

Statement From the African Civil Society Forum to the 23rd Session of UNEP Governing Council//Global Ministerial Environment Forum

This statement provides recommendations of the African Regional Civil Society Forum meeting held in Nairobi on 16-17 November 2004 to the 23rd Session of UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

We, representatives of African civil society and major stakeholder groups, recognize and appreciate the GC/GMEF's and UNEP's willingness and endeavours to integrate and partner with civil society and major stakeholder groups in pursuing sustainable development. We particularly hail the establishment and operationalization of the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch at UNEP and the institutionalization of regional and global civil society forums as part of the preparatory activities and processes intended to inform the agenda of GC meetings in line with Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration.

We also appreciate endeavours being made to make participation of civil society and major stakeholders real and meaningful through their accreditation and acceptance into sessions of GC meetings.

We implore governments and the 23rd Session of the GC to uphold and build upon these gains and, in particular, to give due regard to the following recommendations of the preparatory African Regional Civil Society Forum meeting held in Nairobi on 16-17 November 2004:

1. Making Civil Society and Major Groups Participation Real

- a) Although the need for and principles of partnership between governments and civil society and other stakeholder groups are now well accepted, mechanisms of engagement are yet to be clearly defined. Civil society and other stakeholder participation remain largely in the form of pre-GC/GMEF session consultations, reading of statements, side events at major meetings and *ad hoc* participation in conferences. There is need for UNEP to design a clearer strategy on how to engage with civil society and major stakeholders.
- b) It is important that governments meaningfully include legitimate representatives of civil society and other stakeholders in official delegations to regional and international intergovernmental processes and meetings. Further Member States should allow representation and participation of civil society and other stakeholders in official sessions of international meetings. The GC could give guidelines on procedure and principles of selection as well as the proportion of delegates from civil society required for any international meeting. This would enhance ownership and legitimacy of outcomes of such fora.

2. Strengthening Regional and Global Civil Society Forums

- a) The regional and global civil society forums are critical processes in the effort to incorporate all important stakeholders in shaping UNEP's agenda. It is, however, clear that these initiatives require additional financial and human resources to ensure better coordination and greater inclusiveness in order to enhance their legitimacy and impact.

- b) The African Civil Society Forum has established an *ad hoc* steering committee and secretariat to steer the participation of African stakeholders to articulate their sustainable development agenda and promote their partnership with UNEP and other relevant institutions and initiatives, such as African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The GC/GMEF is called upon to recognize and support this initiative as a positive endeavour towards streamlining civil society engagement with UNEP.
- c) We commend NEPAD Secretariat for the establishing the Office for Gender and Civil Society Affairs, and consequently encourage NEPAD Secretariat to develop a UNEP-like civil society engagement process aimed at supporting African governments to implement and monitor the NEPAD Environment Action Plan in the continent.
- d) Unlike the GC/GMEF, the very critical African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) lacks a mechanism for bringing on board views of civil society and major stakeholders. Governments are strongly urged to recommend and establish UNEP-like civil society engagement process for AMCEN to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to inform its agenda.
- e) While it saves resources to hold UNEP civil society meetings in Nairobi, this tends to foreclose opportunities for other African sub-regions to strengthen their identity with UNEP and its activities. African Civil Society urge UNEP to hold the African regional meetings in different sub-regions of the continent.

3. UNEP's Draft Work Programme

- a) Although the UNEP Draft Work Programme contains numerous references to civil society and envisages their participation and support in its implementation, there has been very limited, if any, meaningful consultation or stakeholder involvement in the preparation of this important document. This will undermine ownership and legitimacy of the Programme of Work. The GC needs to provide guidance on how to build constituency and legitimacy for such important documents.
- b) The Draft Work Programme has critical omissions in at least 2 areas. First, it refers to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in many cases but fails to contemplate the necessary influence that the impending High-Level 5-Year Review of the MDGs will have in shaping UNEP's agenda. Second, it glaringly omits the Johannesburg Plan of Action's (JPOA) objective of halting and reversing biodiversity loss 2010. The Draft Work Programme needs to bring these important issues into perspective.
- c) While objectives and Expected Accomplishments of the seven sub-programme areas are well-outlined, the Draft UNEP Work Programme lacks overarching objectives and outputs for the Biennium under consideration. An overarching chapter describing UNEP's programmes areas by subject, objectives and outputs and which includes the programme of the Executive Director is necessary to give an overall picture UNEP's SMART goals for the biennium.
- d) As the CSD 13 convenes next year to receive global policy review on water, sanitation and human settlements it is critical that the UNEP Programme recognizes that in most countries in the African region, there is a water financing gap---demand for finance

outweighs supply. Two major challenges face the task of financing African Water and sanitation sectors: allocation and appropriate use of limited public resources; and Leveraging of additional resources into the sector. The programme needs to take into consideration the above challenges in its work in this sector in the region.

- e) The UNEP draft Programme needs to indicate areas where the programme makes deliberate commitments to mainstream environmental considerations into socio-economic frameworks (e.g., PRSPs). We call for a reinforcement of UNEP scientific basis for policy discussion especially through UNEP's Science Initiative including highlighting of the information needs for sustainable resources management particularly in the programme of the early warning and assessment to reduce the continent's ecosystem vulnerability.

4. International Environmental Governance (IEG)

- a) Whereas the ongoing debate and search for an effective international environmental governance framework is healthy, it should not be allowed to distract focus on sustainable development and the obvious need for incremental and evolutionary upgrading of the environment pillar within the UN by strengthening UNEP in Nairobi and its presence in all regions and countries.
- b) An evolutionary approach to establishing UNEP's presence at country level through establishing national offices and/or collaborative initiatives with country offices of other UN agencies like the UNDP is necessary.
- c) In spite of the widespread recognition of participatory principle in nurturing political will and legitimacy for environmental concerns, many governments across the world and in Africa in particular remain reluctant to work with civil society or promote broad-based participation in policy formulation and implementation. The GC/GMEF should encourage members to promote and implement Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration as well as take part in and promote such important governance tools as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) of NEPAD.
- d) Environment tends to come late and superficially into the agenda of critical development initiatives due to its low priority in development contexts. There is need to foster stronger synergetic relationships between UNEP and its Regional Office for Africa, and such important initiatives as the MDG's, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the poverty reduction strategies driven by the multilateral donors.

5. Technology Support and Capacity-Building

- a) Recognizing the crucial role of technology support and capacity building in promoting environmental sustainability and sustainable development, we hail the effort to develop an Intergovernmental Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-Building.
- b) Systematic and thorough self-conducted needs assessments are necessary to identify synergies, overlaps, demands and gaps as the basis for providing technology support and capacity building. Technology support and capacity building need to be sustainable and long-term to maximize learning-by-doing as opposed to business as usual models of workshops and seminars.

- c) Civil society and other stakeholder groups need to be recognized as a source of experience and knowledge and should be involved in all elements and stages of capacity-building programmes including assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- d) While the strategic plan should respond to the regional dimensions emphasized in the plan of Implementation of WSSD as well as maximize experiences from initiatives like NEPAD Environmental Action Plans and models like the GEF National Capacity Status Assessments (NCSAs), due regard must be had to differentiations among countries and groupings (women, youth, private sector, policy makers, etc)

6. Resources

- a) Fostering participation of civil society, strengthening international environmental governance and providing technology support and capacity building have significant resource implications. Governments are strongly encouraged to rise to the challenge of endowing UNEP with the necessary human and financial capital to facilitate effective implementation of its environmental mandate within the UN system.
- b) There is urgent need to seek solution to the perennial issue of resource scarcity within the IEG framework. We implore governments to match their calls for UN's environmental agenda with predictable mandatory financial support based on principles of common but differentiated responsibility, assessed contributions and multi-annual commitments.
- c) We strongly urge governments and UNEP to strength the Regional Office for Africa and the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch within the Division of Policy Development and Law in order to fully operationalize partnership with civil society and major stakeholders as a model for actualizing Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration within the UN system.

We, Members of the African Civil Society Forum, in our diversity are ready and willing to play our constructive role in fostering sustainable development at national, regional and international level by drawing on our experiences and knowledge from different fora and processes so that the 3 pillars of sustainable development are fully balanced and integrated.