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Final Negotiations for Johannesburg Summit Open in Bali; Outcome Will Determine Action for Sustainable Future

27 May, Bali, Indonesia—Negotiations on accelerating action to achieve a sustainable future got underway by governments today in Bali, at the fourth and final preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

With negotiations underway on an action-oriented implementation plan that will be adopted in Johannesburg, the PrepCom heard calls from Summit leaders and citizen activists for bolder commitments that the people of the world would recognize as progress.

“The World Summit on Sustainable Development has not been called to endorse business as usual,” Summit Secretary-General Nitin Desai told the opening of the preparatory meeting. “It has been called because people want change. And this Summit must signal a real commitment to change.”

The Summit, which will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September, will be attended by world leaders and the representatives of citizen groups, businesses and other important sectors of society. It presents a major opportunity to forge agreements and actions to tackle crucial problems arising from poverty, unsustainable consumption and the impact of human society on the natural environment.

Indonesian Environment Minister Nabel Makarim called the Bali PrepCom “an historic opportunity to breathe new life into sustainable development” where a number of landmark outcomes can be achieved.

Actual progress in tackling the five strategic areas identified by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan—Water and sanitation, Energy, Health, Agricultural productivity and Biodiversity, shortened to the acronym WEHAB -- would be the measure of the success of the Summit, Desai told the PrepCom.

Proposals for action in these five areas are among those presently under consideration by governments in the Bali negotiations. By the end of the first week of the PrepCom, governments are expected to agree on an implementation plan that Desai hopes will become known as the Bali Commitment for Sustainable Development. In the second week, the PrepCom will decide on the elements for a political declaration that Heads of State and Government will adopt in Johannesburg.

Another outcome of the Johannesburg Summit will be the launch of partnership initiatives between governments, community groups or the private sector to supplement government efforts to put into action the commitments reached in the negotiations.

The partnerships, which Desai emphasized were not a substitute for government actions or responsibilities, will promote sustainable development cooperation that taps all available resources, from the public and private sectors.

“We have definitely reversed the downward trend in official development assistance at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey,” Desai said, “but now we have to see what we’re going to use those resources for.”

Widely diverging national prerogatives have made the negotiations leading up to Bali challenging, and the talks in Bali are expected to be difficult. “Negotiations are not a smooth road,” according to PrepCom Chairman Emil Salim, whose revised text is the basis for the talks. But noting that the present approach to development has benefited 20 per cent of the world’s population while the living standards of the remaining 80 per cent have largely stagnated, Salim said the value of the Summit outcome hinges on whether “it has the elements of change or is it business as usual.”

For more information, contact the Media Centre at the Bali PrepCom:

Klomjit Chandrapanya, tel (62-361) 779 056

Agus Supriyatno, tel (62-361) 779 055

E-mail mediainfo@un.org

Website: www.johannesburgsummit.org