

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: 13-22 JUNE 2012

The third and final meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD, or Rio+20) will open today in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Following the conclusion of the PrepCom, the Conference itself will convene on Wednesday, 20 June 2012.

The PrepCom will continue negotiating the draft outcome document as it emerged on 2 June from the third round of “informal informal” consultations at UN Headquarters in New York. The PrepCom is also expected to adopt the provisional rules of procedure for the conference.

The formal opening plenary meeting for the Conference will be held during the morning of Wednesday, 20 June, and will consider all procedural and organizational matters. The plenary meeting will also hear statements from the President of the Economic and Social Council and the nine major groups.

At the ceremonial opening of the Conference, which will be held in the afternoon of Wednesday, 20 June, the President of the Conference, the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Secretary-General of the Conference will address participants. In addition to a general debate, the Conference will feature four high-level roundtable sessions on “Looking at the way forward in implementing the expected outcomes of the Conference.”

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCES

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD or Rio+20) will mark the 40th anniversary of the first major international political conference that specifically had the word “environment” in its title. Taking place in June 2012, the UNCSD seeks to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assess progress and implementation gaps in meeting previously-agreed commitments, and address new and emerging challenges. The conference will focus on the following themes: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD).

STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE: The UN Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) was held in Stockholm, Sweden, from 5-16 June 1972, and produced three major sets of decisions: the Stockholm Declaration; the Stockholm Action Plan, made up of 109 recommendations on international measures against environmental degradation for governments and international organizations; and a group of five resolutions calling for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons, the creation of an international databank on environmental data, actions

linked to development and the environment, the creation of an environment fund, and establishing the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), which was charged with providing the central node for global environmental cooperation and treaty making.

BRUNDTLAND COMMISSION: In 1983, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) established an independent commission to formulate a long-term agenda for action. The World Commission on Environment and Development—more commonly known as the Brundtland Commission, named for its Chair, Gro Harlem Brundtland—subsequently issued its report in 1987, *Our Common Future*, which stressed the need for development strategies in all countries that recognized the limits of the ecosystem’s ability to regenerate itself and absorb waste products. The Commission emphasized the link between economic development and environmental issues, and identified poverty eradication as a necessary and fundamental requirement for environmentally sustainable development.

UN CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT: UNCED, also known as the Earth Summit, was held from 3-14 June 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and involved over 100 Heads of State and Government, representatives from 178 countries, and some 17,000 participants. The principal outputs of UNCED were the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 (a 40-chapter programme of action) and the Statement of Forest Principles. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity were also opened for signature during the Earth Summit. Agenda 21 called for the creation of a Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) as a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, enhance international cooperation, and examine progress in implementing Agenda 21 at the local, national, regional and international levels.

UNGASS-19: The 19th Special Session of the UNGA for the Overall Review and Appraisal of Agenda 21 (23-27 June 1997, New York) adopted the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. It assessed progress since UNCED and examined implementation.

WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: The WSSD met from 26 August - 4 September 2002, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The goal of the WSSD, according to UNGA Resolution 55/199, was to hold a ten-year review of UNCED at the summit level to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development. The WSSD gathered over 21,000 participants from 191 countries. Delegates negotiated and adopted the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and the Johannesburg Declaration on



Sustainable Development. The JPOI is designed as a framework for action to implement the commitments originally agreed at UNCED. The Johannesburg Declaration outlines the path taken from UNCED to the WSSD, highlights challenges, expresses a commitment to sustainable development, underscores the importance of multilateralism, and emphasizes the need for implementation.

UNGA 64: On 24 December 2009, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 64/236 and agreed to convene the UNCSD in 2012 in Brazil. Resolution 64/236 also called for holding three Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) meetings prior to the UNCSD. On 14 May 2010, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the appointment of UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang as Secretary-General for the Conference. The UN Secretary-General subsequently appointed Brice Lalonde (France) and Elizabeth Thompson (Barbados) as executive coordinators.

UNCSD PREPCOM I: This meeting was held from 17-19 May 2010, at UN Headquarters in New York. The PrepCom assessed progress to date and the remaining gaps in implementing outcomes of major summits on sustainable development, as well as new and emerging challenges, a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and the IFSD. Participants also organized their work in the lead-up to 2012, and considered the UNCSD's rules of procedure.

FIRST INTERSESSIONAL MEETING: This meeting convened at UN Headquarters from 10-11 January 2011. Delegates listened to a summary of the findings of the Synthesis Report on securing renewed political commitment for sustainable development. Panel discussions were held on the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and on the IFSD.

UNCSD PREPCOM II: This meeting took place from 7-8 March 2011, also at UN Headquarters. Delegates discussed progress to date and remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development, addressed new and emerging challenges, discussed the scope of a green economy and the idea of a "blue economy," and debated the IFSD. At the end of the meeting, a decision was adopted on the process for preparing the draft outcome document for the UNCSD.

UNCSD REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL MEETINGS: During the second half of 2011, a series of regional and sub-regional meetings were held to prepare inputs for the UNCSD preparatory process. These included three sub-regional preparatory meetings for small island developing states (SIDS), as well as regional meetings organized by the UN regional economic and social commissions.

During the **Regional Preparatory Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean**, held in Santiago, Chile, from 7-9 September 2011, delegates called for better ways to measure the wealth of countries that adequately reflect the three pillars of sustainable development, and a flexible and efficient global IFSD ensuring effective integration of the three pillars. They also discussed a proposal from Colombia and Guatemala to launch a process to develop sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The **Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting** took place from 16-17 October 2011, in Cairo, Egypt. Delegates highlighted the lack of a universal definition of green economy and agreed that it should be a tool for sustainable development rather than a new principle that might replace sustainable development. Participants also highlighted the need for balance among the three pillars of sustainable development.

The **Regional Preparatory Meeting for Asia and the Pacific** took place from 19-20 October 2011, in Seoul, Republic of Korea. Although many found merit in the idea of a green economy, some noted that it should not lead to protectionism or conditionalities. On IFSD, while many favored "strengthening"

UNEP, there was no consensus on whether this should be done through transforming UNEP into a specialized agency. Some participants also expressed interest and support for establishing a sustainable development council.

The **Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa** took place from 20-25 October 2011, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. On IFSD, while there was some opposition to the idea of transforming UNEP into a specialized agency, all participants agreed on the need to strengthen the programme. Delegates supported the concept of a green economy while indicating that it needs more definition, should not result in protectionism or trade conditionalities, and should include the concept of sustainable land management.

The **Regional Preparatory Meeting for Europe and North America** convened in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1-2 December 2011. Participants called for improvement in monitoring and evaluation of progress on sustainable development, better integration of the three pillars of sustainable development, and stronger regional cooperation. They discussed SDGs and a green economy roadmap. On IFSD, many supported upgrading and transforming UNEP, creating a sustainable development council, strengthening the regional commissions and national sustainable development councils, and engaging civil society.

SECOND INTERSESSIONAL MEETING: This meeting convened at UN Headquarters in New York from 15-16 December 2011. Participants discussed the compilation of submissions from states, UN bodies, intergovernmental organizations and Major Groups, and provided comments and guidance for the development, structure and format of a "zero draft" of the outcome document to be adopted at the UNCSD.

INITIAL DISCUSSIONS OF THE ZERO DRAFT: This meeting took place at UN Headquarters from 25-27 January 2012. In their opening statements, delegates agreed that the zero draft would serve as the basis for negotiations. They had submitted written comments on the first two sections—the Preamble/Stage Setting and Renewing Political Commitment Sections—prior to the January discussions, and began negotiations on these sections.

FIRST "INFORMAL INFORMAL" CONSULTATIONS AND THIRD INTERSESSIONAL MEETING: Negotiations resumed from 19-27 March, at UN Headquarters. Delegates engaged in lengthy discussions on the text, proposing amendments and responding to other delegations' suggestions. By the end of the meeting, most sections of the text had been reviewed and discussed more than once, with the text expanding to more than 200 pages.

SECOND "INFORMAL INFORMAL" CONSULTATIONS: Negotiations resumed from 23 April to 4 May 2012, at UN Headquarters. Delegates agreed *ad referendum* to 21 out of 420 paragraphs in the text, and so the Bureau decided to hold an additional negotiating session prior to the UNCSD.

THIRD "INFORMAL INFORMAL" CONSULTATIONS: The third round of "informal informal" consultations on the draft outcome document took place from 29 May to 2 June 2012 at UN Headquarters in New York. Delegates discussed the 80-page revised draft text produced by the Co-Chairs, working in two working groups and over 20 issue-specific contact or "splinter" groups. In the end, 70 paragraphs were agreed *ad referendum*, with 259 containing bracketed text. Key areas of divergence include: several issues within the framework for action, such as climate change, oceans, and food and agriculture; the process for the establishment of SDGs; means of implementation; IFSD; and green economy.