

SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 5-16 MAY 2008

Delegates to the sixteenth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-16), which opens today and continues through 16 May 2008, at UN headquarters in New York, will focus on the thematic cluster of agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. The CSD meets annually in two-year "Implementation Cycles," with each cycle focusing on thematic clusters alongside cross-sectoral issues. This approach was outlined in a multi-year programme of work (2004-2017) adopted at CSD-11 in 2003. Each cycle is comprised of a Review Year and a Policy Year. As this is the first year of the third implementation cycle (2008-2009) of the programme of work, CSD-16 will focus on reviewing barriers and constraints in implementation, as well as lessons learned and best practices, in relation to the thematic cluster. CSD-17, in 2009, will negotiate policy recommendations based on CSD-16's review of the issues.

In addition to reviewing the thematic cluster of issues, CSD-16 delegates will participate in several additional discussions, including a dialogue with major groups, a review of implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), in relation to the thematic cluster of issues, a review of the CSD-13 decisions on water and sanitation, and a high-level segment, including ministerial dialogue sessions with heads of UN agencies, funds and programmes, relevant international and regional organizations, and representatives of Major Groups. A Partnerships Fair, Learning Centre and side events will take place in parallel with CSD-16.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CSD

The Commission on Sustainable Development emerged from Agenda 21, the programme of action for sustainable development adopted in June 1992 by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the "Rio Earth Summit." Agenda 21 called for the creation of the CSD to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, enhance international cooperation, and examine progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the local, national, regional and international levels. In 1992, the 47th session of the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 47/191, which established the CSD's terms of reference and composition, organization of work,

relationship with other UN bodies, Secretariat arrangements, and guidelines for the participation of Major Groups. The CSD is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and its decisions are forwarded to ECOSOC for the latter body's action. The CSD has 53 member states, although all UN member states are invited to participate in its sessions. The Division for Sustainable Development, within the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), serves as the CSD's Secretariat.

The CSD held its first substantive session in June 1993 and has convened annually since then at UN headquarters in New York. During its first five years, the CSD systematically reviewed the implementation of all chapters of Agenda 21. In June 1997, five years after UNCED, the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS-19), also known as "Rio+5," was held to review the implementation of Agenda 21. Negotiations produced a Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Among the decisions adopted at UNGASS-19 was a five-year CSD work programme organized around sectoral, cross-sectoral and economic thematic issues.

CSD-8: The eighth session of the CSD met from 24 April to 5 May 2000. Participants addressed the sectoral theme of integrated planning and management of land resources, and the cross-sectoral themes of financial resources, trade and investment and economic growth. The session also considered the economic sector sustainable agriculture and land management. The decision on integrated planning and management of land resources addressed the importance of a holistic approach to sustainable development, including integrated watershed management and the application of an ecosystem-based approach that takes into account the necessary balance between environmental conservation and rural livelihood. The decision on agriculture focused on sustainable agriculture and rural development, recognizing the special and important place of agriculture in society for food and fiber production, food security and social and economic development.

WSSD: The World Summit on Sustainable Development met from 26 August to 4 September 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and adopted two main documents: the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development. In their consideration of desertification, delegates agreed to call on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Assembly to designate land degradation as a focal area of GEF and to consider the GEF as a financial mechanism for the UN Convention to

Combat Desertification. The JPOI chapter on the Sustainable Development of Africa affirms the international community's commitment to support sustainable development in Africa, through addressing the special challenges by taking concrete actions to implement Agenda 21 in Africa, within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). On water and sanitation, the JPOI includes an agreement to halve by 2015 the proportion of people unable to reach or afford safe drinking water and who do not have access to basic sanitation. In relation to water resources, delegates adopted the following commitments: launch a programme of actions to achieve safe drinking water and sanitation goals; mobilize international and domestic financial resources, transfer technology, promote best practices and support capacity building; promote and provide new and additional financial resources and innovative technologies to implement Chapter 18 of Agenda 21; and develop integrated water resource management and water efficiency plans by 2005. A section on means of implementation calls for, among others, the fulfillment of World Trade Organization (WTO) members' commitments, notably on market access, and the fulfillment of a commitment to comprehensive WTO negotiations initiated under the Agreement on Agriculture, aiming, *inter alia*, to phase out all forms of export subsidies.

CSD-13: The thirteenth session of the CSD took place from 11-22 April 2005. Building on the outcomes of CSD-12 (the Review Year of the first two-year cycle), CSD-13 focused on policies and options to expedite the implementation of commitments in the areas of water, sanitation and human settlements. On water, delegates agreed to call for, among others: accelerating progress toward the water access goal through increased resources from all sources; developing and transferring low cost technologies; enhancing cooperation among riparian states and supporting basin-wide initiatives in Africa; improving water demand and resource management, especially in agriculture; and accelerating the provision of technical and financial assistance to countries needing help to meet the 2005 target on integrated water resource management. Delegations also agreed to text calling on governments and UN agencies to provide sanitation, recognizing interlinkages and the positive impacts of sanitation on poverty reduction.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETINGS: In preparation for CSD-16, regional implementation meetings (RIM) were organized by the UN regions. The African RIM convened from 22-25 October 2007, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, during the fifth meeting of the African Committee on Sustainable Development. Participants revised and accepted four reports to forward to CSD-16 for consideration and adopted the African Regional Statement to CSD-16 on Agriculture and Rural Development, Land, Drought and Desertification and Africa.

The Western Asia RIM met from 4-6 November 2007, in Cairo, Egypt, during the ninth session of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region. The Asia and the Pacific RIM, convened from 26-27 November 2007, in Jakarta, Indonesia, and was organized with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The Latin America and the Caribbean RIM, which met from 28-29 November 2007, in Santiago, Chile, was organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. And the Europe and North America RIM convened from 28-29 January 2008, in Geneva, Switzerland, organized by the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

WATER TECHNOLOGIES WEEK: The Water Technologies and Environmental Control: Fourth International Water and Environmental Technology Week convened in Tel Aviv, Israel, from 30 October to 1 November 2007. Participants discussed water resource management, sustainability and environmental challenges of development, and innovative technologies in the agricultural arena, among others.

BEIJING INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DESERTIFICATION: The Beijing International Conference on Combating Desertification, which was co-organized by UNDESA and the State Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China, convened from 22-24 January 2008 in Beijing, China. Participants adopted a Beijing Statement on combating desertification and discussed the need to: strengthen the implementation of the Ten-year Strategic Plan and Framework adopted at the eighth Conference of the Parties (COP-8) to the UNCCD as well as the coordination of implementation of the UNCCD, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity; recognize that forests play an important role in preventing and controlling land degradation and restoring degraded land; implement National Action Plans in coordination among relevant government agencies, including central government agencies and local governments; strengthen multilateral and bilateral regional cooperation; and recognize that international development cooperation, including official development assistance (ODA), can play an important role in investing in addressing land degradation, while central and local governments should take effective measures to mobilize financial resources.

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON LAND IN AFRICA: The Expert Group Meeting on Land for Sustainable Urbanisation in Africa took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 21-22 February 2008. Sponsored by the Global Land Tool Network, participants identified emerging issues requiring attention, emphasized the need for innovation in Africa's land management, called for recognition of the dynamic nature of land tenure systems in Africa, proposed off-farm activities to increase Africa's land productivity in order to alleviate poverty and reduce urban problems, and called for improvement in information management to streamline land administration and attain better governance.

OSLO POLICY FORUM: DEALING WITH DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE: The Oslo Policy Forum on Changing the Way We Develop: Dealing with Disasters and Climate Change, met in Oslo, Norway, from 28-29 February 2008. Participants agreed, among others, on the need to ensure that disaster risk reduction is a central theme in the discussions leading to the UNFCCC COP-15, and on the importance of mainstreaming an integrated approach to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction into key sectoral policies, such as agriculture, energy, natural resource management and urban development.

ROUNDTABLE ON CARIBBEAN SIDS: UNDESA organized a High-level Roundtable on International Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Caribbean SIDS, which took place on 25-27 March 2008, in Bridgetown, Barbados. The roundtable was organized at the request of the Government of Iceland for UNDESA to facilitate enhanced development cooperation between Iceland and the Caribbean SIDS. The meeting identified areas of mutual interest to increase cooperation, including in the areas of sustainable use of natural resources, climate change, renewable energy resources, fisheries management, capacity building and the advancement of women.