root and community level especially at a time the MDGs are already taking away a lot of energy and resources.

All the complexity of issues surrounding IEG were discussed and considered. The group clearly favored strengthening UNEP and appeals to governments to support UNEP through adequate, stable and predictable funding to enable it to fulfill its mandate.

In this regard, civil society urges UNEP to consider convening a brainstorming session during one of the GCSFs to consider possible, joint innovative fund-raising activities between UNEP and civil society for future activities.

The areas in which civil society can readily and immediately support and assist UNEP are in

- Design of governance structures
- Participatory planning & program development
- Offering civil society perspectives to UNEP on policy and policy development mechanisms
- Program/project implementation and project outreach
- Multi-stakeholder consultation / links to media / out-reach
- Impact assessment, incorporating feedback from the grassroots
- Monitoring and evaluations of programs and projects

Civil society urges UNEP to focus on the areas in which it has distinguished itself; early warning systems, global assessment, policy & law development, capacity building, technology assessment and undertaking credible scientific analysis and disseminating information.

Given the widening mandate of the WTO, civil society is convinced UNEP must continue to facilitate the broad-based integration of environmental issues across sectoral ministries, steadily increase its own capacity to deal with WTO-MEA perceived and potential conflicts, provide credible leadership and ensure coherence such that trade policies do not undermine environmental goals and objectives.

UNEP should stay engaged in issues surrounding intellectual property rights (IPRs) & traditional knowledge in order to protect the rights of indigenous people and local communities and ensure they continue to benefit from the resources that sustain them.

Inter-Governmental Strategic Plan on Capacity Building and Technology Support (IGSP)

Civil Society from Asia Pacific is pleased to have been a part of developing the IGSP framework from the beginning and wish to endorse the statement made by the Civil Society representative in Nairobi on 22 June 2004. The following additional points were raised by participants from the Asia Pacific region:

- Civil society must be regarded both as recipients as well as potential providers in the capacity – building aspects;
- That the sources of experience & knowledge of civil society be sought & utilized in the interests of sustainable development at all levels;
- Capacity building and technology support be provided equally to men & women as gender equality is both an aim and precondition for sustainable development;

- That the recognition and protection of traditional knowledge as a source of sustainable practices is recognized and protected outside the WTO/TRIPS system;
- That UNEP should explore new models to access IPR-protected sustainable technologies and also assess all other technologies, existing and emerging, to make sure they are sustainable and do not adversely impact upon the environment, ecosystems, human health and culture.

III Regional Priorities for Sustainable Development

Issue Identified

	NEAsia	SEAsia	CAsia	S.Asia	Pacific
Sectoral Issues					
Water access, quality, quantity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Biodiversity loss	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GMOs / Food security / Food sovereignty	✓	✓		✓	✓
Marine & Coastal pollution		✓		✓	✓
Fisheries		✓			✓
Waste management	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dams / Mega infrastructure and Transboundary issue	✓	✓			
Land reclamation	✓			✓	✓
Dessertification / Land degradation	✓		✓	✓	✓
Energy & climate change / Energy Security	✓	✓			✓
MNC's / Role of Export Credit Agency	✓	✓			
Deforestation	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mountain eco-system		✓	✓	✓	
Air pollution	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Urbanization	✓	✓		✓	
Population increase & density				✓	

	NEAsia	SEAsia	CAsia	S.Asia	Pacific
Cross-sectoral Issues					
Poverty/vulnerability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Impact of globalization	✓	✓		✓	✓
FTAs / BTAs/ Economic Partnership Arrangement	✓	✓			✓
Sustainable Production And Consumption Patterns	✓				
Gender	✓			✓	
Health	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Education	✓	✓	✓	✓	

In addition to the above, other specific issues of concern were raised in the Asia Pacific region and governments are urged to be vigilant and to constantly keep impacts on the environment in mind when faced with challenges and to always adopt a people-centered, rights-based approach to sustainable development:

- Privatization of public services, energy, water, health and education/ GATS agenda
- Promoting sustainable lifestyles, sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Genetically modified organism (GMOs)- field trials, food testing, food sovereignty, food safety and food security
- Trafficking in women and children
- Migrant labor and related social issues
- Danger posed by large scale extractive industries- mining, oil and gas
- FTAs & BTAs as intensifying the liberalisation, deregulation agenda
- IPRs and impact on communities and food security
- Relationship between MDG Goals7, Goal 1 and Goal 8
- Need for integrated resource management, eco-system based approaches to dealing with shared resources including also the possibility of including the term 'bio-region' to secure transboundary management mechanisms for shared resources.

Several participants urged UNEP to develop indicator systems for other aspects of MDG7 & to take a leadership role in its review exercise and beyond.

There were also calls for UNEP to encourage new concepts of development that are in harmony with nature; life-styles that are much more sustainable and accounting practices such as green GDP that reflect and reinforce such changes.

D. Conclusion

Civil society stands ready to work closely with UNEP and all governments in facing the complex challenges posed to sustainability on this planet. Civil society takes this opportunity to remind governments, especially those in developed countries, not to renege on their promises in MDG 8 especially as they relate to trade, aid, debt and commodities. It calls upon governments to meet all the commitments they have made in order to ensure a better safer world for us and for future generations.