

Opening address of the DED to the Global Civil Society Forum

Time: 10 minutes

Distinguished delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;
Colleagues;

On behalf of the United Nations Environment Programme, I am very pleased to welcome you here to its Headquarters, and to the Tenth Session of the Global Civil Society Forum.

Thank you very much for accepting our invitation and thank you for your continued engagement with UNEP throughout the year.

I would in particular like to thank the *Major Groups Facilitating Committee* which has proven to be a very efficient and promising interface between the UNEP Secretariat and Civil Society Organizations.

Civil Society's contribution and input to UNEP's work is of tremendous value; and I am extremely pleased that we have been able to establish this substantive, fruitful dialogue with you as real partners over the long term.

This partnership is going to become ever more important, as we now enter into a new global context, characterized by financial, economic, environmental and social crises. Each of these on its own presents a substantial challenge; together they are cause for serious concern. And we do have to address these together, given how they are inter-related and how they relate to the environment.

Our ecosystems are under severe pressure and our natural capital is becoming more depleted by the day, leading us down the path to perhaps the first ecological debt crisis ever. Meanwhile inequalities between countries deepen the rift between North and South.

We can no longer afford to ignore these problems. The costs of doing nothing would be too severe. **Never has the threat been more real, nor the action needed more urgent.** Now is the time to pick up the pace in efforts to **redirect our economies to a more sustainable path.**

Meanwhile to tackle these multifaceted challenges we rely on an inter-governmental system designed more than half a century ago which may no longer be equal to the task or to the urgency and complexity that present themselves. That is no longer good enough.

Hence the discussions in the Global Ministerial Environmental Forum on the topics Globalization and the Environment: "Global Crises: National Chaos?" and International Environmental Governance and United Nations Reform: "IEG: Help or Hindrance?"

At the level of UNEP Secretariat we are seeking to adjust to the nature of this composite challenge. We have diagnosed our past approach and designed for the immediate next period a Medium Term Strategy to

guide the organization, both Member States and the Secretariat. Our delivery mechanism for this is the Programme of Work beginning with the biennium 2010-2011.

The Medium-term Strategy, on which you had an opportunity to comment last year, requires UNEP to become a more effective, efficient and results-focused entity, in an effort to meet the expectations of Governments and their stakeholders in responding to the global environmental challenges – as well as the opportunities they present. Through this strategic approach we will attempt to deliver on our mandate more effectively by building on existing expertise and comparative advantage, and by focusing them on a limited number of priority areas.

This approach reflects our recognition that we cannot address everything at the same time, continuing to spread our fire and miss the mark, so to speak. It reflects the reality that there are many actors at the various levels at which responses are being designed and implemented. It reflects the limits and the limitations to our own role and involvement. It emphasizes the catalytic, facilitative, enabling role that is expected of UNEP. It puts a high premium on partnership.

As a consequence, we need a clear strategic partnership with Major Groups and Stakeholders. Our relationship with you is not about Public Relations. It is about working together as partners. We intend to do what is needed to keep and further strengthen your participation in the policy dialogue, but I hope that we can go further together.

I have already asked Olivier Deleuze to advise how we can go about working with you, and through you, to engage you in discussion and delivery of the Programme of Work. I believe that in the strengthened results-based Programme of Work for the biennium 2010-2011, and around the 6 thematic priorities, we now have the framework for developing strategic partnerships between UNEP and major groups and stakeholders to better position us for implementation, and to carry forward the notion of working according to comparative advantage.

So, while sessions of this Global Civil Society Forum are dedicated to discussions around policy design issues, one session will focus on strategic partnerships. You will also have the opportunity to have a dialogue with the Executive Director, in which you might convey your thinking on this.

Let me also highlight for you the elements that we consider, at a minimum, would make for a successful meeting of the Governing Council:

First, International Environmental Governance: as you know this topic has had sporadic attention through various initiatives in the last couple of years, without any clear or definitive outcome. While there may be some amount of fatigue associated with the topic, in our view it is so fundamentally important to the world kicking up its act in relation to the pressing, accelerating and worrying environmental trends and consequences that we deemed it imperative to keep the discussion going. Accordingly, we have as you will have seen proposed the topic for consideration by the GMEF, to give Ministers an opportunity to collectively decide whether they wish to take some ownership of this issue, give some leadership, and if desirable set up a continuing mechanism through which the subject can be given some focused attention, with a view to

making their inputs into the global debate. An appropriate outcome here would enable the GMEF to enhance its discharge of its role as the global policy making body in relation to Environment for the system.

Second, the subject of Mercury: Many of you have been avidly following the developments and discussions in this area, and I know that there is great familiarity with the positions within this. The preponderance of evidence does lead to a conclusion that global action on this in order to protect people and the Environment needs to be considerably intensified, through whatever instrument is deemed suitable and equal to the need. We hope that there will be a positive outcome in this direction.

Third, the International Platform for Science/Policy Interface for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: We are all aware of the trends in Biodiversity loss. We have all been working for some time to have the concept ecosystem services enter fully into Development discourse and policies, so that these services can be adequately valued and enter into economic-decisionmaking and the economic equation. The Science that underpins these two issues appears undisputed. Yet, it is evident that there is a considerable lag in the Science influencing policy and decision-making. There appears to be no disagreement that this is a gap to be met. The question is how to do so. We are not expecting the Governing Council to decide on that model in this meeting, but to authorize a continuation of the process, within a short time frame, in order to conceptualise and build consensus the mechanism through which this gap might be met. It would also be terrific if we could come up with a user-friendly name for whatever it is!

Fourth, UNEP's Programme of Work and Budget for the biennium 2010-2011: naturally we hope and expect approval of this, given the extensive consultations we have had with the Committee of Permanent Representatives here in Nairobi during the process of formulation, given the successful representations to the Committee for Programme Coordination of the United Nations, and given the advice Member States have received from the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

Fifth, we are presenting the early results of various activities we have undertaken that fall under the banner of Green New Deal. While these are not for decision, we would be gratified if the various materials assist governments, societies and organizations in perceiving the historic opportunity that we have at this moment in time, to advance the understanding and the responses to the various crises in a holistic and integrated manner. If we achieved that, it would enable the world to move a step forward on the long road towards moving Environment to the centre of Economy.

We invite you to add your voice to these and other projected outcomes.

And we thank you for being here to contribute to that effort.

AC

Nairobi

14 February 2009