

UNEP North American Civil Society Consultation

Washington D.C.

November 13-14, 2008

REGIONAL STATEMENT

Some of the key points raised by participants in the UNEP North American Civil Society Consultation are enumerated below. Specific suggestions on the program of work can be found in the co-facilitators' summary. While consultation participants support the overall statement and its principles, the various groups present do not necessarily endorse every recommendation.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR BOLD ACTION

- The alarming degradation of the environment and the global financial crisis warrant decisive and bold action from a range of actors, including UNEP. Civil society and major groups have an essential role to play in helping international institutions address these challenges and should be involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of these institutions' responses. The recent election of a new American president opens a window for constructive U.S. participation in international processes. In that context, the role of North American civil society should be reexamined to fully leverage this political shift. Civil society can also be a relay to foster behavioral change of local communities toward sustainable production and consumption.
- Bold and inclusive action is needed from variety of actors and perspectives. The group supports the observation that incremental adjustments to our current international institutions have proved insufficient and need to give way to more transformative change. UNEP should use its mandate to bring together a variety of stakeholders in a cross-cutting fashion by more broadly convening ministers, agencies and international organizations that have an interest in the environment, such as ministers of finance, health and defense.

IMPROVE UNEP'S ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

- It is essential for UNEP to actively engage with civil society in the design, implementation and evaluation of its program of work. Participants welcomed the improvements made in the past years, under the leadership of Achim Steiner, to bring the voice of the major groups and stakeholders to the Governing Council. However, they pointed to lingering limitations and noted that additional reforms are needed to ensure that civil society participation is continuous, meaningful and influential.
- Participants expressed concerns over the relative weakness of their comments' impact compared to that of the private sector. Joint statements often lead to language that does not reflect the boldness of civil society's positions. In addition, the group strongly supports

promoting dialogue between the major groups at the national, regional and international levels.

- It is essential to ensure that NGOs have equal access to the discussion and are given equal prominence on the agenda. Industry has greater influence than other major groups. UNEP should ensure meaningful engagement of civil society by (1) adjusting forums to enable meaningful input of civil society organizations, (2) making travel funds available to marginalized communities, (3) strengthening civil society capacity, and (4) systematically identifying opportunities for civil society engagement in the design, implementation and monitoring of UNEP's program of work. Finally, UNEP should track, document and share best practices in partnerships with civil society at the local, regional and international level. This point of equity in the consultation process was raised last year by the participants of the North American civil society consultation and appears not to have been addressed sufficiently by the Governing Council.

MAINSTREAMING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

- Participants expressed overall support for a multi-stakeholder financial and environmental approach to solving the environmental and financial crises ("green New Deal"). In that context, UNEP should draw upon civil society's ability to shift citizen and business behavior as well as push North American political leaders to act swiftly and decisively.
- Participants support the integration of environmental issues into the regular decision-making processes of governments, international institutions and civil society as opposed to being considered separately.
- UNEP should play a leadership role in pushing for the "green New Deal" on the environmental side, both as an institution and by cultivating individuals to become champions. UNEP RONA in particular should ensure coordination between international financial institutions and the environmental community.

GOVERNANCE REFORMS FOR BETTER COORDINATION AND EFFICIENCY

- UNEP's adoption of six priority areas brings with it advantages for efficiency but also challenges for coordination across divisions and offices and for ensuring that other environmental issues are addressed. Specific suggestions for addressing this challenge are included in the summary of the consultation.
- In the context of the global financial and climate crises, UNEP should play a leadership role in the reform of international environmental institutions, conventions and agreements.
- UNEP should also ensure that in the current window of opportunity for reform of international financial institutions, environmental concerns are mainstreamed across agencies, institutions and discussions.