



## Panel Discussion<sup>1</sup>

### UN Reform and the Environment

#### Church Center for the United Nations

New York, NY

May 9th, 2006

UNEP's Major Groups and Stakeholder's Branch and New York Office convened a panel discussion on May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006 in New York alongside the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 14) about ongoing deliberations related to U.N. reform and the environment, including the U.N. General Assembly's informal consultations on the institutional framework for the U.N.'s environmental work and the work of the U.N. Secretary-General's High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment. At the session, UNEP officials provide an update on the current status and scope of these processes and civil society participants shared their views on the issues at stake. The panel discussion was attended by more than 50 people representing approximately 40 organizations.

Hilary French of UNEP's Division of Policy Development and Law (DPDL) and Worldwatch Institute welcomed guests and presenters and said the CSD14 side event was a continuation of UNEP's outreach efforts towards civil society such as the annual regional and global civil society forums and other events, including the "Green Room" hosted by UNEP's New York office during the 2005 World Summit.

Kilaparti Ramakrishna, Deputy Director of UNEP's DPDL and Moderator for the panel, noted the cross-sectoral and partnership work undertaken by DPDL, including with the U.N. Development Program, UN-Habitat, UNESCO and the World Health Organization. As the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch falls within UNEP's Division of Policy Development and Law, he highlighted some of the initiatives undertaken in recent times by this division in engaging major groups and civil society in UNEP's work. He spoke briefly about the current UN Reform exercise and in particular stressed the importance of the U.N. Secretary General's High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment and the ongoing work by the President of the U.N. General Assembly on international environmental governance. Dr. Ramakrishna then reported on the recent visit of the General Assembly President, as well as that of members of the High Level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence to UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, including a dialogue between civil society groups in Nairobi as well as those invited to participate in the discussions with the Coherence Panel. A key point that came out of these discussions was the need to continuously engage with civil society in the on-going discussions and to ensure that the civil society has an opportunity to weigh in with their comments and views on any eventual reform package that might be developed.

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This report builds on a summary prepared by ENB On the Side, published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development and available at <http://www.iisd.ca/csd/csd14/enbots/9may2006.html>.

Werner Obermeyer of UNEP's New York Office provided an overview of the General Assembly's informal consultations on the institutional framework for the UN's environment work and the work of the UN High Level Panel on System Wide Coherence, noting that the latter may be able to come up with far-reaching recommendations than those that might have come from the intergovernmental process. Questions being considered in these deliberations include reforms of individual agencies and the possibility of clustering the secretariats of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Bringing the discussions into the General Assembly has allowed the International Environmental Governance (IEG) issue to move beyond its earlier focus on UNEP. The General Assembly process would likely have a June meeting to outline its future work, with the two Co-Chairs (Mexico and Switzerland) hoping to have some recommendations ready in early July. Mr. Obermeyer noted likely recommendations, including that the environmental component of sustainable development needs to be strengthened and that UN environmental policies need to be less fragmented. In the meetings so far, member states had already indicated that they felt there were far too many environment meetings, with onerous reporting obligations.

Saradha Iyer of the Third World Network maintained that the High-Level Panel process has much to learn from UNEP in terms of civil society engagement, arguing that the High-Level Panel has been too secretive in its activities to date. She felt that over the years UNEP's substantial responsibilities have not been matched by sufficient financial resources. Ms. Iyer said there was too little southern NGO involvement in global environmental processes. She noted that while NGOs welcome the attention to environmental concerns in ongoing UN reform efforts, they are skeptical whether these processes will address the "green gap" in implementation efforts, adding that a rushed debate is likely to do more harm than good. She urged that sustainable development be the overarching framework, and noted the importance of ensuring that U.N. reforms efforts do not become merely cost-cutting exercises. Ms. Iyer agreed with the G77 position that there is no need for a new U.N. Environment Organization (UNEO) or World Environment Organization (WEO). She argued that what was needed was the implementation of the agreements reached at all of the U.N. Summits since Rio. She said there were already a host of recommendations in this area contained in the Millennium Project's Environmental Task Force report.

Andrew Deutz of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) noted that in theory, the two reform processes should be mutually reinforcing, as they were both based on paragraph 169 of the World Summit Outcome Document. He felt the High Level Panel process was both a threat and an opportunity. Its primary focus was on operational activities and the idea of a single UN country team. But he noted the risk that the environment may remain marginalized or be pitted against development. He said the opportunity exists to integrate and mainstream environmental issues across many UN agencies, along with gender and human rights. He said there was a need for environmental and social safeguards to be built into UN and country development planning. Dr. Deutz noted that there was a need to merge the UN Environmental Management Group and the UN Development Group into a UN Sustainable Development Group, and possibly to merge the UN's Economic and Social Council and its Commission on Sustainable Development. He felt that UNEP had capacity for country-level analysis but not country-level presence. For long-term reforms, he encouraged improvement of UNEP's scientific capacity and in the relationship between multilateral environmental agreements, and also noted the importance of streamlining reporting requirements.

Esther Neuhaus of the Brazilian Forum of NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and Development noted that the UN reform discussion was not too popular in her region, as it was not always obvious how the UN affected people's daily lives. She said the UN's legacy to date has been to step back from previous environmental commitments, and that the implementation gap is increasing,

and noted that there was a need to reaffirm the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”. She urged further technology transfer, capacity building, and civil society engagement, and that UNEP remain in Nairobi. She felt that macro-economic policy should not be left to the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, and noted that the GEF needs far greater resources. She cautioned that the role of the UN risks being marginalized, and urged greater engagement of and capacity building for grassroots organizations, adequate funding from donor countries, and greater inter- and intra-regional and South-South cooperation.

Gordon Shepherd of the World Wide Fund for Nature—International (WWF), expressed alarm that environmental agreements are increasingly shying away from using precautionary language, producing institutions that react to instead of working to prevent problems. In this regard, he cited the difficulty of expanding the list of chemicals prohibited under the PoPs Convention and the non-implementation of the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol. He lamented the collapse of environmental funding; citing the US cuts to the GEF and the UK plans to move environmental funding to development efforts. He added that the environment is in the worst condition it has ever been, and that human consumption is rising rapidly. He cautioned against consolidating environment and development programmes, noting that environment would get lost in this debate. In the end, reform of the Bretton Woods institutions may be the key.

A lively question and answer period followed in which participants highlighted the following points:

- Both the U.N. General Assembly’s informal consultations on the institutional framework for the U.N.’s environmental work and the High Level Panel should consult more fully with civil society
- The Aarhus Convention is a strong tool for promoting civil society engagement, but there is a need for other regions to adopt similar instruments
- Implementing the Monterrey Consensus is key to engaging the Bretton Woods Institutions on sustainable development issues, and there is also a need for a review mechanism under the U.N.’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- Civil society has a friend in the UN and NGOs need to defend it and multilateralism in general
- The environmental movement is too isolated from country-level problems, as is UNEP; implementation at this level is key for effectiveness
- The High Level Panel should review the report of the Cardoso Panel on the UN and civil society
- Rule 69 of the UNEP Governing Council rules of procedure needs to be revised to allow for direct civil society participation

In closing, Dr. Ramakrishna thanked the panelists and the audience for their many useful observations. He also emphasized that UNEP would continue its efforts to effectively engage civil society in its work, and welcomed suggestions from participants in the discussion about how best to go about doing so.

### Participants List

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Name</b>
An Taisce – National Trust of Ireland	Frank Corcoran
ANPED	Jan Rademaker
ANPED	Jan-Gustav Strandemas
Australian DEH	Annie Gabriel
Brazilian Forum (FBOMS)	Esther Neuhaus
Bulgarian delegation	Ivan Gospodinov
Campaign for the Earth	Margaret Spallone
Century Foundation	Emerson J. Sykes
CIEL	Dianne Dillon-Ridgley
CUT-BRAZIL	Temistocles Marcelos
Earth & Peace Education Associates International	Frans Verhagen
Earth Media	Michael Strauss
EED Germany	Wilfried Steen
ELCI	Cyril Ritchie
Greenpeace	Daniel Mittler
GYAN Mexico	Carlos Garcia Robles
Heinrich Boel Foundation	Marc Berthold
IDDDRI	Benoit Martimort-Asso
IISD	Peter Wood
IUCN	Andrew Deutz
IUCN	Rebecca Pearl
IUCN	Lorena Aguilar
Marynoll	John T. Brinkman
Marynoll	Jean Fallon
Marynoll	Jo Albright
Marynoll OCC	Ann Braudis
Medical Mission Sisters	Philo Morris
National Wildlife Federation	Barbara Bramble
Netherlands Centre for Indigenous Peoples	Miriam Anne Frank
Peace Action	Pauline Cantwell
Presentation Sisters	Maria Stella Korb, PBVM
Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace	Suzanne Golas
Stakeholder Forum	Jennifer Peer
Stakeholder Forum	Felix Dodds
Sustain Labour	Joaquin Nieto
Tebtebba Foundation	Joji Carino
Third World Network	Saradha Iyer
Third World Network	Neth Dano
UNDP Office of Development Studies	Nina Thelen
UNDP	Nina Kantcheva
UNEMG	Hossein Fadaei

UNEP/DPDL	Kilaparti Ramakrishna
UNEP/DPDL and Worldwatch Institute	Hilary French
UNEP NYO	Werner Obermeyer
UNEP NYO	Jim Sniffen
UNEP NYO	He-day Hiruma
WECF/MAMA-86	Anna Golubovska-Onisimova
WEDO	Betsy Apple
WEDO	June Zeitlin
Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & NRM	Jeannette Gorung
World Information Transfer	Adrianna Murphy
WWF	Hugh Wilkins
WWF	Gordon Shepherd