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GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM

CONTRIBUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME
TO THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Background paper presented by the secretariat

The present document contains background information on two issues of concern under this item:
regional ministerial forums on health and environment and the New Partnership for African Development.

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A. REGIONAL MINISTERIAL FORUMS ON HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

1. Up to 25 per cent of the global burden of disease is attributed to environmental causes. Much of this is largely preventable through better management of the environment. An ecological approach to health highlights the complexity of the links between the different determinants of health, arising not only from the behaviour of individuals, but also from the quality of their living and working environments, and encourages a much broader concept of disease prevention. It also entails developing solutions that are integrated, involving relevant sectors - rather than conventional interventions in the health or environmental sector.
2. In this context, and having recognized the need to build stronger bridges between the environment and health sectors, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are working closely to promote environmental health through intersectoral dialogue.

Europe

3. Regional Ministerial Conferences of Ministers of Health and Environment, which started in 1989, meet every five years. At the second Conference, in Helsinki in 1994, it was decided to set up a European Committee on Environment and Health to ensure synergies between the two sectors and follow-up between Conferences. The mandate of the Committee was enlarged at the 1999 London Conference to enable it to act as the Steering Group for the preparation of the Ministerial Conferences.
4. The Committee comprises four representatives from member States selected by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, four representatives from member States selected by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and representatives from the International Labour Organization, ECE, UNEP, WHO, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and a number of other intergovernmental organizations and international funding agencies, and six representatives from major groups. Each member serves for a period of two years.
5. The Committee has been instrumental, *inter alia*, in elaborating the agenda of the Ministerial Conferences. It proposed, for example, that the ECE Water Convention should be supplemented by a protocol on water and health, which was completed and approved in 1999. At its latest meeting, held in Istanbul from 19 to 21 November 2001, it identified the theme for the next Ministerial Conference in Hungary in 2002: "Children for the future". The Committee has also encouraged research through the European Science Foundation and contributed to the initiation and development of the Charter on Transport, Environment and Health, now considered by Governments as the basis for a possible legal regional instrument. One of the Committee's most successful achievements has been the promotion of National Environment and Health Action Plans. The Committee is also looking into the possibility of merging the "Environment and health " process with the ECE-led "Environment for Europe" process.
6. As an official member of the Committee since its inception, UNEP has actively contributed to its activities and hosted one of the Committee's meetings in December 1999. The activities of the Committee are regularly brought to the attention of UNEP divisions, which have provided advice and sent representatives to some of the meetings sponsored by the Committee (such as on climate or strategic health assessment).

Americas

7. Ministers of the Environment of the Americas called upon the Pan American Health Organization and UNEP to participate actively, and provide technical expertise, in the convening of a meeting of ministers of health and environment. This proposal was endorsed by leaders at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, Canada, in April 2001 and adopted as part of a plan of action.

8. A meeting of health and environment ministers of the Americas is to be held in Ottawa on 4 and 5 March 2002. The objectives of the meeting are to build bridges between the health and environment sectors to address common issues; to strengthen the capacity of countries in the hemisphere to manage health and environment issues effectively; to establish follow-up mechanisms for addressing health and environment issues in the Americas; and to contribute, as appropriate, to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. The meeting will provide an opportunity for health and environment ministers of the Americas to take stock of the implementation of the Pan American Charter on Health and Environment in Sustainable Development signed by the countries of the hemisphere at the 1995 Pan American Conference on Health and Environment in Sustainable Human Development, and look at concrete follow-up mechanisms to continue furthering the environment and health agenda in the region.

Africa

9. While the process is well advanced in Europe, and is beginning to take shape in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is still in its infancy in Africa. UNEP has approached WHO with a proposal to jointly convene a meeting of African ministers of environment and health, for which UNEP has obtained financial support of 75,000 Canadian dollars through the good offices of the International Development Research Centre, Canada, during the forthcoming ninth session of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, as well as a meeting of technical experts in April 2002 to prepare for the ministerial meeting. A draft agenda and programme of work is being worked out and will be circulated for comments, after responses from WHO and donor agencies have been received.

B. THE NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

10. The process of preparing a comprehensive development programme for Africa, begun at the initiative of several heads of State, culminated in the adoption of the New African Initiative at the thirty-seventh ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity, which took place in Lusaka, Zambia.

11. The title was revised at a meeting of 10 heads of State held in Abuja, Nigeria, in October 2001, to become the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). To ensure coherent and thorough follow-up of NEPAD, a governing structure composed of an Implementation Committee made up of heads of State and government, a Steering Committee and a secretariat has been established. The Implementation Committee comprises heads of State from 15 African countries, representing the five regions of the continent, chaired by President Obasanjo of Nigeria, with Presidents Wade of Senegal and Bouteflika of Algeria as vice-chairs. It will meet every four months. The Steering Committee consists of representatives of the five initiating countries (Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa). The permanent secretariat has been established in Pretoria, South Africa.

12. NEPAD will constitute a major framework for achieving the African development goal, and reflects the shared vision of the continent's future among African leaders. It is a future of peace and prosperity based on good governance, poverty reduction, sustainable development, private-sector-led growth, enhanced regional integration, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and the information revolution. The focus is on areas where action will be pivotal to kick-start growth and reduce poverty. At the core of NEPAD is a commitment by African leaders to improve government capabilities in the fight against poverty. The initiative recognizes that the absence of good governance deepens poverty and that the real causes of poverty and human deprivation lie deep in the national policy actions of African countries. Improvements in the external environment can help greatly, but they can never replace domestic reform.

13. NEPAD contains an environmental element which recognizes that a healthy and productive environment is a prerequisite for sustainable growth in Africa. The framework adopted by NEPAD recognizes that the range of issues involved in nurturing the environmental base is vast and complex, and that a systematic combination of measures is necessary in a coherent environmental programme. Thus choices will need to be made, and issues prioritized. The core objective of the environment initiative must be to combat poverty and contribute to socio-economic development in Africa. Eight priorities for intervention have been defined: combating desertification, wetland conservation, invasive alien species, coastal management, global warming, transboundary conservation areas, environmental governance and finance.
