

European and Central Asian Civil Society Statement to the 6th GCSF

We, the participants of the joint meeting of UNEP National Committees and partner NGOs and regional networks, serving as the European and Central Asian Regional Preparatory meeting for the 6th Global Civil Society Forum, gathered 29 November – 1st December 2004, in Geneva, Switzerland, agreed on the following statement.

The statement reflects views and comments from a diverse civil society, the majority of which was UNEP National Committees and NGO networks.¹ 58 persons representing a large geographical area within the UN ECE region² participated in the many discussions covering a range of issues³ during the three-day meeting at the UNEP ROE Headquarters– November 29, 30 and December 1st.

Civil society and UNEP

Civil society is a diverse community, and should so remain. The UN has in different ways recognised both the complexity and multiplicity of civil society. The Rio Conference in 1992 recognised 9 major groups⁴ and they now play key roles in the CSD process. But as several pointed out, it would be contrary to the very nature and the added value of civil society to be forced to make one statement reflecting all groups at venues like the UNEP Governing Council. The plenary session at the European and Central Regional Preparatory Asian meeting took note of the fact that CSD now officially accepts separate statements, both written and oral, from each of the 9 major groups, and recommended this process to be followed also by UNEP.

Several speakers pointed to the fact that the relationship between civil society and the Governing Council were improving, but that key issues were still not resolved. Historically UNEP was among the first UN entities to allow the NGO community to participate in its many proceedings. NGOs were present at the very the making of UNEP at the Stockholm conference in 1972.

NGOs are and will always be important to UNEP. In the suggested work programme for UNEP for the period 2006 - 2007, there are almost 70 references to NGOs and civil society in the implementation of the work programme.

The fact that NGOs including other representatives of civil society are still barred from key processes and proceedings of the Governing Council, speaks not well neither to UNEP's historical legacy nor to the present global demands for better transparency and good governance.

In responding to the recent Cardoso report on civil society⁵, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan makes it a priority for the UN to be inclusive in relationship to civil society.

The meeting recommended strongly that UNEP in all contexts and at all levels include accredited NGOs and civil society.

¹ See attached list for complete overview of participants and their organisations.

² *ibid*

³ Please confer with the attached agenda of the meeting,

⁴ The 9 major groups as recognised by Agenda 21 are: Women, Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, Trade Unions, Science and Technology, the Private Sector, Local Government

⁵ Fifty-eight session, Agenda point 59 "Strengthening of the United Nations System" (A/57/387 and Corr.1) the report titled: "We the peoples: civil society, the United Nations and global governance. Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations."

More specifically this would mean that

- CSOs are at least 9 major groups with sometimes different agendas that may for various reasons have different approaches and outcomes as well as priorities. Each group should therefore have an opportunity to make its own statement.
- UNEP needs to develop a more inclusive civil society process and widen the representation to include a variety of different major groups
- UNEP should work to encourage more youth environmental NGOs to be integrated in the ongoing work of UNEP.
- UNEP needs to organise the input from a wider range of CSOs, not only the environmental community
- UNEP must ensure CSOs participation in all meetings and in all sessions of the UNEP GMEF and UNEP GC, and amend Rule 69 of the Rules of Procedure accordingly
- Governments are strongly urged to include CSOs representatives in national delegations
- UNEP should investigate new opportunities for interactive processes and subsequently develop dialogue sessions/ round tables for the Ministers and Civil Society within the GMEF agenda
- UNEP will call for the support to the proposed Round Table on MDG Implementation and Youth Participation at GC 23 in 2005 (according the TUNZA proposal)
- UNEP should ensure participation from NGOs in the EECCA region in regional and global UNEP meetings and provide adequate financial support to facilitate their participation

Global Civil Society Forum

The importance of the Forum was recognised as an important venue for bringing civil society views to the attention of UNEP. Some however, pointed to the fact that the Forum was not really integrated into the Governing Council, the way that the dialogue sessions have been for a number of years at CSD. A major problem of the Forum seems to be that it is seen as an add on to the Governing Council and as such not prioritised by the Governing Council at all.

Modalities for bringing Environment Ministers and national delegates in contact with civil societies were discussed. In this context, it was suggested concretely that:

- Round tables be established between environment Ministers, key players among the national delegates and representatives from civil society.
- The experience of the CSD in getting the major groups issues across be used while at the same time respecting the individualities of the major groups.
- A broad CSO stakeholder approach be allowed.
- Side-events be organised using the experience of the CSD.
- Representatives of civil society should be allowed to stay and participate in entire Governing Council.
- UNEP needs to make GCSF a more interactive process and cover a wider range of thematic issues
- Delegations should be positively recognised for having CSO representatives on their delegation. CSOs participating at the GCSF are encouraged to publish the list of delegations that have real CSOs in their delegations.

UNEP national committees

The UNEP national committees should be national focal points rooted in civil society. As such they are important contributors to increasing the cooperation between civil society and UNEP. The Medium Strategy Plan for enhancing civil society participation in all areas of

UNEP work, both pillars, i.e. the information exchange and civil society design, must be given all necessary support.

The initiatives to expand and develop UNEP national committees were welcome. However, several pointed to the fact that they were in need for support from UNEP. This support covered many areas. Some were highlighted, the most important mentioned by several was grants or seed money to found and start up new national committees as well as help those still struggling with funding problems.

The UNEP National committees represent a very powerful way of working at national levels. Several members expressed appreciation of the answers to the letter dated November 28, 2003 as well as information on recent developments in Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch of DPDL. There was expressed hope that that the Executive Director of UNEP will be able to accept the invitation to the next European National Committees meeting in Geneva in November 2005.

Environmental inequalities and poverty

We recognise that the quality of the environment varies widely within every nation and every locality, and that many studies show that the poorer communities regularly suffer the worst environments. UNEP should also develop an understanding on how to address needs of the poorest communities.

We express our concerns about the environment inequalities and welcome moves within Europe to address issues of environmental justice. We note the work being done by many agencies at national and regional level to tackle health inequalities and call on UNEP to start the development of similar methodologies to help identify and minimise environmental inequalities.

UNEP should ensure that the special attention in assessing environmental justice including gender aspects, should be given to marginalized ethnic groups, such as for instance the Roma People in central and Eastern Europe.

There is often a direct and active link between poverty, environmental degradation and consumption and production. UNEP should contribute to poverty reduction strategies developed and implemented by the UN system, and in particular should continue to develop and strengthen cooperation with UNDP, including the development of National Strategies on Sustainable Development and PRSP, CAS (Country Assistance Strategies), etc. by using references to environmental concerns such as risk assessments and indicators such as ecological footprints, social debt etc.

Governance

The participants expressed concern over governance issues in international fora, and suggested that:

- Better cooperation and coordination should be established between different UN agencies, programmes and the MEAs
- The MEAs should be moved back under UNEP coordination
- The specific role of NGOs in capacity building programmes should be stressed
- A special NGO support sub-programme in each capacity building and assistance programme should be established
- NGOs should be involved in the assessment of technology transfer ensuring only environmentally friendly technologies transfer
- The WTO should never be allowed to have the final say in matters relating to the environment, environmental protection as well as sustainable development.

- UNEP be encouraged to develop a platform for partnerships with environmental NGOs and business/ private sector to ensure West-East-North-South transfer of knowledge and environment-friendly technologies
- The status of environmental ministries in countries in transition should be enhanced.
- The environmental pillar of sustainable development should be strengthened
- Domination and dictatorship of nations, regional and sub-regional blocks and groups of countries should be prevented and is unacceptable. Where consensus has been reached in a transparent, accountable and participatory manner, no opportunity for veto should be permitted.
- Governments should be dissuaded from blocking progressive and creative initiatives from groups of countries or civil society and refrain from intimidating these actors.
- Assistance should be given to countries in transition to implement MEAs
- UNEP be called upon to support initiatives and facilitate the development of National Sustainable Development Strategies in countries where they do not exist, and support the establishment of National Councils for Sustainable Development with full participation of civil society
- UNEP be called upon to consistently promote globally the implementation of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration and the UN ECE Convention on Public Participation, Access to Information and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.
- Efforts are continued to adopt the Earth Charter

Addressing Gender issues is not only a symbolic exercise – promoting the WAVE process

- The UNEP initiative on organising the First Women’s Assembly on Environment: WAVE – “Women as the Voice for the Environment” was warmly welcomed. The meeting underscored the outcomes of the WAVE and expects that UNEP and its partners as well as national governments and different stakeholder groups will play proactive roles and take concrete steps to implement the outcomes and move the WAVE process forward
- UNEP should take a lead in developing guidelines for implementation of gender tools in international environmental policy
- Gender issues must be recognised and addressed in all environmental decisions, documents, National Development Plans and strategies etc.

Phasing out unsustainable production and consumption patterns

- UNEP should make significant efforts to implement the WSSD decision to "encourage and promote the development of a 10-year framework of programmes in support of regional and national initiatives to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production to promote social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems." UNEP should promote the development of national strategies and action plans on SPAC⁶ issues.
- To make sure poverty eradication and environmental protection receive equal attention both in analysis and implementation, special attention to ensure SPAC patterns in relation to fair trade regimes is needed.
- Technical and financial support and follow-up to further the development of the “Sustainable Consumption OPPS for Europe” should be enhanced.
- UNEP ROE is urged to explore and develop cooperation with pan-European NGOs working on SPAC issues.

⁶ SPAC – sustainable consumption and production

- The meeting also stressed the need to increase the environmental performance of UNEP offices and UNEP publications by better use of recycled papers, avoiding unnecessary use of plastics, etc.

Playing significant role in UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development

- UNEP as an initiator, promoter and supporter of the environmental education process (starting in 1975 in Belgrade and followed-up by the Tbilisi -1977 Global EE Conference and beyond) should take a lead in strengthening and further developing the environmental pillar of Education for Sustainable Development and providing stronger links with the economic and social pillars.
- We call on UNEP to take a proactive role in cooperation with UNESCO, UNECE, UNDP and other UN agencies and programmes in the implementation of the UN Decade on ESD at global, regional and national levels, to support regional and national implementation processes, including developing and implementing regional strategies on ESD, national strategies and action plans, provide support to sub-regional and local initiatives of CSOs on ESD.
- We urge UNEP to ensure that human values and sustainable consumption and production patterns are placed at heart of the ESD processes.
- As ESD is both a political commitment and a developing concept, it also needs urgently concrete action at different levels. We call upon UNEP to start immediately by
 - Initiating and supporting the regional needs assessments in the area of ESD and take a lead in EE needs assessment
 - Stressing and providing strong interlinkages with other environmental and SD processes at all levels
 - Supporting development of ESD materials and tools
 - Using the GEO report as educational tools
 - Involving mass media in active awareness processes
 - Supporting civil society initiatives on ESD

In addition, we call upon UNEP to work to have special officers in UNEP Regional Offices responsible for DESD (environmental pillar) and identify focal points for ESD in UNEP regions and at national levels.

Promoting further work on Environment and Health issues

We consider the WHO-EURO Environment and Health process to be a very important way to address the impact that environmental problems exerts on the human health. The UNEP GC should therefore consider a more active role for UNEP involvement in this process and support efforts to further promote and globalise this process.

Water, Sanitation and Human Settlements issues

We stress the importance for UNEP to work on the implementation of the JPOI and EU Water Initiative launched at the WSSD and in particular contribute to the activities aimed at

- Ensuring the right for all to have access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation and working to reduce by half by 2015 the number of people having no access to safe drinking water and sanitation
- Developing integrated water resources management plans in all countries
- Actively support and promote involvement of civil society in this process

UNEP publications and special focus on further work on GEO Reports

- As CSOs are natural allies in promoting the Global Environmental Outlooks (GEO), especially at national level, we ask UNEP both to pay more attention to distribution as well as to better utilisation of the GEO reports and to develop a clear plan (strategy) to improve this, including increased budget allocation for the translation of the GEO reports into ALL UN languages.
- Youth environment NGOs be specifically integrated in the GEO 2007 Process. Developing a specific GEO for European Youth Project will further strengthen the cooperation between UNEP ROE and youth NGOs.
- We, CSOs representatives of the European region, offer UNEP our assistance in promoting, translating and distributing the report.
- We encourage UNEP to develop sub-regional GEO reports and ask governments to financially support development of such reports (e.g. for Carpathian region, the Danube region etc.), and continue the work already launched on the Caucasian region.

UNEP Work Programme 2006-2007

UNEP as a UN programme does not expect to fulfill its mandate alone. It counts on co-operation with other UN agencies and programmes, national governments, private sector and CSOs. There are many references to CSOs (NGOs) in the UNEP Work Programme, and we as representatives of CSOs are interested and committed to contribute our experience, knowledge and enthusiasm to the effective implementation of this Programme.

We have the following comments to the Work Programme 2006-7:

- **It is important that UNEP clarifies the role of CSOs in consultations with the UNEP Work Programme.** CSOs can help to identify priorities for the Biennium from the civil society perspective and thus help the governments to obtain feedback from CSOs on the goals set up by the UNEP Governing Council. We recommend to provide Regional Civil Society Fora with the draft Work Programme, so the comments from CSOs may be given to governments at least 10 weeks prior to a session of the GC.
- **The Draft Programme in its present shape does not reflect well enough the priorities and key opportunities offered by the political agenda beyond UNEP.** A consideration of the calendar of all key events and deadlines that will take place in the run up to, and during, the Biennium would be useful, in order to examine key opportunities that UNEP and CSOs may together strategically want to seize (e.g. High Level 5-year Review of the MDGs in September 2005, UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014, objective of JPOA to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, launching of GEO-4 in 2007, 5th anniversary of the WSSD in 2007).
- **While the Work Programme contains numerous references to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it does not contemplate the impact that the High Level 5-year Review of the MDGs in September 2005 may have on their future.** NGOs and Environment Ministers from all parts of the world participating in the 23rd UNEP GC in 2005 will want to discuss the plans that go beyond the Biennium starting in 2006, as expectations from the run-up to the MDG High Level 5 Year Review will have increased considerably pursuant to the current Session of the UNGA adopting modalities for the review. UNEP and civil society organisations, especially advocacy NGOs, should work together to make it a priority to ensure that there is unprecedented political momentum for the High Level MDG+5 Review. They should also as share their respective plans for the MDG+5 Review, and identify possible synergies.

- **The Draft Programme contains many good and interesting projects with regard to biodiversity assessment and conservation.** Yet, it does not contain any reference to the objective that was adopted by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as well as by the Heads of States and Governments who signed the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOA), to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2010. The objective to end biodiversity loss by 2010 should be clearly stated, so that all proposed action regarding biodiversity can be assessed against its contribution to this objective.
- **CSOs join the UNEP Secretariat in saying that the proposed budget of little more than US \$239 million is ridiculously low for the task,** and ask the governments to seriously consider universal membership in UNEP Governing Council.
- **We strongly support that Governing Council sets up priorities for the seven expected accomplishments to secure maximum effectiveness of its work.** We recommend to focus especially on activities associated with Sustainable Consumption and Education on Sustainable Development and assistance to the implementation of the Carpathian Convention. It will also help to classify the seven sub-programme activities by cluster of environmental topics (environmental law, biodiversity, forests, ocean, climate, etc) for a better insight on where UNEP Secretariat's proposed priorities lie.

The meeting expressed strongly that special attention needs to be given to the area of biodiversity conservation, food safety as well as genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Time and again all participants strongly reiterated the need for real commitment from national governments to implementation in all matters relating to the environment and sustainable development.

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