

**Workshop on UN System-wide Coherence Report  
28 February 2007, UN Headquarters, New York**

## BACKGROUND

On 28 February 2007, Stakeholder Forum (SF), the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for Environment and Development (FBOMS), ANPED—Northern Alliance for Sustainability, and the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN NGLS) hosted a workshop on UN system-wide coherence at UN Headquarters in New York. The meeting was a free and frank exchange of views between government and civil society representatives in their personal capacity on the issue of international environmental governance (IEG) in the context of UN reform. More particularly, the event focused on how to address:

- environmental elements of UN reform, in light of UNEP's recent Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) meeting and the International Conference in Paris on Global Ecological Governance;
- sustainable development aspects of the High Level Panel's (HLP) report on UN system wide coherence.

The workshop was held under the Chatham House rule, such that participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speakers, nor that of any other participant, may be revealed. The workshop Panel consisted of three speakers from government—two from developing countries and one from a developed country—and two speakers from civil society—one from a developing country and one from a developed country.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The workshop highlighted an emerging consensus that the current structure of international environmental governance (IEG) and governance for sustainable development are not working. As one speaker said, the initial outcomes of the General Assembly informal discussions on the environment (the so-called 169 informals) reveal an agreement among governments that there are serious gaps and weaknesses with environmental governance, which has no capacity to face growing environmental challenges. Despite this recognition, however, the main area of disagreement remains how to address these problems. The need to strengthen the environmental pillar by upgrading UNEP into a United Nations Environment Organisation (UNEO) was stressed by some; others felt that a specialized agency for the environment will not solve the systemic problems of the current system. Civil society representatives reported that there is a strong agreement among civil society organisations on the need to take forward to IEG reform agenda: while many Northern-based organisations are supportive of proposals to establish a UNEO, some developing country organisations remain uncertain that a UNEO would remedy the problems. Still, there is a growing convergence on the views that the environmental pillar within the UN is underrepresented in terms of political status and needs to be strengthened.

On governance for sustainable development, there was a sense that the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is failing to fulfil its current mandate. Speakers recognized accomplishments of the CSD but pointed to failures as well, generally supporting the High Level Panel's call for "continuing reform of the Commission on Sustainable Development that truly leads to integrated decision-making on economic, social and environmental issues." One speaker called for an informal stocktaking dialogue to assess the successes and failures of the CSD. Several options were presented for strengthening the CSD, including:

- (1) that there is incremental change within the current institution;
- (2) that the High Level Panel's recommendations are implemented and the integration functions of CSD are moved to ECOSOC; and most ambitiously
- (3) that the CSD be upgraded to a General Assembly level body such as a UN Sustainable Development Council, as originally suggested by the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.

While the workshop confirmed that governments and civil society organisations alike have not agreed on a way to address the shortcomings of the UN system, there was little doubt that political will would ultimately determine whether the international governance architecture for sustainable development and the environment can and must be strengthened. Without determination among governments to implement sustainable development commitments, there would be no effective improvement of IEG.

## FULL REPORT

The workshop opened with an overview of IEG reform by the Chair, reviewing four related processes: the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Environment; the General Assembly Informal Consultations on Environment; the Governing Council/GMEF of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); and the Paris Conference for Global Ecological Governance. The Chair summarized the recommendations of the High Level Panel, including that UNEP should be upgraded with a renewed mandate and improved funding, the Global Environment Facility should be strengthened as the major financial mechanism for the global environment, and a UN Sustainable Development Board should be created. She noted that the Governing Council/GMEF of UNEP had sent a clear signal of determination on the part of governments to address IEG reform, while the Paris Conference for Global Ecological Governance called for action on IEG reform and the transformation of UNEP into a UN Environment Organisation (UNEO).

Building on the Chair's overview, the first speaker reviewed yet another IEG reform process: the 'Cartegena Package'. She explained that the 'Cartegena Package', initiated by the UNEP GC/GMEF in 2002, includes a series of recommendations for strengthening UNEP's role, authority and financial situation by addressing universal membership of the Governing Council; strengthening UNEP's science base; improving coordination and coherence between multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs); supporting capacity building, technology transfer and country-level coordination; and enhancing coordination across the UN system, as well as the role of the Environment Management Group. The speaker said that the 'Cartegena Package' and decisions on its implementation provide an important start for discussions on IEG, as many related processes have yielded similar recommendations. The speaker highlighted the nature of the current debate on IEG reform, underscoring that the question of whether or not we need a new institution is the essence of the debate at the moment.

Addressing the broader issue of international sustainable development governance, the speaker pointed to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) which notes that the process of designing sustainable development governance is evolutionary. She said that the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the UN's highest level commission dealing with sustainable development issues, has both highlights and lowlights. It has acted as a forum to consider regional and national progress in implementation, lessons learned and best practice, but its success in addressing means of implementation, institutional arrangements, and cross-cutting issues has been limited. The speaker expressed concern with the de-linking of the JPOI targets and the Millennium Development Goals, and noted that the CSD has provided limited opportunities for interactive discussion. In light of these challenges, the speaker called for a stocktaking exercise to evaluate the success of the CSD.

The speaker noted that there is a growing need to redefine the relationship between the environmental and security agendas. The speaker concluded that on IEG reform, we have reached a critical point in terms of political choice. The scope for reform must be defined, as options exist for a short term, medium term, and long term reform process. She said that in the short term, there is a need to implement the 'Cartegena Package' and prioritise capacity building and implementation, while long term reform requires a maturing of discussion on IEG and the recognition of the need for a redesigned UN, perhaps including a United Nations Sustainable Development Organisation.

The second speaker highlighted the fact that the UN in its current form does not respond to or represent the current global order, arguing that reform could, and must, bring benefits to all regions and partners. He noted that the recommendations of the HLP provide a good starting point for discussions on UN reform, though some of the recommendations are more feasible than others. On the upgrading of UNEP into a specialized agency, the speaker explained that the informal consultations in the General Assembly reveal that views are still vast. The speaker argued that the creation of a new structure will not ensure that current IEG problems are addressed, pointing to the example of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) which has the same structure as UNEP but far greater success. The speaker underscored the need for political will and commitment to make the current institutions of IEG successful. He emphasised the need for capacity building for developing countries and called for a greater flow of resources to Middle Income Countries, which act as drivers of development in their regions.

The speaker highlighted the need to address the three pillars of sustainable development together, arguing that some reform proposals will lead to more fragmentation rather than coherence. He cautioned, for example, that as a specialized agency the environment pillar would lose its direct access to the General Assembly. The speaker said that one of the key advantages of keeping UNEP as a UN programme is that it would retain its direct link to the General Assembly, and thus the universal membership of the UN. On the linking of the environment and security agendas, the speaker noted that some countries are calling for a debate on security and climate change in the Security Council. He stressed that this proposal reflects the current blurring of the roles of the General Assembly and Security Council within the UN, and detailed the concerns of many countries with this development.

On the CSD, the speaker agreed that there are failures and successes. He said that the institution's role in highlighting the regional dimension of sustainable development and bringing sanitation to top of the agenda are two such successes. He pointed to the shift away from negotiated outcomes as weakening the current institution.

The third speaker said that the initial outcomes of the General Assembly informal discussions on the environment reveal an agreement among Governments that there are serious problems with governance for the environment, including a lack of political leadership, insufficient coordination and cooperation, lack of scientific expertise, and lack of financing. He underscored that given this emerging consensus, the discussions on IEG must now focus on developing options for how best to strengthen the environmental pillar of sustainable development. He supported the High Level Panel's recommendation to upgrade UNEP, arguing that this would address the lack of leadership on environment within the UN system. On the Panel's recommendation to create a Sustainable Development Board, he expressed his view that this body would not really have a mandate in sustainable development, but rather would act primarily as a governance body in New York to coordinate the Resident Coordinators and oversee the proposed One UN Country Programmes.

The speaker reviewed the outcomes of the Paris Conference on Global Ecological Governance, noting that participants called for an upgraded UNEP leading towards a UNEO. He outlined the recent establishment of the 'Friends of UNEO' group to pursue these goals. He emphasised that the group does not aim to compete with current reform processes, but rather provide necessary political momentum. On governance for sustainable development, the speaker said that without a strengthened environmental pillar, there can be no integrated approach to sustainable development.

The first speaker from civil society gave an overview of civil society views on UN reform and the High Level Panel's recommendations, collected through the consultation process initiated by SF, UN NGLS, FBOMS, and ANPED. On IEG, she said that in general, consensus exists among NGOs on the need to strengthen UNEP, pursue integrated planning, and build on current civil society participation mechanisms. She noted that many developing country organisations have emphasised the need to respect the principle of common but differentiated responsibility and

promote Rio Principle 10, and have called for more resources for capacity building. The speaker said that there is strong support for upgrading of UNEP into a UNEO among European-based organisations, but that the same issue has not been sufficiently discussed among developing country organisations. However, there is a strong feeling that the environment organisation should remain in Nairobi. On trade and environment, she noted that there is a call for the strengthening of Multilateral Environmental Agreements in the face of the trade regime which runs counter to the spirit and principles of Rio. The speaker emphasised the need to involve grassroots movements in discussions on IEG and UN reform.

On reform of sustainable development governance, the speaker emphasised civil society's calls to better mainstream sustainable development in the UN by establishing sustainable development as the overarching framework. She noted that many civil society organisations consider the ability of Major Groups to participate alongside governments, as defined in Agenda 21, a notable strength of the CSD. The speaker discussed several civil society proposals for strengthening the CSD, including a greater focus on implementation, improved capacity to address politically sensitive issues, increased engagement beyond national environment Ministries, adequate resourcing to integrate CSD decisions within the UN system, and a strengthened Secretariat. Other civil society proposals on sustainable development governance included the need to include Major Groups and UNEP in the proposed Sustainable Development Board, support for a sustainable development segment in ECOSOC, the establishment of a forum to discuss the relationship between trade and environment, and a linking of the sustainable development agenda with peace and human security.

The second civil society speaker focused largely on options for strengthening the CSD, including that incremental change within the current institution; the High Level Panel's recommendations are implemented and the integration functions of CSD are moved to ECOSOC; and most ambitiously, that the CSD be upgraded to a GA level body such as a UN Sustainable Development Council.

The speaker outlined the problems with the current CSD, stressing that the current two year cycle is not working. He pointed to insufficient national preparations, ineffective regional meetings, and failure to address the most controversial issues of sustainable development as key indicators of the inadequacy of the institution. He outlined several recommendations for strengthening the CSD within its current mandate, including: better balancing of normative and non-normative outcomes; mechanisms to identify champions and best practices; increased resources for the Secretariat to fulfil its mandate; a strengthened Bureau to provide key political leadership; and a coherent approach to regional implementation meetings.

Alternatively, the speaker suggested moving sustainable development to the level of the General Assembly, in keeping with the proposal of establishing a Trusteeship Council as advanced by Maurice Strong at UNCED. He said that such a body would have the political weight to address issues related to coherence and gaps in environmental governance, as well as financing for sustainable development. Further, a Council could more readily address new and emerging issues, such as the agenda of human and environmental security.

An initial discussant gave a brief overview of the civil society perspectives on IEG reform advanced at the UNEP Governing Council. He explained that many civil society organisations had endorsed the '12 points on IEG reform', which included the need to consider system-wide coherence on environment within the broader context of sustainable development, the need to strengthen UNEP, the need for further resources to support the Bali Strategic Plan, the need for adequate and predictable financing. He said that taken together, the '12 points' reveal a strong agreement among civil society organisations on the need to take forward to IEG reform agenda.

The Chair thanked the presenters, highlighting themes that ran throughout the discussions, including the need to strengthen IEG and the recognition of the problems of IEG- a lack of leadership, fragmentation and lack of coordination, and lack of predictable financing. She noted

that the presentations reflected the different views on how to address these problems, and the different solutions that have been advanced for the short term, medium term, and long term. She invited participants to pose questions to the panel, first on reform of IEG and then on sustainable development governance. Questions were asked about how to better reflect information delivery and organisation management issues in the reform agenda; how to approach IEG reform when the fundamental issue of governments agreeing will determine the success of any solution; and on the current fragmentation of political processes on strengthening science based decision-making in UNEP, MEAs and the UN system in General.

Noting the crucial role of political will in determining the success of IEG structures, one panellist said that governments need to focus on implementing what has been agreed upon rather than creating a new organisation. A second panellist, supporting the upgrading of UNEP into a specialized agency, clarified that the proposal works within the existing structure rather than attempting to create a new institution: a UNEO would consist in an upgraded UNEP. The speaker noted that the issue in question is in particular the mandate of UNEP. Regarding science based decision-making the speaker said that these processes, in particular, the new process on creating an International Mechanism on Science Expertise in Biodiversity, would ultimately support a UNEO and are not competing processes

On organisation management and information delivery, one speaker noted that these needs are in fact reflected in the UN reform agenda. He explained that the One Country UN programme would facilitate the exchange of information about best practices and lessons learned. He said that in the CSD, one proposal advanced by the US is to develop the CSD website as a 'living site' to exchange lessons learned, and that this proposal now has the support of most developed countries.

On the High Level Panel's recommendation to create a Sustainable Development Board, one speaker noted that all three pillars of sustainable development need to be reflected in the composition. On operational issues, he cautioned that developing countries will not accept monitoring on environment at the national level, as environment is a global issue. In response, a second speaker noted that the role of the proposed sustainable development Board needed to be clarified and further stressed that the Panel's recommendations on "delivering as one", including the Board, would bring more coherence by putting the beneficiary country in the driver seat. A third speaker identified the challenge of adding UNEP to the proposed Sustainable Development Board because of differing governance structures between the UN bodies involved.

On sustainable development governance, questions were asked on: how governments could address the noted failings of the CSD in the short term or in the context of UN reform; how problems of coherence and lack of political leadership could be addressed (particularly in light of the experiences of trade unions on negotiating industrial relations in the CSD) ; whether the HLP recommendation for the institution of a Sustainable Development segment in ECOSOC is a duplication of the mandate given to ECOSOC under the JPOI, which requested the CSD to provide guidance to ECOSOC on potential sustainable development themes; and whether it could be feasible to replicate the tri-annual assessment of the UN development activities, but with a separate process on sustainable development, as a better alternative to the Sustainable Development Board.

In response to the tri-annual assessment, one speaker cautioned that this assessment only addresses normative issues and not operational measures, and that many governments would be hesitant to review implementation at the operational level.

On CSD reform, one speaker called for an informal stocktaking dialogue to assess the successes and failures of the CSD. Another supported this proposal, highlighting the need to address such institutional questions, given the fact that the themes of the CSD sessions beyond the agriculture session are not confirmed. A third speaker noted the recent creation of the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review and Development Cooperation Forum, which will review commitments on

sustainable development. He argued that one needs to examine the success of these mechanisms before considering a sustainable development segment of ECOSOC, as recommended by the High Level Panel to strengthen the CSD.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

On 9 November 2006, the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and Environment released its report *Delivering As One*.

In July 2006, Stakeholder Forum (SF), the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for Environment and Development (FBOMS) and the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN NGLS) organised the only civil society discussion with the Panel on sustainable development. Building on this work, the coalition, with ANPED—the Northern Alliance for Sustainability, initiated a Call for Input in November 2006 to gather further submissions from civil society.

The submissions gathered to date are available at <http://ieg.stakeholderforum.org>. In addition, three papers have been prepared which compile civil society views on the High Level Panel's recommendations in relation to:

- Strengthening UNEP and the environmental pillar
- Strengthening the Commission on Sustainable Development
- Strengthening the Global Environment Facility

The views expressed in these papers do not represent a consensus view, and are not necessarily the views of the facilitating organisations.

The coalition is also organising a series of meetings on UN reform, of which the meeting held in New York on 27 February is a part. A further meeting will be held in New York at the Commission on Sustainable Development in May 2007. For more information, please contact [jpeer@stakeholderforum.org](mailto:jpeer@stakeholderforum.org) or visit <http://ieg.stakeholderforum.org>.