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NEED FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRATIZATION, TRANSPARENCY, EQUITY

STRESSED AS MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE BEGINS

A broad range of civil society and government actors in the sustainable development process took the floor this afternoon to express their views, as the fourth and final Preparatory Committee for the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development continued its work.

During the “multi-stakeholder dialogue” that took place, speakers broached a wide range of subjects related to sustainable development.

A representative of business and industry said the issue of governance was fundamental because it provided the framework for sustainable development. Good governance applied at all levels and to all stakeholders. There must be better synergies between official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI) -- but even that would not work without good governance. Those three aspects were interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

The contemporary world was characterized by deep imbalances and by gross inequalities among nations, said a representative of indigenous peoples. She called for greater democratization, transparency and equity. It was a deep contradiction to be making policy decisions about poverty and environmental degradation in such beautiful surroundings. Efforts to prepare statements and engage in dialogue on the part of indigenous peoples had not yet resulted in commitments that would improve their lives, she stressed.

A representative of trade unions said the unions shared a vision of how their members could and must become involved in implementing sustainable development at the local, national and international level. She looked forward to the day when workers could help implement change on the most pressing issues involved in sustainable development. Trade unions hoped to announce a major initiative at the Summit on workplace assessments, which would be used to engage employers around the world in programmes for change.

The Summit was about implementation -- about moving from agenda to action, a representative of local authorities said. The concept of the partnership initiative grew out of the understanding that the job at hand needed the participation of all stakeholders, not just governments. One of the success stories since Rio was what had happened at the local level. Local authorities had delivered, she stressed.

The representative of the United States said the dialogue was a perfect forum to highlight participants' vision for the Summit and to highlight to crucial role of all stakeholders. Efforts must be focused on implementing the sustainable development blueprints set out at Rio and the succeeding forums. No declaration or plan of action would give people access to clean drinking water or education. That was why this multi-stakeholder dialogue was essential. Effective partnerships among all stakeholders were the means to deliver concrete results.

After the opening statements, a discussion was held on the issues raised.

(more)

Representatives of women, youth, non-governmental organizations, scientific and technological communities, and farmers also spoke. Statements were also made by the representatives of South Africa, Spain, speaking on behalf of the European Union, Belgium and Finland.

Emil Salim (Indonesia), Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Preparatory Committee, opened the meeting and directed questions at participants during the discussion segment.

The multi-stakeholder dialogue segment will continue tomorrow at 10 a.m. in two separate discussion groups.

Statements

EMIL SALIM (Indonesia), Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the preparatory committee, opened the meeting.

A representative of the women's working group said 10 years ago at Rio, the international community and thousands of women had set out a vision of sustainable development. All had claimed to have understood the principle that human beings should live in harmony with nature. That would necessitate a new relationship with nature, men and women. However, at the global level the international community was more enmeshed in freeing markets than in freeing people. Agenda 21, with the strong input of women and civil society, had committed to the overarching goal of sustainable development.

She called on governments to put in place effective policies for the implementation of sustainable development at all levels. She underlined the importance of the areas of global governance, gender and governance and transparency. Good governance required full access for civil society into all the organs of the United Nations. The United Nations should consider giving permanent status for civil society in its various organs. Among other things, she urged the adoption of a convention of corporate accountability. Commitments made at the various forums on gender equality were integral to the achievement of sustainable development.

A representative of the indigenous peoples said the contemporary world was characterized by deep imbalances and by gross inequalities among nations. She called for greater democratization, transparency and equity. It was a deep contradiction to be making policy decisions about poverty and environmental degradation in such beautiful surroundings. Efforts to prepare statements and engage in dialogue on the part of indigenous peoples had not yet resulted in commitments that would improve their lives.

She stressed the need to respect indigenous peoples rights to self-determination, among other things. They must be taken on as equal partners in the sustainable development process. The United Nations must promote the recognition of treaties and agreements between governments and indigenous peoples.

A representative non-governmental organizations (NGOs) said it was crucial to turn the principles of the Rio Declaration into broad action. Governments must not remove reference to rights, which must be applied at all levels. International financial institutions, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), were the dominant institutions in international governance. Their dominance threatened the goal of achieving balance among the three pillars of sustainable development. The outcome of the International Conference on Financing for Development should only be a minimal starting point, not a ceiling. He called for a better balance between the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development. He also stressed the need for improved corporate accountability.

A representative of trade unions said the unions shared a vision of how their members could and must become involved in implementing sustainable development at the local, national and international levels. She looked forward to the day when workers could help implement change on the most pressing issues involved in sustainable development. Trade unions hoped to announce a major initiative at the Summit on workplace assessments, which would be used to engage employers around the world in programmes for change. Such assessments would identify target areas and assess the progress that could be made. She challenged all the stakeholders to give the trade unions the tools to make change happen.

A representative of local authorities said the Summit was about implementation -- about moving from agenda to action. The concept of the partnership initiative grew out of the understanding that the job at hand needed the participation of all stakeholders -- not just governments. One of the success stories since Rio was what had happened at the local level.

Local authorities had delivered, she stressed. Sustainability involved social, economic and environment aspects. Working in partnership on such issues was part of the daily business of local authorities. The local level must be acknowledged by governments. They must be part of the follow-up to the Summit. Local action moved the world, she said.

A representative of business and industry said the issue of governance was fundamental because it provided the framework for sustainable development. Good governance applied at all levels and to all stakeholders. The Summit should be more than a meeting of heads of government -- it should be a meeting of all the stakeholders meeting to improve "our collective lot".

Whatever the ownership of large business was, all businesses were ultimately local, he noted. More could be made of what businesses did locally. There must be better synergies between official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment (FDI), but even that would not work without good governance. Those three aspects were interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

A representative of the scientific and technological communities said existing governance institutions must be transformed to ensure input from the communities. Successful mechanisms had been developed over the past 10 years at the international level, but they must also be developed at the local and regional levels. A formal link should be established between the Commission on Sustainable Development and the organizing partners of the scientific and technological communities.

To ensure policy relevance, the communities would integrate research that supported the three pillars of sustainable development, he said. A scientific and technological initiative approach to sustainable development would require the participation of all stakeholders in the process. Capacity-building for science and technology must be supported at the Summit. The five areas set out by the Secretary-General were areas where the scientific and technological community had much to offer. The communities pledged their assistance to help in those crucial areas.

A representative of farmers commended the United Nations for consulting with the stakeholders on the issues involved in the lead up to the Summit. Agriculture was at the heart of all the dimensions of sustainable development. Yet it was a vulnerable sector, linked to climate and other factors. That must be taken into account at the international level.

He said specific policies must be implemented in the areas of natural resources and rural enterprises. Food security and safety must be ensured. All the economic players involved must work together to develop policies, and farmers must be involved at all levels. The agricultural sector must be strengthened. It was also necessary to increase the share of developing and least developing countries in global trade.

A representative of youth said she had a question for all those present: "Why are we here and what are we doing 10 years after Rio?" The Summit was meant to be about action. Youth wanted to see strong, action-oriented words in the outcome document, not such words as "promote" and "suggest". The policies of international financial institutions such as the WTO should not supersede the goals of international organizations and arrangements.

She noted the immense influence of transnational corporations on the deliberations leading up to the Summit. In that regard, she called for corporate accountability. Developed countries should cancel the debts of developing countries. Ensuring an equal playing field was key. She went on to say that 50 per cent of the world's population was youth -- they should be involved at all levels of decision-making. Measures should be taken to ensure that youth living in countries at war could participate in the sustainable development process. She called for action to be taken now to ensure that another meeting 10 years from now was not needed on the same issues.

The representative of the United States said the dialogue was a perfect forum to highlight participants' vision for the Summit and to highlight to crucial role of all stakeholders. His country was committed to the success of the Summit. Efforts must be focused on implementing the sustainable development blueprints set out at Rio and the succeeding forums.

The plan of action should carry forward the outcome of the Monterrey Conference, he said. Good governance should be promoted as an essential foundation of sustainable development. No declaration or plan of action would give people access to clean drinking water or education. That was why this multi-stakeholder dialogue was crucial. Effective partnerships among all stakeholders were the means to deliver concrete results.

Forging partnerships was not easy -- it meant all must modify the way they were accustomed to doing business, he said. A blueprint for partnership approaches should be developed. He hoped the partnerships could continue well beyond the Summit.

The representative of South Africa said he agreed with most of the comments made -- the Summit was about implementation and about making Agenda 21 real for people on the ground. He agreed that Agenda 21 could not be delivered unless the Summit came up with a way to deal with global inequality and poverty. He agreed that good governance was essential for sustainable development.

A successful outcome would not be possible without stakeholders, he said. Governments could not do it on their own. The kind of participation seen here must be built on and strengthened. Access to water and sanitation, improved health and education were among the issues that must be addressed. Moving beyond the text was the key. There must be mobilization for delivery and implementation.

Discussion Segment

During the discussion that followed the opening statements, speakers addressed such approaches as thinking globally and acting locally. One speaker said it would be important to recognize the need to build the capacity of local authorities. The issue of workplace assessments was taken up again and further developed. A number of criteria for dealing with such assessments were in place, a speaker noted. The rights and protection of workers to engage in joint actions with the employer and within the community was among them.

The importance of ensuring access to safe water and responsible water usage was also taken up, with the opinion being expressed by one speaker that water should not be seen as a commodity. Another speaker said that water was owned by the public but that water services were an area where privatization could be very effective. Another speaker noted that privatization of water services had had negative results. Another speaker stressed the central role to be played by women in the area of water.

The representative of Spain, for the European Union, taking the floor during the discussion segment, stressed the need for democracy, respect for human rights and the participation of all stakeholders to promote good governance. Steps should be taken at the Summit to improve institutional frameworks at all levels. Local authorities would have a key role to play at that regard. The Union was working on partnerships with regard to water, energy and health.

Efforts that could be made at the local level to ensure sustainable development were also discussed. Local governance could provide for more cross-sectoral synergies to ensure viable local life, one speaker said on that subject. The relationship of official development assistance (ODA), foreign direct investment (FDI) and good governance was also mentioned. A speaker from the private sector said good governance was good for everyone -- whether women or youth. Returning to the subject of water, the speaker said there was no gainsaying that business in many cases had helped with improving water flow to villages. Ensuring the rights of women was a key aspect of the sustainable development process.

The representative of Belgium took the floor during the discussion. He said that as a federated State, Belgium needed to ensure synergy between all the levels of power. At all levels, a contribution must be made to furthering the implementation of Agenda 21. His Government had worked to develop planning for sustainable development based on law with participation of all the ministries and social groupings. He underlined the

importance of participation by citizens in the sustainable development process. The social component was a foundation for such development, and it must be made stronger.

A proposal to have young people in decision-making structures on sustainable development at the national and local levels was taken up by another speaker. He was eager to see more awareness-raising programmes on sustainable development. The possibility of establishing advertisement-free zones was also raised, as advertisement promoted patterns of unsustainable consumption.

The effects of globalization were also discussed. A speaker stressed the importance of advertising for business. Efforts to bridge the gap between governments and science and technological communities were also addressed. The creation of nuclear waste and its disposal was also brought up. The speaker stressed the need to ensure sound scientific policies in that regard. He also stressed the need to examine the world's relationship to the sacredness of the earth.

The need for policy frameworks in the area of property rights for farmers was then tabled. Protecting the rights of small "fisher folk", who were not represented at the current gathering, was crucial, the speaker added. Both good and bad governance must be defined.

The representative of the United States, responding to the remark made by a representative of indigenous peoples on disposal of nuclear waste in the United States, said there had been a great deal of scientific research on the subject. There were strong opinions on both sides, and the matter was being considered by the United States Congress.

To be successful on corporate accountability, cooperation was needed at all levels, another speaker said.

The representative of Finland said he was going to discuss a form of governance that cut across all levels -- partnerships. His Government had established a very concrete system of partnerships. The experiences so far were promising. Capacity-building in terms of shared learning was included in the partnership arrangements, he noted. Such arrangements provided an excellent platform for advancing sustainable development on a voluntary basis and could complement other efforts undertaken.

The possible negative impact on the sustainable development process of privatization was also addressed. Globalization became visible at the local level for the average citizen, another speaker noted, pointing out that media brought the world of globalization into the living room. She asked what kind of rules there were for all the stakeholders. Local authorities must have a voice in the system of global governance, she stressed.

A speaker called for a change of attitude -- health and the equality of all human beings must be ensured. Another speaker noted the code of corporate governance in South Africa and its role in ensuring a place for all. Today's world was highly transparent, as business was being held accountable, another speaker said. All the stakeholders present in the room were holding business accountable. Business was not one unit -- it was very broad. Some performed well and others did not. It was up to society to police those that did not perform well.

Lars-Goran Engfeldt (Sweden), Co-Chair of Working Group III, then summed up the debate. A wide range of issues that covered the entire chairman's paper had been broached. The right mix of tools was needed to make sustainable development happen. Clear measures at all levels were essential. The discussion had been extremely enriching.

Ositadimna Anaedu (Nigeria), Co-Chair of Working Group III, said a number of things had been highlighted that would facilitate the discussions to be held in the coming days. A balance between business and governance was key, he noted. He was very happy with the kind of interaction that had been held.

Emil Salim (Indonesia) also made concluding remarks and said he had appreciated the diversity of opinions that had been expressed.