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CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY, 4 MAY 1994

PLENARY

In one of its more eclectic sessions, the Plenary heard reports from representatives of the NGO Islands Forum, adopted the report of the Credentials Committee (A/CONF.167/7), reopened the General Debate to hear two statements, and heard the presentation of a case study on early warning systems.

NGO FORUM: Calvin Howell, on behalf of the Caribbean Conservation Association, said that it is important that governments, in partnership with NGOs, commit to the implementation of Chapter 27 of Agenda 21. He expressed hope that at the end of the process there would be no need to retain the brackets around the word "action."

VILLAGE OF HOPE: Colin Hudson reported on the Village of Hope, which contains more than 300 significant exhibits, 23,000 school children and more than 12,000 adults have visited. There is now a proposal to make the Village of Hope a permanent exhibition and other delegates have expressed interest in establishing Villages of Hope in their own countries.

SUSTECH '94: Bobby Khan, Barbados Manufacturing Association, said 14 island States and 50 small businesses from islands participated in SUSTECH '94. NGOs and the private sector must be involved in building models for sustainable development in SIDS.

BARBADOS ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION: Gordon Bispham said that the NGO Forum should be part of all UN Conferences. There is a need to coordinate, facilitate, communicate and allow new thinking and imaginative initiatives.

PAN-AFRICAN MOVEMENT: Dr. Pauulu Kamarakafego said sustainable development must be rooted in sustainable livelihoods and sustainable human development. The rights of indigenous people of SIDS must be respected. There is also a need to ensure access to credit and capital.

NGO ACTION PLAN: The NGOs then presented their Action Plan, which was summarized by Dr. Caroline Sinavaiana (Pacific Concerns Resource Centre), Dr. Pynee Chellapernal (Centre for Documentation, Research and Training on the South West Indian Ocean), Joan French (Caribbean Policy Development Centre), and Waldaba Stewart (Pan-African Movement).

The Preamble highlights: the vulnerabilities of SIDS; population; colonialism and militarism; terms of trade and aid; the strengths of small size; the requirements of sustainable development; and putting people at the centre of development. The Action Plan contains a series of 81 recommendations for action by governments and 23

recommendations for action by NGOs and indigenous people. The NGOs and indigenous peoples also adopted a resolution that establishes the International Network of SIDS NGOs and Indigenous Peoples (INSNI).

Gloria Goffe spoke on behalf of peoples with disabilities. She presented a series of recommendations, including: people with disabilities should have equal rights guaranteed by the Constitution; barriers to equality must be removed; and people with disabilities must be consulted on matters concerning their needs.

Damodar Penton, Pan-African Movement, who spoke on behalf of youth, called for reallocation of military budgets to social services and the environment, an end to the economic blockade of Cuba and debt forgiveness for SIDS.

From atop a chair, Enoch Astapha spoke on behalf of the youth under age 14. Since young people make up a large population in developing islands they should be given a responsibility in local government. He called for an end to the dumping of wastes in rivers, seas, lakes and other waters and a halt to deforestation and reckless land use. He called on Heads of Government to give a global gift to the children of the world by universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Audrey Roberts, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, presented the resolution by the Women's Caucus, which included: creation of an enabling environment for women's participation in implementing the Programme of Action; respecting the right of all colonized people for independence; and access to training, information and sustainable development technology for women.

Desrey Fox, Barbados Environmental Association, spoke on behalf of indigenous people, who did not participate adequately at this Conference. Indigenous people need to participate in all processes related to sustainable development, which is their life. She called for the guarantee of intellectual and cultural property rights of indigenous peoples and demanded the right to self-determination.

INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS UNION: Philip Cross said that a programme of action for the Caribbean was adopted in April 1992, which includes upgrading telecommunications legislation, development of telecommunications policies, human resources development, and satisfying vital communication needs such as news networks, video services and disaster preparedness.

UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY: Amb. Lucille Mair (Jamaica), Chair of the UNU Governing Council, elaborated on the UNU's work on the environment, under its Sustaining Global Life Support Systems programme, implementation of Agenda 21, preparation of a textbook on environmental economics, and international environmental law.

Amb. Gerhard Henze (Germany) introduced a case study on the early warning capabilities of the Caribbean

Meteorological Organization and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (A/CONF.167/CRP.7). John Scott, Center for Public Service Communications, then presented the details of this case study.

MAIN COMMITTEE

On Tuesday night, the extended bureau met until 3:30 am to negotiate the unresolved paragraphs on finance in the Programme of Action. The agreed language, which appears throughout the text, reads: "The implementation of the Programme of Action will require the provision of effective means, including adequate, predictable, new and additional financial resources in accordance with Chapter 33 of Agenda 21." There is also reference to the "optimal use of existing resources and mechanisms" in the text.

On Wednesday evening, the Main Committee convened in formal session to adopt its report, as contained in A/CONF.167/L.6 and addenda 1-16, which contain the Preamble and the 15 chapters of the Programme of Action. The rapporteur, Takao Shibata, made several oral amendments to the draft report, which will be reflected in the final text. Brazil, supported by Colombia, made a statement for the record on the need for compensation for the use of knowledge in traditional and customary practices of local communities and indigenous people. The Main Committee then approved the Programme of Action and agreed to transmit the text to the Plenary for adoption.

Joy Hyvarinen, on behalf of the World Wide Fund for Nature, said that the NGOs had hoped that the developed countries would breathe new life into the Rio process at this Conference, but this was not the case. Although the Conference provided recognition of the urgent situation in SIDS and UNCED language was maintained, NGOs had hoped for greater movement towards the creation of new and innovative financing and economic mechanisms. Dr. Jeremy Leggett of Greenpeace International criticized the developed countries for not addressing climate change, especially two related crises -- the effect on the global insurance industry and coral bleaching. Both of these crises have a negative impact on SIDS. He said that the international community has missed another opportunity to wake up and there may not be many more to come.

In her closing remarks, the Chair, Amb. Penelope Wensley, thanked all the participants and commented on the harmony and partnership between developed and developing countries that has made this Programme of Action possible. Despite the criticisms, she said that they had achieved something here that is worthy of pride -- the first concrete step by the international community to fulfill one of the commitments of UNCED. This is not rhetoric, she added. It is a Programme of Action that clearly and comprehensively defines the actions required to put SIDS on a sustainable footing. The meeting concluded with expressions of thanks by Guinea Bissau, Greece (on behalf of the EU), Algeria (on behalf of the G-77), China, Trinidad and Tobago (on behalf of AOSIS), New Zealand (on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand), Romania (on behalf of himself, since he was the only one present from his region), the US, Iceland (on behalf of the Nordic countries), and Barbados.

BARBADOS DECLARATION

On Tuesday, the contact group met through the evening and new proposals on the structure were tabled. On Wednesday morning the group met for a final round of debate. Delegates were urged to restrict their comments to the new text and not to engage in rhetorical debate. Nevertheless, members of the group were allowed to reopen previously agreed paragraphs.

As it stands, the Declaration contains a short preambular section and lists a number of areas in which participating States affirm their commitments. These are: human resources; natural resources; ecological fragility; economic vulnerability; capacity building; constraints to sustainable development; partnership; national, regional and international implementation; and public awareness.

The atmosphere took a turn for the worse when some of the contentious issues gave rise another round of protracted debate. These issues included: the participation of major groups; ownership of natural resources; climate change, response strategies and the framework convention; references to the debt burden on SIDS; and actions to reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. On this last point, a major donor country said that the only way this point could be retained was if it were moved to the section on national implementation. References to growing population pressure were dropped in anticipation of the circular debate that was bound to follow in Plenary. The debate lasted close to five hours before the group adjourned and the text was sent for translation.

At 8:00 pm the Plenary resumed in informal session to discuss the latest draft prepared during the afternoon by the Chair of the contact group, Amb. Besley Maycock. The differences over natural resources were resolved with language referring to the sovereign rights of SIDS over their own resources. The debate continued into the evening ironing out the final wrinkles.

AOSIS SUMMIT

At the conclusion of the Second AOSIS Summit, the Chair of AOSIS, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, gave a press briefing. He was accompanied by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, the Prime Minister of Barbados, the President of Nauru, the Minister of the Environment of Mauritius, and the Ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago to the UN.

The Summit had discussed the need to strengthen cooperation within the Alliance. The Chair said that while AOSIS was far from happy with the allocation of finances, it recognized that commitments had been made at this Conference. He further noted that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. The AOSIS leaders agreed that per capita measures for the appropriation of ODA are irrelevant and that sets of indicators should be used. While they were disappointed that so few Heads of State and Government were able to attend the Summit, they noted that the Summit was a useful precursor to the High-Level Segment.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Following three days of debate on the Barbados Declaration, delegates breathed a sigh of relief that something -- anything -- had been agreed to and sent for translation. The Declaration, described by some as no more than a whimper, is not expected to become part of the lexicon of sustainable development in the near future. However, it does show that the two-and-half years negotiating the Rio agreements were not completely in vain -- no one has yet been able to say it better.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT: The High-Level Segment will convene this morning at 10:00 in Conference Room 1. Speakers in the morning will probably include: the Presidents of the Republic of Nauru, Kiribati and Cuba, as well as the Governor General of Papua New Guinea, the Prime Ministers of Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, and Vanuatu. Ministers from China, the US, Iceland, Australia, the Marshall Islands, Cyprus, Venezuela, Jamaica, Mauritius, the UK, Brazil and the Maldives may also deliver addresses. In the afternoon, the speakers' list includes the President of Guyana, the Premier of Niue, the Prime Ministers of Tonga, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, the special representative of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Cook Islands. Ministers from Fiji, Malaysia, Germany, Solomon Islands, Seychelles, Western Samoa, Canada, India, New Zealand, Colombia and the British Virgin Islands are also expected to take to the rostrum.