



CSD-20 HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER 2013

Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, called to order the second meeting of the 20th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-20). The first meeting was held directly after the conclusion of the 19th Session on 13 May 2011. The Commission elected Bektas Mukhamedzhanov, Vice-Minister of Environment Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as Chair of CSD-20.

Chair Mukhamedzhanov expressed his gratitude to the Commission and invited the election of Vice-Chairs. Miloš Nikolić (Montenegro) and Paolo Soprano (Italy) were elected by acclamation, and Soprano was also elected Rapporteur. The Commission then adopted the provisional agenda and organization of work (E/CN.17/2013/1).

OPENING REMARKS

Chair Mukhamedzhanov welcomed delegates to the historic and final session of the CSD. He discussed the history of the Commission and sustainable development, beginning with the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden, and the adoption of Agenda 21 at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Reflecting on the past 20 years, he recalled the CSD's mandate to implement Agenda 21 and sustainable development through analysis of regular reports and inclusion of stakeholders and Major Groups in its meetings. He recognized the creation of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to replace the CSD, and looked to this Forum to engage heads of state and government, enhance integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, and "stir changes in the realities of people's lives."

Noel Sinclair, Deputy Chef de Cabinet, spoke on behalf of the President of the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Amb. John Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda). He reviewed the history of the CSD beginning with the establishment of the Brundtland Commission in 1983. He noted that the CSD was created to follow up on the Earth Summit and to ensure that the people-planet relationship remained healthy. He reviewed the accomplishments of the CSD, including its successful model for multi-stakeholder participation that has since been replicated in other fora. As we launch the HLPF next week, he said, "Let's rekindle the aspirations of the CSD,"

and ensure that representatives from all three dimensions of sustainable development participate in the Forum's work. The first meeting of the HLPF on 24 September 2013 and Special Event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on 25 September 2013, will chart a course for the new development agenda with an emphasis on sustainable development practices, he noted.

Wu Hongbo said the Commission had been unique in taking a long-term view on issues rather than reacting to immediate crises. He also highlighted its breadth and scope, which generated a "fertile mix" of interdisciplinary outcomes, actions and policies, and advanced sustainable development implementation beyond UN corridors and conference rooms. Wu noted the expansion of political commitment to sustainable development since 1992. The most lasting legacy of the CSD, he said, could prove to be its innovative, inclusive engagement of Major Groups.

Wu also outlined ways to ensure the success of the HLPF, including by keeping sustainable development high on the global agenda, and engaging all relevant actors. He said that the Forum must: attract high-level participants from all three dimensions of sustainable development; serve as a platform to follow up on the sustainable development goals (SDGs); and ensure engagement around themes not discussed in other places, such as small island developing States. The Forum should be supported with a stronger science-policy interface, and the Global Sustainable Development Report mandated at Rio+20 will be critical in this regard. The most important factor in the Forum's ability to address new and emerging challenges, he said, could be securing adequate financial resources. Finally, he called for the Forum to work in harmony with existing bodies – the UNGA, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), other UN agencies and the multilateral environmental agreements – and to maintain strong links with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and relevant bodies in the social and economic domains.

João Felipe Scarpelini, Children and Youth, on behalf of all nine Major Groups, said "We are marking the end of an era, but our work is far from done." He called for intergenerational justice, recognition of common but differentiated responsibilities, the generation of capacity and technology transfer. He reviewed the important role that Major Groups have played in the CSD, ensuring its success and transparency, and promoting outcomes at national and local levels. He promised that Major Groups will



work with the UN to ensure the HLPF is a credible body that will enhance the three dimensions of sustainable development at the regional, national and local levels.

HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CSD AND THE WAY FORWARD

The Chair introduced a video prepared by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)/*Earth Negotiations Bulletin* (ENB), noting that IISD has been working with the CSD since its beginning. He said the material presented in the video is part of the legacy of the Commission's work.

Mohammed Valli Moosa, Chair of CSD-11, via video, cited a "phenomenal" impact of the CSD, that sustainable development used to be of concern only to environment ministers, and this has now changed: "Today, you won't find a minister responsible for agriculture or energy not familiar with sustainable development." He also noted the CSD's impact on the private sector, since almost every jurisdiction in the world now requires companies to report on their societal and environmental impacts, in addition to financial performance.

Bedrich Moldan, Chair of CSD-9, reflected on the work programme on indicators that was completed during his tenure. Since "what cannot be measured also cannot be managed," he said, it had been critical to devise ways to assess progress made in sustainable development. Major Groups, especially the scientific and technical community, had cooperated in developing the indicators and directly contributed to global policies, he added.

Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director, said that the closing of the CSD was not the "extinction of the ambitions of sustainable development," but instead "an evolutionary step" into a new era of sustainable development. He described the ideas that underpin the Commission and the concept of sustainable development, including: the recognition of the three dimensions of economic development, environmental protection, and social development; and the challenge to ensure intra- and inter-generational equity. Steiner highlighted important ideas and policies that matured within the CSD, especially the notion of sustainable consumption and production. He looked towards the HLPF as an immense opportunity, telling participants to "take the heritage of the CSD and use it to move forward."

Nikhil Seth, Director, UN Division for Sustainable Development, said this is a time to celebrate and to plan for the future, noting that over 20 years ago the CSD was created with great hope and enthusiasm. He shared four lessons from the CSD that will help shape the work of the HLPF, and hopefully attract the right kind of participation and political heft: the need to review and monitor progress in the implementation of Rio+20 outcomes at the country level; the need for better agenda setting, policy recommendations, and participation of ministers; engagement and participation of Major Groups and multi-stakeholder partnerships; and the need to enhance the science-policy interface. He expressed hope that the UN can adopt SDGs and related targets that will help the HLPF monitor process.

Braulio Dias, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), said the CSD provided a useful link between technical progress and the UNGA, whose political support had been valuable in advancing the biodiversity agenda. Recalling that the CSD's planned focus on biodiversity in its 2012 review

session and 2013 policy session did not happen due to the preparations for Rio+20, Dias called for a high priority for biodiversity in the processes now being launched. Biodiversity must be mainstreamed in sustainable development in order to accomplish the CBD's agenda, he said. Biodiversity is needed, in turn, to make progress on poverty eradication, food security, water access, health and climate change adaptation, i.e., the broader sustainable development agenda.

Barbara Adams, Global Policy Forum and a representative of Major Groups, spoke of the importance of diversity within the CSD, and the modalities that enabled multi-stakeholder dialogues and interaction between Member States and Major Groups. Adams described a vision for the HLPF that included: a conversation on goals and targets to address areas in need of long-term structural change; an emphasis on measurements that go beyond gross domestic product; a focus on reporting mechanisms; and increased partnerships as part of an implementation strategy. She encouraged the HLPF to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to agenda-setting.

The Chair then opened the floor for an interactive dialogue.

Fiji, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the HLPF should continue the work of the CSD, and give it great priority and standing. He highlighted lessons learned on the most important aspects of the CSD, including: centrality; institutionalization; integration; participation; agenda-setting and policy recommendations; coherence, and partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagement. Welcoming the establishment of the Forum, he stressed the importance of its universal character.

The European Union noted lessons learned from the CSD, including the benefits of its multi-stakeholder approach. He said that the CSD revealed how broad the sustainable development agenda is, and that we need to be more successful in addressing issue interlinkages. The CSD raised concerns on the environmental dimension, but was not as successful in addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development in an integrated manner, he continued. Finally, he added that the CSD would have benefited from an effective means of implementation, a clear set of targets and indicators, a review mechanism for its own decisions, and more flexibility in choosing its agenda.

Norway said the international community still agrees that sustainable development is important, and that the UN is the right home for it. Civil society and Major Group participation has been crucial in achieving the MDGs, and a sustainable future calls for a broad range of actors, both public and private, and the voices of women. The HLPF must address follow-up and implementation, have flexibility to address emerging issues, and attract high-level participation. As we have created the HLPF, she concluded, we can – "with some emotion but without regret" – close the book on the CSD and be optimistic for the future.

Iran said that in seeking to increase political will for sustainable development, governments "should not have deleted the specific home" for following up on these issues. Moving forward, the HLPF should not be treated as a compromise; it should still incorporate all Rio Principles, and monitor progress on financing and capacity-building programmes, including transfer of environmentally sound technologies, especially to developing countries.

Italy said the world now understands that sustainable development is a difficult and long, but urgent, process. He said that the CSD had engaged governments and stakeholders together, and had fostered mutual understanding and partnerships. On the subject of the HLPF, he said that a “strong, credible, and open” Forum will be crucial.

A representative of the Women’s Major Group welcomed the policy space given to women in the CSD. Looking to the future, she said a truly transformative sustainable development agenda must be about gender equity and the quality of rights. She stressed the need for full participation of the Major Groups, since they have important evidence and recommendations that should be heard.

Switzerland said the HLPF should provide the institutional framework to include the three dimensions of sustainable development. In order to address the insufficiencies of the CSD, she said the Forum should stress implementation of commitments made at all levels. She hoped that the new HLPF would be involved in the processes to strengthen institutional arrangements and define the post-2015 development agenda.

Japan noted that 20 years ago, the phrase “sustainable development” was not commonly used, but the CSD played a great role in expanding the concept. However, she added, the Commission was not able to attract participation from all three dimensions of sustainable development, and it failed to integrate the dimensions in a balanced manner. Too much time negotiating outcome documents meant a lack of focus on means of implementation. She called for the HLPF to be a place to review the post-2015 development agenda.

Malaysia said that since his country was the first CSD Chair in 1993, the CSD had grown and achieved success in steering the sustainable development agenda to greater heights. He said the failure of the Commission was not due to its structure, but lack of political commitment from Member States. He added that the Secretary-General’s report on lessons learned (A/67/757) is a good source of reference for the HLPF to move forward.

The NGOs Major Group outlined tangible results from the Commission’s 20 years of work, amounting to a “concretization of sustainable development,” and concluded that the CSD’s decisions were diligently carried out by the UN to a high degree. At the national level, governments in some regions improved over time, which may not have happened without the CSD’s constant reminders of urgency. He recalled a suggestion that it was not the Commission but governments that had failed sustainable development. He estimated that 14,000 members of civil society had been involved in the CSD through the Major Groups system, and said they “never gave up on the Commission or on sustainable development.” Finally, he drew attention to IISD Reporting Services, whose reporting was “innovative in 1992” and today covers all of the UN’s sustainability activities, and is considered “a must by delegates, UN people, and Major Groups alike.”

The Business and Industry Major Group said corporate leaders now understand how sustainability issues affect their bottom line. Priorities for the HLPF, she said, should include implementation, sharing experiences, and further integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. Collaborative,

innovative partnerships must work at all levels to drive sustainable development, and she called for a “new standard for engagement” between the UN and the private sector to this end.

A representative of the Major Group for Children and Youth said that most young people involved in the CSD reported positive experiences. She encouraged delegates to engage with the Major Groups, and youth and children to increase their voice in the process.

CONCLUSION OF THE WORK OF THE CSD

The Chair thanked the Commission for its valuable proposals. The Rapporteur presented the report of the 20th session (E/CN.17/2013/L.1), which the Commission adopted. Chair Mukhamedzhanov recognized this as a time of remembrance and celebration of the legacy of the Commission. He thanked everyone who took a leadership role in moving the sustainable development agenda forward, and said “may the legacy of CSD resonate in time and through history so that future generations may understand how the past has shaped the world they inherit.” He gavelled the Commission to a close at 12:54 pm.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As the final session of the CSD opened in Conference Room 2, the gallery was packed with representatives of civil society, while the floor was nearly empty of government delegates. Some observers wondered if this was a reflection of the waning support for the Commission, and representative of what it had done best and where it had fallen short. As more government delegates arrived, their statements suggested that engaging civil society had been one of the CSD’s chief accomplishments – if not its most important one – and that the value of listening to Major Groups is a crucial lesson to carry forward into the HLPF. In an ironic moment toward the end of the session, the Chair interrupted the statement of the NGOs Major Group to say his time was up.

The mourning period for the CSD will not last long. The air in the room was not heavy with grief for a promising life cut short, or for something beloved that will be missed. The CSD’s unfulfilled potential was acknowledged years ago. Calls for a celebration of what the Commission accomplished over its 20 years did not seem to resonate as much as the pleas to make the HLPF a success. With the Commission’s conclusion, many observers noted that they were already looking to the future with hope that the next chapter will be an improvement on the last.

Editor’s Note: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* will publish a summary and analysis following the inaugural meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which will be available on Friday, 27 September 2013 at <http://www.iisd.ca/hlpf/hlpf1/>