

Asia Pacific Regional Statement to the Ninth Global Civil Society Forum and the Tenth Special Session of UNEP's Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

Seoul, Republic of North Korea, 25 - 26 October 2007

1. Introduction

“The Asia Pacific pays high price for progress”. GEO 4 Report Launch, Seoul, 26 October 2007

This regional message is on behalf of participants of the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Consultations, which was convened in Seoul during 25-26 October 2007, as a joint effort between UNEP and the Eco-Peace Leadership Centre. 54 participants representing all major groups including representatives from various networks, advocacy groups, technical experts and grassroots NGOs, from all 5 sub-regions of the region namely: North East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the South Pacific participated in the 2 day consultations.

The consultations were to prepare Asia Pacific civil society's participation in the 9th Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) that will be held in February 2008 prior to the 10th Special Session of UNEP's Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF). The theme of the consultations was: “Globalization and the Environment: Mobilizing Finance to meet the Climate Challenge”. The meeting also deliberated on the UNEP Medium Term Strategy and options for Enhancing Major Group's Participation at UNEP's Governance Level. It discussed the Global Environment Outlook (GEO 4) report and also looked at issues related to poverty and environment, as a key concern for the Asia Pacific region.

2. Civil Society Engagement in the Asia-Pacific

The Asia Pacific region is home to nearly 60% of the world population – approx. 4 billion out of nearly 7 billion people. It has 3 of the world's most populous countries, 3 of the world's largest countries, 2 of the least populated, 13 least developed countries, 12 landlocked countries, and 17 small island developing countries. The region is endowed with a rich diversity of natural, social, human and economic resources. The length of the coastline is two-thirds the global total, and it has the world's largest mountain chain. New directions in environmental paradigm in the region are characterized by the following:

- from growth to sustained growth, and towards well-being and happiness;
- from reactive environmental management to proactive and prevention-based and sustainable approaches; and
- from primarily global focus to regional, sub-regional, bilateral cooperation.

UNEP has identified four strategic directions for its work in the Asia Pacific. These strategic directions ensure decisions of the UNEP Governing Council are effectively implemented in the region, while taking into account regional concerns/priorities, namely:

- Promote Regional Cooperation;
- Strengthen the Environment Community;
- Identify and Respond to Emerging issues; and
- Leadership by Example through Demonstration Projects.

Within the ambit of these strategic directions, four focus areas have been identified, viz.:

- Climate Change;
- Urbanization;
- Mainstreaming Environment; and
- Atmospheric Brown Cloud.

Through the strategic direction of “strengthening the environmental community”, UNEP is enhancing

engagement with civil society in the Asia Pacific. The meeting supports the strategic directions and focus areas, and encourages further civil society engagement in the Asia-Pacific.

Recommendations:

- *Enhanced civil society engagement in the Asia Pacific within the framework of the strategic directions of UNEP in the region;*
- *Need for a stronger regional platform to promote information exchange, foster partnerships and promote strategic capacity building for the civil society community in the Asia Pacific;*
- *Development of an Asia Pacific regional civil society strategy, articulating sub-regional priorities and institutions, networking mechanisms, and pilot projects;*
- *Possibility of sub-regional civil society networks and conduct sub-regional consultations prior to the annual regional consultations; and*
- *Strengthen the role of UNEP Eco Peace Leadership Centre as a regional hub for civil society engagement, with focus on networking (through the annual regional civil society consultations), capacity building (through the Leadership Programme) and applied research and pilot projects.*

3. Regional Issues and Recommendations for UNEP's 10th GCSF theme: “Globalization and the Environment: Mobilizing Finance to meet the Climate Challenge”

The Earth's surface is warming. This is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level. Other major impacts include changes in water availability, land degradation, food security, and loss of biodiversity. The projected increase in frequency and intensity of heat waves, storms, floods and droughts would dramatically affect many millions of people including those in small island states. While in the past century the global average temperature increased by 0.74°C, the best estimate of the IPCC for additional warming over the current century is projected to be from 1.8°C to 4.0°C. Some experts have identified a 2°C increase in the global mean temperature above pre-industrial temperatures as a threshold beyond which climate impacts become significantly more severe, and the threat of major, irreversible damage may be plausible. This implies emission reductions of 60-80% by 2050 in developed countries.

Recommendations:

a. Finance the transition to a “sustainable” low carbon economy, including through new investment flows and markets

- *It is necessary to take into consideration the different stages of development, various and multiple sources of financing mechanisms in the region;*
- *Need to address the disconnect between actions and benefits in existing mechanisms - benefits remain primarily at the higher national levels and actions for transition to a low carbon economy are at the micro/individual or local levels;*
- *Decisions should be at community level and information should be made available for informed decisions/choices;*
- *Community level project funding should be made available, and a bottom up collective resource mobilization and investment should be explored;*
- *Current uncertainty of the climate change regime poses a detriment for transition to a low carbon economy;*
- *Current mechanisms to promote the transition to a low carbon economy, such as CDM, require further reform and improvement in order to achieve better efficiency in emission reduction/carbon sequestration and sustainable development; a multidisciplinary approach in evaluating and assessing the impact of these existing projects and mechanisms should be done with the full and effective participation of local communities and civil society towards identifying ways forward;*
- *Need to connect CDM with medium and small scale initiatives, as opposed to large scale and easily implementable projects;*
- *Under the CDM and market mechanisms investment should be made in local technologies while making better use of local knowledge/practice;*

- *Transition to a sustainable low carbon economy can be promoted through approaches such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Socially Responsible Investment (CSI), Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI);*
- *The Polluter Pays Principle should be applied to finance the transition to a sustainable low carbon economy;*
- *Economic incentives, such as subsidies, tax breaks, etc. for environmental services especially those by local communities should be promoted for transition;*
- *Promote the effective use of the Adaptation Fund under Kyoto Protocol, GEF and other financing mechanisms and emphasis on assistance of developed countries to developing countries under the aegis of the UNFCCC; and*
- *The corporate and business sector should be mobilized to finance the transition to a low carbon economy.*

b. Access the finance required to adapt to change, especially for countries that are most vulnerable

- *Partnerships between CSO in vulnerable countries, with investing entities in developed countries should be encouraged to promote access to finances for transition to a low carbon economies;*
- *Local champions (individuals, companies, major groups etc.) should be identified and encouraged as a means to access further finances;*
- *The role of CSO advocacy and pressure on concerned governments should be strengthened, which could lead to better access to resources;*
- *Public loans, taxes, incentives should also constitute the finance portfolio;*
- *NGO initiated financing mechanisms should be encouraged;*
- *Self-reliant finance mechanisms at the individual, corporate and national levels should be explored. To complement these, multilateral and bilateral financing (grants, loans) should also be enhanced;*
- *Enlarging adaptation funds to cover disaster prevention and mitigation could provide access to additional resources;*
- *Subsidies/rebate and support for environmental technologies can facilitate the transition to a low carbon economy; and*
- *Need to promote better access to finance and technical support and services at the grassroots levels.*

c. Create both an enabling and sustainable policy and regulatory environment for the transition

- *Strengthen government implementation and monitoring of policies;*
- *Need to strengthen governance and management mechanisms to build capacity including multi-stakeholder partnerships, technology transfer, and community mobilization;*
- *Awareness, education and advocacy efforts should be intensified;*
- *Policies to use revenues from carbon credits and taxes for public education on environmental sustainability should be initiated;*
- *In addition to regulatory policy encompassing efficiency standards and legislation, Governments should look at incentives and disincentives as policy instruments to facilitate the transition to a low carbon society;*
- *Compliance and enforcement efforts need to be strengthened.*

d. Achieve multiple environmental objectives and avoid unintended environmental consequences, through the transition and through adaptation measures

- *In the transition to a low carbon economy, and through adaptation measures, key areas for multiple benefits include biodiversity, pollution control on air, water and land quality, and disaster prevention through sustainable management systems;*
- *The displacement of populations “Environmental refugees” due to migration resulting from climate change impact is an upcoming issue, which needs immediate attention for appropriate policy development and action;*
- *It is imperative to consult stakeholders, as key actors in the mitigation and adaptation processes (stakeholders include industry, villagers, youth, civil society, indigenous people and women) to achieve multiple environmental objectives;*

- *The sharing of information and transfer of appropriate technology could facilitate multiple environmental objectives;*
- *To achieve multiple benefits, a framework should be developed and used for: Prioritization of what needs to be done; and Building consensus among stakeholders;*
- *Strong measures are needed by concerned agencies to ensure that development initiatives, including options for low carbon economy i.e. biofuel plantations and renewable energy projects do not impact negatively on the physical and social environment. The free, prior and informed consent of local communities host to any development initiatives should be sought before any undertaking commences and their full and effective participation ensured.*

e. Identify linkages to wealth generation and poverty eradication through the transition and through implementing adaptation measures

- *It is a recognized fact that the most vulnerable peoples and sectors of society live in some of the richest ecosystems. Their ecosystems services, such as sustainable environmental management practices and maintaining carbon sinks, are invaluable ;*
- *CDM and climate change related market mechanism should be made more compatible with sustainable development objectives and should not be narrowly restricted to mere carbon sequestration;*
- *Promote livelihood options which are closely linked to climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, such as community managed eco-tourism ;*
- *Consider eligibility of small-scale and community initiatives as CDM projects for preserving ecosystem services;*
- *Put into place mechanisms at national level for flow of funds to local level.*
- *Free trade agreements and economic partnership agreements should be promoted in a manner compatible with sustainable and rights-based development; the concept of fair trade also should be taken into consideration; and*
- *Promotion of small scale agriculture and renewable energy industries.*

Additional recommendations:

- *Integrating climate change issues in education curriculum and promoting education for women and youth;*
- *Promotion of low carbon indigenous technologies and practices, and provision of seed money;*
- *Facilitate environmental governance and Harmonization of policies and programs among and between international agencies, governments, civil societies on climate change;*
- *Promote change of individual lifestyle and behaviour towards low carbon use and encourage strong and equitable partnership among stakeholders, especially the youth, government, and UNEP;*
- *Ensure sufficient resources for UNEP in collaboration with other UN agencies to provide stakeholders with required support;*
- *Regional platform for information disclosure and sharing on environment should be established or strengthened; and*
- *Regional assessment on the mainstreaming of sustainability/environment in the educational programs particularly at university level in collaboration with United Nations should be promoted.*

4. The Global Environment Outlook (GEO4)

The meeting took note that UNEP's GEO4 is published 20 years after the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) produced its seminal report, Our Common Future. GEO4 reports on the state of the global environment, assesses the current state of the global atmosphere, land, water and biodiversity, and describes what has changed in the two decades. It highlights progress made in tackling some of the world's pressing environmental challenges, but also highlights an urgent call for action to address persistent environmental problems, such as climate change, deterioration of fisheries, and the extinction of species.

According to the GEO4, the Asia Pacific has made “remarkable” progress in reducing poverty, improving its ability to protect the environment, increasing energy efficiency, and provision of drinking water in the last decade. But this progress has come at a price. Increases in consumption and associated waste have contributed to the exponential growth in existing environmental problems. Serious challenges remain, including urban air quality, fresh water stress, agricultural land use and increased waste. Environmental and economic policies have not been fully integrated. It states that the ecosystems and human health in Asia Pacific continues to deteriorate, while population growth and rapid economic development have driven significant environmental degradation and loss of natural resources. The report specifically recognises the Asia-Pacific’s achievements in protecting its environment, a key to tackling poverty. Several countries in the Asia Pacific have already achieved many of the MDG targets and set themselves new and more demanding goals, called MDG Plus.

Recommendations:

- *Need to focus on disseminating the GEO4 report as widely as possible in the region;*
- *Need to highlight regional issues, such as disasters and chemicals; and*
- *Develop user-friendly version of GEO4 for different stakeholders, such as for youth.*

5. Enhancing Major Groups Participation at UNEP’s Governance Level

Cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme and civil society organizations spans more than three decades on a wide variety of levels, from technical cooperation through to policy development and governance. UNEP has consistently welcomed an ongoing dialogue and frank exchange of views with civil society – as it has long been recognized that civil society organizations can be substantive contributors to improving our understanding of the environment, and in developing innovative solutions to environmental challenges. These organizations, in turn, have become increasingly mobilized to collaborate in the UNEP decision making process.

The purpose of the Global Civil Society Forum, is to increase Civil Society influence and inputs into decision adopted by the GC/GMEF by informing Major Groups (MGs) and relevant civil society stakeholders about UNEP’s procedures and arrangements of the upcoming GC/GMEF, providing information about the latest developments on substance, allowing the different MGs the opportunity to have an exchange of views, and to facilitate the development of possible common positions of the Major Groups related to the topics discussed at the GC/GMEF.

To this end a draft paper on enhancing Major Groups participation at UNEP’s governance level was produced and had the elements below which the meeting discussed/considered and made recommendations towards the further development of enhancing major groups participation at UNEP:

For the Global Civil Society Steering Committee, three election scenarios were proposed:

- Scenario 1: Status Quo (Regional Elections Model – 2 members from each region)
- Scenario 2: Nine + Twelve Model (Nine representatives from each major group, plus twelve regional representatives which includes 2 members from each region)
- Scenario 3: Appointed Committee Model

For development of the Global Policy Statement presented at GC/GMEF, four scenarios were proposed:

- Scenario 1: Status Quo (single statement, major groups work together);
- Scenario 2: Independent Statements by individual major groups (9 statements, each major group work independently);
- Scenario 3: Independent Statements by individual major group working independently in each region (54 statements, each major group in different regions work independently);
- Scenario 4: Independent Statements by individual major groups from different region (various statements that may be combined per group from the major group, major groups work independently in each region).

Recommendations:

- - *There was a suggestion to retain the name of the Global Civil Society Steering Committee;*
 - *There was some perception that Major Groups model lacked dynamism and potential for regional disparity;*
 - *Suggestion for a hybrid structure with another lower tier ‘Sub-regional Major Groups’, which would enable consultation at the sub-regional level to be incorporated into one regional statement, without prejudice to stand-alone statements from stakeholders groups, if any;*
 - *There was appreciation by participants for more representative nature in Scenario 2 but the disadvantages of this scenario were thought to be real;*
 - *There was a suggestion to retain the status quo election scenario;*
 - *Consensus on the utility of one consolidated statement rather than nine separate statements;*
 - *Resources and mechanisms available to support the implementation of the proposed options/scenarios should be mobilised;*
 - *Scenarios should provide opportunity for consensus at the local and regional levels so as to reduce time and resource requirements at the global level;*
 - *Representation should be from credible institutions/groups; while the focus should be on problem-solving; and*
 - *Consensus on the necessity to develop and support sub-regional civil society networks in the Asia Pacific region.*

6. UNEP Medium Term Strategy

A consultation paper on the preparations of UNEP’s Medium Term Strategy (MTS) for the period 2010-2013 was circulated to participants. UNEP’s Senior Advisor on Policy and Operational Matters in the Executive Office made a presentation on the evolving process of developing the Medium Term Strategy.

Recommendations:

- *Civil society should have been provided with actual contents of the MTS rather than just information on the process;*
- *Wider level consultations with civil society is vital;*
- *Importance of ecosystems management is underscored;*
- *Emphasis on gender and education should be highlighted in the MTS; and*
- *Call for enhanced regional presence and delivery in the MTS;*

Participants welcome the possibility to contribute and participate in the Asia Pacific consultations on International Environmental Governance, to be convened towards the middle of 2008, in Sydney.

The participants thank EPLC and UNEP for the organization of the 2007 Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Meeting, and express optimism for enhanced civil society engagement and partnerships in the Asia Pacific region in the path towards sustainable development.