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STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY WORLD INFORMATION TRANSFER to the

PANEL CALL: CIVIL SOCIETY VIEWS FOR A STRENGTHENED UN SYSTEM ON ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Theme 2: Strengthening the UN System for environment and sustainable development: Options on the roles of UN agencies, programmes and funds.

Focus: World Health Organization and Multi-stakeholder Model

WORLD INFORMATION TRANSFER (WIT) advocates strengthening UN policies and programs which link human health with environmental degradation by expanding cooperation between the UN Environment Programme and the World Health Organization. WHO's emphasis on triage tends to impede their recognition of environmental factors as a cause of illness. WIT recommends that WHO increase its work with UNEP on all health issues with environmental components, and we suggest that the initiative come from UNEP. Working in conjunction with UNEP, WHO could not only develop more effective overall programs for resolving or mitigating long term environmental health problems, but also expand opportunities for more rapid responses to toxic contamination such as the illegal dumping of toxic waste affecting residents of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

UNEP and WHO currently work together on a number of initiatives to combat the increasing threat of environmentally linked illnesses (i.e. malaria, tuberculosis, water borne diseases), collaborate with UNICEF in the field of children's environmental health, particularly in the context of the WHO-led Healthy Environments for Children Alliance, cooperate on the United Nations Ad Hoc Interagency Task Force On Tobacco Control, and work together in WSSD partnerships, i.e., HECA or Healthy Environments for Children Alliance.

An expanded role for increased cooperation and program harmonization between WHO and UNEP on issues of environmental health and sustainable development should further include mounting a greater effort towards coordinated chemicals management. The international processes to manage toxic chemicals, Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS) and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), should be given higher priority in both WHO and UNEP, but also UNICEF, UNDP and ILO. Each of us has traces of industrial chemicals and pesticides lodged in our bodies. Toxins like DDT, PCBs, dioxin, furans (even though banned by the Stockholm Convention) and mercury enter our bodies through the foods we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink and reside in fatty tissue. Most people around the world already carry levels of endocrine-disrupting chemicals very close to those levels found in animals with disorders specifically linked to

endocrine disruption. Dutch researchers have found a correlation between dioxin exposure and suppressed levels of disease-fighting white blood cells in children. The list of examples could regrettably go on. However, given the limits to funding, primary emphasis should be placed on expanding collaborative strategies related to protecting children's health.

World Information Transfer recommends that WHO and other agencies working on environmental health and sustainable development adopt a synthesized **multi-stakeholder approach** toward managing long term environmental health issues. We use the term multi-stakeholder rather than civil society or non-governmental or NGO for the following reasons: (1) the term multi-stakeholder has established parameters (unlike "civil society"); (2) multi-stakeholder involvement has established precedent; (3) the process is more transparent and equitable than other models; (4) the process requires self organization by the stakeholders themselves; and (5) the process can yield the widest range of valid information for relevant agencies. Adopting a common multi-stakeholder model (based on existing practices) would increase knowledge for policy decisions, establish a transparent and predictable process for policy and implementation, conserve time lost in deciding how to engage non-governmental actors, and contribute toward increased efficiency in resolving health issues.

References:

<http://earthwatch.unep.net/index.php>;

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Children in the New Millennium: Environmental Impact on Health--- book compiled by UNEP, WHO, UNICEF,
<http://www.unep.org/ceh/>

Health and Environment Linkages Initiative, <http://www.who.int/heli/en/>

"Climate Change and Human Health – Risks and Responses" launched at the 9th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Milan, Italy. WHO authored the book together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), with the support of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

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