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PREPCOM HIGHLIGHTS THURSDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER 1993

The PrepCom concluded the general debate on Agenda Items 2(a) and 3 on Thursday morning. The Chair, Amb. Penelope Wensley, then moved on to more specific discussion of Agenda Item 2(a), activities of the United Nations system, and Agenda Item 2(c), reports from the regional technical meetings. Wensley also convened informal sessions in the late morning and afternoon to introduce and discuss the G-77's draft paper on basic elements for an action programme for the sustainable development of small island developing States (SIDS).

GENERAL DEBATE

UNITED KINGDOM: Linda Brown noted that a clear programme of action would allow governments to assess their success in meeting their UNCED commitments to consider the special needs of SIDS in the context of Agenda 21. Important issues to be considered include water and the marine environment, health and population policy, the need for export diversification, and institutional issues, such as development planning and capacity building. Donor coordination is needed. The UK will contribute £30,000 to the Conference process in support of Caribbean participation (Government and NGO) and is discussing support for Pacific participation with SPREP.

AUSTRIA: Irene Freudenschuss-Reichl said that the development of vulnerability indicators, as suggested in PC/10, could be a step toward the creation of sustainable development indicators. Issues such as new and renewable energy and tourism are very important. She hoped that this Conference will contribute to keeping sustainable development on the international agenda.

SAMOA: Amb. Tuiloma Neroni Slade highlighted the obstacles that Samoa and other South Pacific SIDS face in their quest for sustainable development. He added that SIDS are the first victim of global change that has been caused by others. For this reason, they will need assistance from the international community. He expressed hope that the outcome of this Conference would be a holistic and integrative plan of action.

MEXICO: Patricia Belmar said that the Conference provides the first opportunity to implement a part of Agenda 21. To succeed, the situation of SIDS needs to be understood and supported by the entire international community.

BANGLADESH: Mohammad Ziauddin said that his country suffers from many of the same problems as SIDS. He underscored the importance of natural disaster preparedness and offered to share experiences in coping with sea-level rise. He suggested that the plan of action adopted for the least developed countries could provide some useful lessons for this Conference.

SRI LANKA: Amb. Stanley Kalpage said that there is an urgent need for special consideration for both environmental

assistance and development aid for SIDS. He said that progress has been made in regional and inter-regional cooperation, but political will and commitment is now needed. He called on the world community to provide assistance to SIDS and added that the reality of global partnership will be tested by the outcome of this Conference.

UNIDO: A.O. Lacanlale presented an overview of the UN Industrial Development Organisation's activities in support of the sustainable development of SIDS. UNIDO emphasizes the development of entrepreneurial and managerial skills, enhancement of competitiveness, and the maintenance of products quality. UNIDO sees considerable scope for the development of marine resource-based industrial processing in SIDS. UNIDO will undertake a study to classify SIDS according to their potential for industrial development.

UN REGIONAL COMMISSIONS: John M. Foday-Lamin spoke on behalf of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ECSWA). He mentioned the nature of the Regional Commissions' work with SIDS. The Regional Commissions have spearheaded initiatives in establishing various inter-governmental organizations and inter-agency committees to coordinate environmental management; and reinforced their effectiveness in dealing with sustainable development and capacity building. The Conference should: develop a coordinated plan of action for implementation by UN organizations and other inter-governmental bodies; develop environmental management plans; and strengthen existing regional and subregional institutions for monitoring and follow-up.

WORLD BANK: Jan C. Post said that the Bank created a vice presidency for environmentally sustainable development last year. All projects now have to go through an environmental impact assessment process. Environmental protection is the object of many Bank projects. He referred to the role of the Bank in the GEF and its work in conjunction with UNEP and FAO on integrated coastal zone management.

WAFUNIF: Diedre Powell, on behalf of the World Association of Former Internes and Fellows, highlighted five areas for further attention: endogenous scientific and technological capacity; access to environmentally sound technologies; the brain drain; the globalization of finance and production and the impact of groupings such as the EC and NAFTA; and the impact of science and technology on women and youth. Youth, women and indigenous people form an essential part of the knowledge base of SIDS.

WOMEN'S CAUCUS: Dr. E.A. Moore said that women's centrality to both the economic and social fabric of life in SIDS is unquestionable. She highlighted women's roles in SIDS and expressed deep disappointment with the Conference documents for their failure to recognize this. This Conference must demonstrate that the gains women made in Rio have not been lost.

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ECUADOR: Miriam Mantilla said that the stage of diagnosis of the problem has already been launched. The next step is to promote greater activity and set priorities for sustainable development of SIDS. The Barbados Conference will provide an opportunity to define strategies.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES IN THE UN SYSTEM

The discussion of A/CONF.167/PC/6, overview of the activities of the UN system, took place with only half a dozen UN agencies and the Regional Commissions present. While the Secretariat was thanked for its efforts, many delegates pointed to some of the shortcomings of the document. In particular, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, France, Iceland, and Canada regretted that the activities described were not always specific to SIDS. Issues specific to SIDS, such as communication and transport, were not always addressed in sufficient detail.

Australia called for a new document providing a complete picture of what the UN is doing, what it can do, and how well it is doing it. Kiribati reminded participants that some UN agency programmes will not benefit SIDS that are not members of the agency in question. Vanuatu added that the imperfections of the report reflect the imperfections of the UN system. The US urged the international community to make the best use of the institutions already in place and to implement existing conventions. Canada suggested that a questionnaire be circulated to assist in evaluating programmes carried out at the national level and to include relevant comments in an inventory compiled by the Secretariat. Cuba suggested that the participants meet once more before Barbados when they have a better sense of what is already being done and a clearer idea of what is needed.

Miles Stoby from the Secretariat urged the delegates to remember that the UN has no specific mandate to deal with SIDS as such. He indicated that a new document could be prepared for Barbados if its focus was more clearly defined. He suggested that as information systems are expensive, a SIDS referral point within the UN system could be created.

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission warned against duplication of efforts in monitoring the effect of climate change in the Caribbean. The FAO suggested that the Conference examine relevant work of non-UN agencies.

REPORTS FROM THE REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETINGS

The Chair asked representatives of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Caribbean Community (Caricom) to introduce their reports of the two regional technical meetings. Gerald Miles (SPREP) commented on the significance of the meeting: the first chance at the regional level to discuss UNCED's outcomes related to SIDS; the first meeting of islands from these regions on these issues; and the first opportunity to discuss sustainable development for SIDS in the context of this Conference. The meeting found that environmental legislation is a key cross cutting issue.

Herman Roehler (Caricom) said that in identifying the priorities for short-, medium- and long-term action, the meeting helped define the different problems faced by some SIDS, as well as general constraints to sustainable development. He noted that at the international level many SIDS are unable to be fully represented at important negotiations and conferences.

ACTION PROGRAMME FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SIDS

During the morning session, Colombia, on behalf of the G-77, submitted an informal paper entitled, "Basic Elements for an Action Programme for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States." This paper was originally drafted by AOSIS and is based on a triangular approach (action at the national, regional and international levels).

Later in the day, the Chair convened an informal meeting to hear preliminary comments on this paper. During the discussion, Brazil and Argentina pointed out that this Conference and the resulting action programme should be in line with the agreements reached in Rio. They pointed out that financial resources were not adequately addressed in the paper. To reinforce the links to UNCED, the paper

should reflect activities in other fora, such as the Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions, the GEF and the CSD.

Belgium, on behalf of the EC, pointed out that the paper has a good list of objectives, but is too general. The paper should: concentrate more on the specific problems of SIDS (economic diversification, transport, tourism, and water resources); mention ongoing work that addresses the specific problems of SIDS; focus more on issues like capacity building and human resources development; and clarify how specific problems of SIDS will be addressed in the context of other relevant global negotiations. Some issues that are not mentioned in the paper and should be included are: dissemination of information; the role of the CSD in follow-up; and better donor coordination, especially at the regional level.

Australia and Iceland agreed with the emphasis on implementation at the national level and the triangular approach. They both supported Canada's proposal to prepare an inventory of what is presently being done at the national level and said that the question of implementation must be considered in time. Iceland also pointed out that this paper should be linked to more efficient UN cooperation. Jamaica expressed concern about the incorporation of the work of many of the UN agencies into this document. He made specific reference to consideration of the latest initiatives on the Law of the Sea, the regional seas programme, and on human settlements.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Cuba's call for another session of the PrepCom spurred discussion in the corridors. However, with the current constructive atmosphere and the AOSIS/G-77 paper fresh in the hands of delegates, there is a feeling that it is still too early to judge whether or not a second PrepCom will be needed. In fact, many believe that if the Secretariat and the Bureau can develop a negotiating text based on the AOSIS document over the long weekend, the four days of meetings next week may produce agreement on all aspects except for implementation. As the section on implementation was not circulated with the rest of the paper, it is not yet clear how contentious this issue will be.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: The first item on the agenda is a report by the host Government. Harcourt Lewis, recently appointed Minister of the Environment in Barbados, will give details on the state of preparations for the Conference. He met yesterday with UNDP to discuss plans for the sustainable development technology exhibition and talked to NGOs about plans for an NGO forum. Today, Lewis should be able to give a detailed overview of the host Government's preparations for all three events.

The second item on the agenda will be a review of the operations of the voluntary fund. Look for signals from donor countries that have not yet made commitments to the fund (such as the United States) that they will indeed do so. There will be some gentle nudging of those who have committed funds, but whose checks have not yet arrived. Talk of a second PrepCom will prove abortive without additional funds.

INFORMAL SESSION: After discussion of the voluntary fund, the Chair will adjourn Plenary and convene an informal meeting to continue discussing the AOSIS/G-77 paper. At its meeting late yesterday afternoon, AOSIS began drafting language on means of implementation. While many AOSIS members recognize that there are gaps in the document as it was introduced (including environmental legislation, references to the role of women, and general strengthening of human resource language), they are looking to other countries and especially NGOs to suggest language. Meanwhile, the OECD countries met yesterday to look at structure -- how to get a clearer idea of what is ongoing at the national level and subsequently define the other two points in the triangle, regional and international coordination and support. There are also concerns about follow-up and implementation. A matrix of existing programmes, priority issues, and levels of response may be needed.