



United Nations
Press Release



Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development
Ministerial Level, Fourth Session, Bali, Indonesia, 27 May – 7 June 2002

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division

Background Release

ENV/DEV/B/1
24 May 2002

PREPARATORY MEETING FOR WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
TO BE HELD IN BALI, 27 MAY - 7 JUNE

To Seek Agreement on Commitments,
Actions to Be Considered by Johannesburg Summit in August

The fourth and final preparatory meeting for this year's World Summit on Sustainable Development will take place in Bali, Indonesia, from 27 May to 7 June. Several thousand participants from United Nations Member States, including a few hundred ministerial-level delegates and over a thousand business, agency and community leaders, will meet there with the goal of agreeing on commitments and action plans to be adopted at the World Summit set for 26 August to 4 September in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The Johannesburg Summit aims to find practical ways for humanity to respond to the challenge of bettering the lives of all human beings, while protecting the environment, according to Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He added that this requires moving from commitments -- of which there have been plenty -- to action.

The framework for the effort was agreed upon at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro. At that Conference, the international community committed itself to a comprehensive plan of action known as Agenda 21, which embraced economic growth, social development and environmental protection to achieve sustainable development in the twenty-first century.

Ten years after the Rio Summit -- with progress towards most of Agenda 21 goals sorely lagging -- the Johannesburg Summit is seen as

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an opportunity to adopt concrete steps to meet the challenges involved, which are now seen as ever more urgent. In previous preparatory meetings for Johannesburg, participants honed in on areas where action was essential -- and realizable -- including poverty reduction, the preservation of natural ecosystems and resources, expansion of access to clean water, improved sanitation and electricity, change in harmful patterns of consumption and production, and special attention to Africa. For tangible results in those areas, partnership initiatives between governments, the private sector and citizen groups, along with improved governance at all levels, came to be seen as essential outcomes of the Summit.

The goal of the Bali meeting would be to reach consensus on a programme of action that is "deliverable", according to Emil Salim of Indonesia, Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which is acting as the preparatory committee for the Summit. In addition, governments will work on a political declaration to be endorsed by heads of State in Johannesburg. The importance of having definitive, consensus texts before the start of the Summit has been underlined by the Summit's Secretary-General, Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. Such extensive preparatory negotiations, he said, led to the success of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development. That conference, in turn, strengthened the financial groundwork for future action on sustainable development.

It is projected that the two drafts to be finalized in Bali, the Programme of Action and the Political Declaration, will express continued support to Agenda 21's objectives. They will specify concrete means of overcoming those problems that have hampered the implementation of Agenda 21, with a renewed focus on realizable activities in each priority area. While much has been agreed upon towards these documents, many areas of disagreement remain, regarding such issues as target dates for implementation and references to the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.

Towards reaching consensus on those matters, there will be a pre-session meeting of delegations and Committee members beginning on 24 May, followed by the opening of the preparatory conference on 27 May. A multi-stakeholder dialogue will take place during the first two days of the conference, with a plenary meeting to discuss governance for sustainable development. Capacity-building and partnership initiatives for sustainable development will be the topics of parallel discussion groups supporting the dialogue.

From 29 to 31 May, intergovernmental discussions will take place on the Summit documents, followed by a high-level (ministerial) segment for the last three days of the meeting. That segment will include the Chairman's presentation of results of previous discussions on the political declaration, and a general debate including heads of delegations and observers from intergovernmental and other groups. After the general debate, an interactive dialogue will be organized in an effort to finalize the draft political declaration.

Draft Programme of Action

To facilitate discussion on the Programme of Action, participants at the fourth preparatory conference will have before them a chairman's paper (not yet issued as a document at this date), which compiles provisions which have been agreed upon in previous preparatory activities. It will also include highlighted passages where consensus has not been reached.

In its introduction, the text reaffirms the validity of Agenda 21, which it says establishes the fundamental principles of sustainable development through the integration of economic growth, social development and protection of the environment. To those ends, a commitment is made to undertake concrete actions and measures at all levels, bearing in mind the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Those measures should benefit everyone and involve all relevant actors through partnerships between North and South, and between governments, the private sector and organizations at all levels.

According to the text, good governance at all levels is essential for sustainable development, and international cooperation is necessary to ensure the success of developing countries in national efforts, particularly in finance, technology transfer, debt and trade, and global decision-making. Peace and stability is also necessary for sustainable development.

The text then outlines large areas of consensus which have been reached on actions, particularly concerning the need to launch programmes aimed at meeting the 2015 Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in poverty. It also calls for halving the proportion of people who lack access to proper sanitation by 2015. It goes on to outline recommendations on a range of issues from limiting unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, to protecting the natural resource base of economic and social development, to combating environmental threats to health

and diverse ecosystems. There are separate areas on actions recommended for Africa and small island States.

While consensus on mention of the Kyoto Protocol has not been reached, the chairman's paper proposes language taken from United Nations General Assembly resolution A/56/199. A range of measures to combat climate change is also proposed, including capacity-building and other support for developing countries, comprehensive monitoring systems, and cooperation at all levels to reduce air pollution.

Means for implementation of certain measures to extend positive effects of globalization are also highlighted as lacking consensus, with language on intellectual property rights and sui generis protection of traditional knowledge also in contention. Also to be negotiated is language on worker safety, financing for the eradication of certain diseases along with target dates for their eradication. The section titled "Means of Implementation" contains numerous paragraphs still under discussion, particularly those concerning financing of initiatives, official development assistance, and trade barriers, subsidies and assessments. The notion of global public goods and strategic environmental assessment are among other topics subject to further negotiation.

In addition, for completion of the work on the draft Programme of Action, two vice-chairman's papers will be before participants. One, entitled "Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development", outlines measures to strengthen the "sustainable development governance architecture" at the international, regional and national levels. Many paragraphs in that paper, concerning funding of governance projects and the roles of various institutions, are noted as requiring further consultation.

The second vice-chair's paper is a summary of informal discussion on partnership initiatives, which are known as "Type 2" outcomes. These voluntary initiatives, between governments, citizen groups, and the private sector are intended to help promote implementation of the government-negotiated outcome documents in Johannesburg, known as the "Type 1" outcomes. The discussions on the partnership initiatives have focused on the need to allow flexibility without diluting, or substituting, for the responsibility of governments to commit to strong "Type 1" commitments.

Draft Political Declaration

In Bali, a text for the draft Political Declaration to be issued by heads of State at the World Summit will be prepared by the preparatory committee, drawing upon the agreed text of the draft Programme of Action. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/199, it would be a concise and focused document emphasizing the need for a global partnership to achieve the implementation of Agenda 21 and addressing the main challenges and opportunities faced by the international community in that regard. According to the Assembly, it should also reinvigorate, at the highest political level, commitment to a North-South partnership, a higher level of integrated solidarity and accelerated implementation of sustainable development.

During the preparatory meeting, a series of informal plenary meetings will be held on the document, in preparation for further work during the high-level segment. Initial inputs for discussion will include the outcomes of the second and third preparatory meetings, information provided by the vice-chairs from Egypt and Canada on relevant discussions, outcomes of the multi-stakeholder dialogue and input from the Secretary-General's panel.

Commission on Sustainable Development

The Commission on Sustainable Development, acting as the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, was established in 1993 to follow up on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio. The Chairman of the Committee is Emil Salim (Indonesia). The vice-chairpersons are Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti (Brazil), Richard Ballhorn (Canada), Jan Kara (Czech Republic), Ihab Gamaleldin (Egypt), Kiyotaka Akasaka (Japan), Ositadanma Anaedu (Nigeria), Alexandru Niculescu (Romania), Lars-Goran Engfeldt (Sweden), and Diane Quarless (Jamaica) who also serves as Rapporteur.

For further information on the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, please consult its Web site: www.johannesburgsummit.org.

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