

Key Messages from Children & Youth

to the 11th Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum

Introduction

Children and Youth under the age of 25 constitute half of the world's population. We're announcing with confidence that the sustainable future is coming! We're not pleading for change anymore, we're creating it ourselves. By reaching out and educating each other we're strengthening and expanding our global movement for positive change. We're raising to the challenge and have already started to implement practical solutions. Over the next 40 years we will commit our entire working lives to gradually transform our societies and create a sustainable future for ourselves and for all future generations. Children & Youth are ready, and we're expecting you to follow. The sustainability era is here!

With respect to International Environmental Governance and Sustainable Development

- COP15 made us very disappointed. United Nations became the Divided Nations and observers were locked out of the room. It's more clear than ever that an IEG reform is needed in order to ensure the survival of all countries and peoples.
- We call on governments from all nations to show capability of moving beyond self-interests and to do what is best for the greater good. If we can't trust our appointed leaders to save the world, it won't take long before Children & Youth kick you out of office and take your place. We can't accept any further delay.
- Environment must be given increased attention in the multilateral system as well as on national level. UNEP must get universal membership and be restructured in a way that brings IEG to the top of the global agenda. Form follows function.
- We call on governments to read the Earth Charter and endorse it as a basis for IEG and sustainable development.
- Children & Youth wish to call for increased participation by all major groups and stakeholders from all regions of the world. We believe that each group brings unique perspectives that must be heard in both decision-making processes and in the implementation of IEG, and we are the future members of all the major groups.
- Children & Youth are moral stakeholders since our future is at stake. We're thinking outside the box, contribute with inspiration and bring new creative solutions.
- In order to decrease costs and carbon footprints of conferences, we encourage the use of virtual meetings within IEG processes when appropriate.

- Children & Youth welcome the Rio+20 conference to be held in 2012, and wish to be recognised as important contributors both in the preparation process and in the conference itself. Rio+20 must be focused on practical solutions and implementation of decisions that will lead us to the sustainable future.

With respect to Green Economy

- We find ourselves in a serious situation and must stop seeking satisfaction from buying stuff we don't need. This is an opportunity to redefine our common values and goals in life. Happiness, justice, human relationships, time in nature and healthy activities are more important than material consumption.
- Economics cannot anymore be based on the idea of continual exponential growth. Our world needs a total system change and a new paradigm for sustainability.
- Those governments who take the lead in transforming our economic system into sustainability will become the superpowers of the 21st century. You better get on board with no delay, or you'll be left behind the rest of the world.
- We urge all governments to immediately stop using the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of success.
- Innovative sources of funding are needed in order to solve environmental problems, such as a global financial transaction tax.
- A tax reform should be implemented to make ecological consumption cheaper, and remove unsustainable practices such as fossil fuel subsidies.
- Solve social and environmental problems by giving employees more free time instead of increased salary. With less money we'll buy less stuff. New jobs get created for the unemployed and lifestyles become more sustainable.
- Youth want green jobs now!

With respect to Biodiversity and Ecosystems

- Children & Youth are desperately aware that humans are currently on track of becoming the first species that knowingly and consciously drives ourselves into extinction. We love life and won't let that happen.
- The rapid ongoing extinction of species caused by humans is an extreme tragedy. Pushing the deadline for meeting the biodiversity targets literally means death and loss with no return. We call upon governments to urgently prioritise this issue and give us a reason to celebrate this International Year of Biodiversity.
- Humans are dependent on biodiversity and ecosystems. Decisions should never be made with the illusion that we can disconnect ourselves from the natural environment to which we belong.

- Humans are just a part of the web of life on Earth, we do not stand above other species. All species have intrinsic value, not only instrumental. We should not view the world from an anthropocentric perspective alone.
- Children & Youth welcome the establishment of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), but it's important to keep in mind that no science is value-neutral. We want to see natural sciences combined with social sciences such as environmental philosophy, human ecology and human behaviour studies.

With respect to the Chemicals Conventions

- When dealing with hazardous chemicals, it's important to remember that we're borrowing the Earth from our children. Generations to come deserve safe and healthy lives and we have no right to destroy everything.
- Commitment is needed to zero waste and a toxics free future.
- The four pillars of Chemical Reform include community's right to know, the precautionary principle, substitution and elimination, and no data/no market.
- A successful synergy of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions must be based on equity across countries, stakeholders participation and respect to future generations.
- It is important to ensure harmonization upwards so that dealing with chemicals from a lifecycle approach is used for strengthening the three conventions.

Conclusion

- You have the power, we have the energy. Use your power to give us the framework we need, and we'll use our passion to steer the world on course!