



GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM HIGHLIGHTS MONDAY, 29 MAY 2000

Delegates to the first Global Ministerial Environment Forum (the Forum) convened in a morning Plenary for the opening ceremony and statements. Ministers and delegates met in the afternoon for ministerial consultations, a Committee of the Whole (COW), and a working group on the Malmö Declaration.

OPENING PLENARY

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, by video, expressed hope that the Forum would rise to the challenges of the new millennium. He said despite success stories, humans continue plundering the environment and unsustainable practices are embedded in our daily lives. He outlined four areas for further effort, including the development of: media and public education to ensure that corporations and consumers recognize environmental consequences; policies and laws that consider the ramifications of subsidies and promote environmental incentives; mainstreamed environmental objectives in policy; and sound scientific information to establish the basis for action.

GC President László Miklós (Slovak Republic) stressed that the Forum should reflect on failures while charting the way forward. He said environmental problems cannot be solved outside politics and noted the disconcerting reality that poverty persists. He suggested rethinking the rules of the global village since market forces are insufficient and assistance from the international community is required.

Ingvar Carlsson, former Swedish Prime Minister, said the Forum provided an opportunity to send a strong message to the Millennium Summit of the General Assembly. He called for more forceful action in fulfilling obligations of environmental conventions. He emphasized: solidarity across borders; new partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society; the importance of new information technologies; and education and awareness raising. He reiterated the concept "think globally, act locally."

Yvonne Maingey (Kenya) and Philip Tinker (UK), representing the Millennium International Children's Conference on the Environment, challenged delegates to: enforce environmental laws; provide clean water for everyone in 10 years; increase recycling bins; substitute plastic bags by 2004; and promote the use of clean energy. They asked delegates to listen to youth because they are future ministers and leaders.

Massumeh Ebtekar, Vice-President of Iran, delivering a message from the Iranian President, said alienating approaches to nature cannot provide solutions. She stressed religious values and harmony between humans and nature. She called for the Forum to

consider a discourse substituting a spiritual approach to nature based on humility for the material and arrogant attitude prevalent today.

Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, representing 45 environment and development NGOs, said that the 1990s was the decade of environmental agreements, but not of implementing solutions. She described a paralysis of thought and action and stated that *laissez-faire* economic models cause social dislocation and environmental degradation. She said Rio+10 should not be a review of Agenda 21, but a global conference on sustainable development and poverty eradication. She suggested that UNEP invite civil society to comment on the creative use of its products and formalize the link with NGOs as a whole, particularly in its preparations for Rio+10.

Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, noted that the Forum was established by the UN General Assembly and highlighted the meeting as the largest gathering of environment ministers in UNEP's history. He described the two main global environmental threats as unsustainable production and consumption patterns in developed countries and poverty in developing countries. Institutions and legislation signaling commitment to tackle these threats exists, but he said environmental stewardship is lagging behind.

Delegates then adopted the agenda and elected Hossein Moieni Meybodi (Iran) as Rapporteur. Delegates agreed to continue deliberations in ministerial consultations, to establish a COW, chaired by Leandro Arellano (Mexico), and an open-ended working group on the Malmö Declaration, chaired by Swedish Environment Minister Kjell Larsson.

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN THE NEW CENTURY: Klaus Töpfer introduced moderator Professor Konrad von Moltke, Dartmouth College. Professor Mario Molina, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, discussed the science/policy interface. He said three questions should be asked when facing an environmental issue: do we have a problem; is it a consequence of human activity; and should anything be done? In relation to ozone depletion, the answers were yes, whereas for climate change, the answers were unclear. Addressing the Ministers as "Ministers of environmental security," M.S. Swaminathan, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, said that we need an "ever-green revolution," which integrates the ecological context. He highlighted that biodiversity is concentrated in developing countries, home to the majority of the world's population. He added that traditional knowledge is crucial.

KUWAIT said legislation exists, but little action is taken when rules are not obeyed. NIGERIA urged consideration of debt cancellation for African countries. ETHIOPIA offered the term "green evolution" since we are returning to the roots of many farming practices and TANZANIA noted that the green revolution

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had success in Asia, but not in Africa. NEW ZEALAND said that the public is not always scientifically literate, raising trust issues about genetically modified organisms. CUBA recognized the role of science in development. EGYPT reflected on scientific uncertainty relating to climate change and water availability.

DENMARK called for a globalization of politics noting that the riches of the north have increased, but generosity has diminished. SAUDI ARABIA requested implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. TUNISIA stressed the need for affordable technology transfers. COLOMBIA said problem solving requires inter-ministerial cooperation. NORWAY emphasized decoupling economic growth and environmental degradation and interlinkages between different environmental processes.

Highlighting climate change as the gravest challenge, UGANDA emphasized capacity building for developing countries. The NETHERLANDS called attention to both poverty and wealth induced environmental degradation. CYPRUS said raising peoples' welfare level should be a priority, while the US said science and technology were part of the solution. INDIA stated that poverty should be the central focus. The UK called for preparing a world sustainable development strategy. MALTA highlighted preventive rather than reactive methods.

SWEDEN called for new institutions to deal with environmental crises, broader and more sustainable financing for UNEP, and new North-South agreements. SYRIA highlighted water and debt as major challenges. CAMEROON advocated enforcement of international agreements and supported the polluter pays principle. CHINA called assistance in attaining sustainable production and consumption patterns.

BANGLADESH noted deficient resources for sustainable development. PORTUGAL stressed the need to define priorities and to increase efficiencies at Rio +10, while PAKISTAN said that old environmental problems persist. GERMANY noted that 2002 must start an action-oriented process and SWITZERLAND highlighted the importance of integrating environmental goals into all sectors. IRAN said the growing gap between rich and poor indicates mismanagement on various levels. BHUTAN drew attention to falling levels of development assistance. JAPAN called for a life cycle economy and MALAYSIA suggested that the 21st century marks the time for action.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ON THE ACTIVITIES OF UNEP: Shafqat Kakakhel, UNEP Deputy Executive Director, introduced the "Report of the Executive Director on the activities of UNEP" (UNEP/GCSS.VI/6). He highlighted UNEP's priority areas: (a) environmental information, assessment and research; (b) enhanced coordination of environmental conventions; (c) freshwater; (d) technology transfer and industry; and (e) support to Africa. He noted the re-energized African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) and the resulting 1999 Abuja Declaration as an important landmark. He reiterated UNEP's successful monitoring of the environment through the Global Environmental Outlook report (GEO 2000).

INDIA, and many others, congratulated UNEP for its excellent reports. He also said India does not support multilateral processes regarding rivers and affirmed that environmental issues should not be used as trade barriers. UGANDA, supported by NIGERIA and ZAMBIA, encouraged the implementation of the Abuja Declaration. JAPAN highlighted the databases for sound environmental management of UNEP's International Environmental Centre.

PORTUGAL, on behalf of the EU, supported UNEP's role in the coordination of activities for Rio +10. He also proposed, supported by NEW ZEALAND, that UNEP produce a document describing the relationship between GC decisions, UNEP activities, and the UNEP budget. SAUDI ARABIA recognized UNEP's role in monitoring convention implementation. CANADA

supported government links with UNEP. CHINA suggested help for governments to develop appropriate water policies and argued for regional bureau involvement in preparing GEO 2002.

AUSTRALIA suggested that UNEP prepare a document with policy options for environmental emergencies. The US proposed a report on convention coordination for Rio +10. VENEZUELA suggested that UNEP institute proper environmental management systems of natural resources. ZAMBIA encouraged UNEP to continue work on synergies of conventions at all levels.

CYPRUS emphasized the importance of looking at the demand side of water management. TURKEY expressed concern that the water report reflected UNEP involvement in issues with political implications. TUNISIA emphasized UNEP's role in implementing UN conventions, especially for desertification and climate change. NIGERIA encouraged UNEP to provide more support for capacity building. RWANDA said awareness-raising efforts need to emphasize land degradation in Africa. MALAWI emphasized that increasing poverty is hampering convention implementation in Africa. Responding, Kakakhel ensured that this positive feedback would not cause complacency on UNEP's behalf.

Halifa Omar Drammeh (UNEP) introduced "Water policy and strategy of UNEP" (UNEP/GCSS.VI/6/Add.1/Rev.1). Discussions on this document begin on Tuesday.

WORKING GROUP ON THE MALMÖ DECLARATION

Delegates discussed the preamble of the draft Declaration text (UNEP/GCSS.VI/CRP.1) presented by Chair Kjell Larsson. INDIA, supported by CHINA, NIGERIA, and KENYA, called for stronger language on poverty. INDIA, CHINA and BRAZIL emphasized common but differentiated responsibilities. CHINA underscored inequities created by the globalization process. The NETHERLANDS, supported by the US, opposed replicating previous UN language, and supported consideration of poverty, threats, spiritual values and youth. The US and others reiterated that the Declaration should reflect ministerial discussions. UGANDA said the preamble should map out a future course of action and, with NIGERIA, highlighted the debt burden. NEW ZEALAND emphasized ownership of the issues by the people. SWITZERLAND said the Forum should send a clear message to the Millennium Assembly.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The inaugural Forum got off to an inspirational start with a choir performance and dramatic film on environmental challenges urging action, and some delegates enthusiastically expressed that this meeting could set the environmental agenda for the 21st century. However, others were uncertain of the objectives of the meeting, as a regular session of the GC could discuss the same issues. But there was also a willingness to give the session a chance since such a meeting has never before been held. Expectations are also high regarding the key output of a Malmö Declaration, but negotiations on final language are not expected to be easy with a view to its presentation to the Millennium UNGA.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS: Consultations will resume at 10:00am on "The Private Sector and the Environment." In the afternoon, "Civil Society responsibility and role towards the environment in the globalised world" will be discussed.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE: The COW will reconvene at 10:00am in Göteborg conference room to conclude discussions on UNEP's water policy and strategy, the "Contribution of UNEP to Agenda 21 and the Programme of the further implementation of Agenda 21" and the "Provisional agenda of the second Forum and 21st session of the UNEP GC."

WORKING GROUP ON THE MALMÖ DECLARATION: This group will meet at 9:00am in Room 17 to discuss text on emerging issues.