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United Nations Press Release

High-Level Push in Bali to Firm Up Sustainable Development Commitments

5 June, BALI, Indonesia—More than 100 ministers from around the world today began three days of deliberations in Bali aimed at generating high-level political commitments for action at the World Summit on Sustainable Development this August.

The Summit, which will be an historic opportunity to mobilize governments, people, institutions and resources for sustainable development, will take place in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September.

At stake in the Bali ministerial-level meeting is the strength of government commitments in Johannesburg to set up programmes aimed at improving living conditions worldwide while preserving the natural ecosystems on which people depend. The results of the ministerial talks will provide the basis for the political declaration that Heads of State and Government will adopt at the Johannesburg Summit. The other key issue for discussion during the ministerial segment is the linkage between voluntary partnership initiatives and government commitments in the Johannesburg outcome.

“The Summit in Johannesburg is truly a chance to set a more hopeful course of development for all of humanity,” United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette told the 118 ministers attending the Preparatory Committee meeting in Bali. “The challenge, as ever, is to match aspiration with action, and promise with positive change in people’s lives. We know what needs to be done. Now, let’s move ahead.”

Fréchette, in her address, said, “Johannesburg is meant to find another way, a path that improves standards of living while protecting the environment.” She added, “That relationship—between human society and the natural environment—is the core concern of Johannesburg, and is what sets Johannesburg apart from other UN conferences and summits.”

In welcoming the ministers, Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri said the Bali meeting could influence the Johannesburg Summit by helping to build a strong foundation for sustainable development, and make a “real contribution to humanity.” “Ten years have passed since we adopted Agenda 21,” she said. “It is time for us to follow it up with concrete programmes and activities.”

The Johannesburg Summit will result in a political declaration, an implementation programme, and voluntary partnership initiatives by and between governments, citizen groups and the private sector to actually carry out sustainable development projects.

Negotiations are expected to conclude Friday on an implementation programme — called the Bali Commitment—that will serve as the guiding plan for an action-oriented agenda that brings measurable results. The two-week PrepCom has already produced substantial agreement on promoting activities across a broad range of sustainable development activities, including the five areas where UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said the Summit must make progress: providing clean water and proper sanitation; increasing access to modern energy, improving health, raising agricultural productivity, and protecting the world’s biodiversity.

“The key elements have all been agreed upon,” according to Johannesburg Summit Secretary-General Nitin Desai. “What we’re aiming at now is much more. We’re aiming at a good, strong programme of action, and we will push these concerns as far as we can take them.”

PrepCom Chairman Emil Salim said the Bali Commitment would contain new time-bound targets. “It is a realistic plan and it is not ‘pie in the sky’,” he stated, “but to implement it, we all have to be committed.”

Over 4,500 people from 173 countries are attending the Bali meeting, including a large contingent of non-governmental organizations, which Salim said have played a major role in lobbying government delegations for a stronger agreement.

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