

North America Regional Major groups and stakeholders messages to the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its eleventh special session Key messages from the UNEP North

American Civil Society Consultation, 8 January 2010

Key points raised by participants in the UNEP North American Civil Society Consultation are enumerated below, structured under the following themes:

- a) International Environmental Governance (IEG);
- b) The Green Economy;
- c) Biodiversity and Ecosystems;
- d) Chemicals Conventions;
- e) The International Year of Biodiversity.

While consultation participants support the overall statement and its principles, the various groups present do not necessarily endorse every conclusion.

With respect to International Environmental Governance (IEG)

• The role of civil society in IEG

Civil society participation in international environmental governance is critical to its effectiveness as major groups bring resources, knowledge, and legitimacy into governance processes. Recognizing the contemporary political negotiations on IEG reform facilitated by UNEP, North American civil society urges that governments and UNEP create opportunities for substantive input from civil society into these discussions through policy dialogues in the regions or globally, position papers, etc.,

• Organizations responsible for IEG

International environmental governance suffers from excessive fragmentation, which has led to unnecessary competition for limited resources, time, and attention from governments and has hampered effectiveness. A more systematic analysis of various reform options is necessary, including the proposal for creating a World Environment Organization (for example, to address total global natural resource demands and capacities, and advise/support national governance organizations in their efforts to achieve sustainability within their sovereign territories) as well as of existing governance arrangements such as UN Water and UN Energy, and of improving the work between the Bretton Woods Institutions and UN organizations. It would be real value added if such reform could, for example, make the multilateral development banks ensure in advance and throughout that their projects comply with environmental law and their own safeguard policies.

• IEG for climate change response

Climate change adaptation and mitigation present an opportunity to rethink IEG architecture and create a more nimble and effective network of institutions. An effort to this end could take the form of a climate governance initiative analyzing the achievements and challenges of major institutional arrangements in the UN and other governance structures, drawing key lessons, and developing institutional scenarios and recommendations.

• Clearing house for IEG

A clearing house for best practices in governance at the local, national, regional and global level should be established, including practices in chemicals management, biodiversity, climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, etc. One avenue could be the Inter-governmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) platform (see below).

With respect to the Green Economy

• The Green Economy is necessary but not sufficient

North American civil society recognizes that the contemporary economic model needs rethinking to create a new paradigm for human progress. Greening our global economies (and other sustainable development programs) is necessary but not sufficient to produce the changes needed to achieve a sustainable world; we also need to pay attention to total resource balances and the numbers of people who place demands on our global ecosystems. A Green Economy can only realistically be created on the basis of shared values, in accordance with planetary limits, and grounded in social, economic, and environmental justice.

- **Clearing house and benchmarking for the Green Economy**

In support of the Green Economy concept, it would be useful to establish a clearinghouse for best practices in green economy initiatives, green careers, sustainable production and consumption, etc; and to build a benchmarking initiative from the information provided through the clearinghouse. This could be achieved through the IPBES platform (see below).

- **Civil society and business in development of the Green Economy concept**

Furthering the Green Economy concept requires a more refined definition of the term and more coherent and sustained consultation and collaboration with civil society and with the business community. UNEP could provide the platform to achieve this.

- **The Green Economy and the Bretton Woods Institutions**

The G-20 communiqué referring to the Green Economy should form the basis for systematic engagement with the Bretton Woods Institutions into rethinking economic principles and governance arrangements. Safeguard policies for biodiversity and ecosystems will play a key role in underpinning Green Economies.

With respect to Biodiversity and Ecosystems

- **The international niche for the Inter-governmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)**

The disconnection between science and policy-making in many countries, and globally, is a strong argument in favor of the establishment of IPBES. IPBES could have its greatest impact in informing global level policy, while both supporting and being informed by environmental decision-making at regional, national, and local levels.

- **Civil society participation in IPBES**

Civil society should be encouraged to participate in the IPBES process, e.g., through fellowships and scholarships, technological tools, clearing houses (see above), sharing of peer-reviewed publications, provision of data, etc. Civil society organizations could play an important role in calling attention not just to successful but also to failed initiatives, preventing repetition of mistakes, and enabling information exchange and learning in ecosystem management across national borders.

- **Independence of IPBES**

IPBES should be given considerable independence and freedom to make and impart its findings and conclusions consistent with the scientific information, especially to facilitate consideration of those interventions that have failed, as well as those that have succeeded; and so as not to wait for scientific consensus before recommending interventions.

With respect to the Chemicals Conventions

- **Added value from coordination**

North American civil society welcomes the promotion of enhanced cooperation and coordination among the chemical conventions. The decisions taken by Governments at the Extraordinary Conferences of the Parties in Bali, especially with respect to joint activities and joint management of the secretariats, should "raise all boats", by requiring the utilization of best practices throughout the three conventions, and must ensure that enhanced cooperation and coordination does not reduce them to the lowest common denominator.

- **Importance of civil society participation in the chemicals convention processes**

To date, civil society has been excluded from participation in the "synergies" process, leading to a lack of understanding and trust in the process on the part of many civil society organizations. Civil society welcomes the opportunity to participate as observers in the Bali Extraordinary COPs, and requests Governments to ensure full civil society access to the synergies discussions that will continue after Bali. In respect to the proposal by UNEP and FAO for "possible elements for the elaboration of terms of reference for reviewing the arrangements adopted pursuant to the synergies decisions," we urge Governments to ensure that the review includes timely opportunities for input and comment from civil society stakeholders.

With respect to the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB)

- **Importance of the IYB**

The IYB and its importance in communicating the central contributions of preventing the loss of biodiversity towards poverty alleviation, human well-being, and the maintenance of all life on Earth is welcomed.

- **Role of civil society in the IYB**

Civil society, in its partnership role, can help organize and support celebrations such as Earth Day and, in the UN Calendar of Observances, World Environment Day, and participation in conferences such as the 24th International Congress for Conservation Biology, among others, through the IYB. Civil society also has an important role in encouraging governments towards establishing key commitments as part of the IYB, for example, for the U.S. government to become a party to the CBD.

- **Importance of setting ambitious post-2010 biodiversity targets.**

Governments should establish ambitious post-2010 targets to prevent extinctions, halt biodiversity loss, and maintain the provision of ecosystem services, when they convene for the CBD COP in Japan at the climax of the IYB. Such targets could include, for example, deadlines for establishing legal and technical capacity to implement each article of the CBD.

