

North American Civil Society Statement to the Ninth Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum

November 16, 2005

1. This statement has been prepared by North American civil society organizations for the Ninth Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) to be held in February 2006 in Dubai. The statement is the product of discussions that took place at the North American Regional Civil Society Consultation convened by UNEP on October 28, 2005 in Washington, D.C. The members of North American civil society organizations that took part in the Consultation are listed at the end of this statement.¹ This statement should be considered on its own and in support of the Global Civil Society Statement that will be distributed at the GC/GMEF. This statement begins by offering observations and recommendations of overarching applicability, and then turns to the three main issue areas on the agenda of the GC/GMEF: chemicals management, energy and the environment, and tourism and the environment.
2. North American civil society organizations thank UNEP, including the Regional Office for North America (RONA) and the Major Groups and Stakeholders Branch, for convening the Civil Society Consultations and the Global Civil Society Forum. We welcome UNEP's commitment to facilitating meaningful participation by civil society in UNEP activities and in international and national processes, programs, and initiatives. We note that participatory rights of civil society have improved in several international fora (for example, those related to chemicals, especially the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management), yet those improvements continue to be resisted by some Governments. We commend UNEP for its inclusive and flexible understanding of participation and urge continued, expanded application of that understanding in all areas of UNEP's work program.
3. In the last five years, governments have endorsed important sustainability objectives in the Millennium Declaration, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and the Monterrey Consensus, among others. Many of these objectives pertain to environmental protection, and will require UNEP support and engagement. Moving to implement these commitments is critical, and will require the substantive involvement of all civil society partners. We call upon governments to act cooperatively to implement these commitments, in partnership with civil society.
4. The exceptional wealth, prestige, and technical expertise that the North American region enjoys place a significant responsibility on civil society and our governments—especially the United States—to provide sufficient leadership and resources to ensure that UNEP can accomplish its mandated tasks. We urge our governments to re-commit themselves to cooperate at all relevant levels in support of UNEP's mission, and to provide the necessary financial and technical resources that such cooperation will entail.

¹ Forum participants strove for consensus in reaching our conclusions. Nonetheless, the listing of participants' names at the end of this statement should not be interpreted as meaning that every listed individual or civil society organization necessarily endorses every point contained in the statement.

5. The Arctic has a special significance for the North American region because it bears a disproportionate burden from the harmful effects of certain industrial activities, in particular, those related to energy and chemicals production, use, and disposal. These harmful effects place the health and viability of Arctic traditional and indigenous cultures at grave risk. We urge the GC/GMEF, UNEP, Governments, and civil society organizations to redouble their efforts to alleviate the impacts of these harms and to eliminate their root causes.

6. We further urge UNEP to facilitate the sustained, active participation of North American indigenous peoples, tribes, and organizations, as well as other under-represented minorities and groups (including members of the environmental justice movement), in UNEP-related processes and activities.

7. In view of the frequency and recurring devastation of natural disasters, UNEP, in cooperation with appropriate relief and aid agencies and intergovernmental organizations, should develop, promote, and increase the preparedness of relevant entities to implement post-disaster emergency and reconstruction plans that incorporate sustainable and environmentally sound approaches to waste disposal and cleanup; rebuilding of transportation systems, energy systems, and other infrastructure; restoration of agricultural and industrial capacity; and provision of emergency and permanent housing.

8. The promotion of education, sustainable agricultural practices, workers' rights (including the right to know), prior informed consent of affected communities, and increased participation of under-represented minorities and groups in decision-making enhances sustainable development, including with respect to chemicals management, energy, and tourism.

Chemicals Management

9. Chemicals offer many societal benefits, but the improper or inadequate management of chemicals, including substances in products and wastes and from accidents and releases, threatens the human rights to life, health, and well-being of all people, especially children and future generations. We pledge ourselves to fundamental reform of chemicals management policies and practices throughout the world—including those that will stimulate the design of safer chemicals, products, and production systems—as an essential step to creating a safe and healthy global environment.

10. As a major producer and consumer of chemicals, the North American region possesses significant technical and financial resources that can contribute to global solutions. Consequently, we believe North America has special responsibilities not only to develop products that improve the health and quality of life around the world, but also to be a global leader in chemical management strategies and innovations that lead to safer products, processes, and systems.

11. The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), as the action plan for achieving, by 2020, that chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment,² is a crucial

² The 2020 goal was adopted as part of paragraph 23 of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

part of the global effort to protect human health and the environment and promote sustainable development. Civil society organizations demand vigorous support and implementation of the SAICM by all governments and relevant intergovernmental organizations, and we pledge our own equally vigorous commitment to ensure achievement of the 2020 goal.

12. With respect to the SAICM, governments and participating stakeholders should agree that:

- (a) The SAICM represents a political, moral, and ethical commitment to work toward achieving the 2020 goal;
- (b) The SAICM can succeed only if substantial new and additional funds become available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and only if such funds are used effectively;
- (c) Implementation of the SAICM must include measures to phase out and require safer substitutes and solutions when a chemical causes significant adverse effects to human health or the environment under its ordinary conditions of production, use, or disposal in a country;
- (d) The SAICM should embrace core principles and approaches of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, and other relevant international agreements, including the precautionary principle, liability and compensation, public participation (including for workers), comprehensive right-to-know laws, and the polluter pays principle; the SAICM should provide guidance on how these principles and approaches might be applied to sound chemicals management;
- (e) The institutional arrangements for implementation of the SAICM must be living, fully participatory, multi-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder. They should build upon the participatory practices of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS), but they should provide more authority, be better integrated into the United Nations system, and create a secretariat with sufficiently robust resources and mandate to ensure successful implementation.

13. Additionally, civil society organizations urge the GC/GMEF and Governments to make every effort to:

- (a) Phase out anthropogenic sources of mercury and other metals of concern by creating and implementing an effective and coordinated strategy for global reduction of supply, use and release, including through immediate reduction activities, the development of a legally binding global instrument on mercury, and the addition of methyl mercury to the list of chemicals in the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs);
- (b) Secure the ratification by all countries of the Stockholm Convention and other chemicals and wastes agreements including the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent; the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, including its Ban Amendment; the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London

Convention); the ILO Convention 170 Concerning Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work; and relevant regional chemicals and wastes agreements;

- (c) Encourage donor countries and donor agencies to provide new and additional financial and technical assistance that enables developing countries and countries with transitional economies to implement fully all of their commitments under international chemicals and wastes agreements and initiatives;
- (d) Promote establishment of a chemical safety focal area within the Global Environment Facility (GEF) with new and additional funds to encompass the GEF's present POPs Operational Program, additional operational programs that support implementation of other chemicals conventions and initiatives on mercury and other metals of concern, and integrated approaches to chemicals management called for in the SAICM;
- (e) Support and strengthen the capacity of the UNEP Chemicals Branch to facilitate the implementation of chemicals-related multilateral agreements and initiatives and to assist governments and civil society in global actions for the sound management of chemicals;
- (f) Encourage UNEP to collaborate with the International Labor Organization, the World Health Organization, and other relevant organizations to identify opportunities for promoting consistency between occupational and environmental protection from chemicals and for monitoring health and chemical exposures of workers and the general population.

Energy and the Environment

14. Energy is a critical underpinning of sustainable development, poverty eradication, and attainment of many of the internationally agreed goals of the Millennium Declaration. Yet some 2.4 billion people in developing countries lack modern fuels for cooking and heating and approximately 1.6 billion people do not have access to electricity. Energy services such as lighting, heating, cooking, motive power, mechanical power, mobility and telecommunications are essential for socio-economic development. Energy poverty is a pressing problem and a barrier to sustainable development for many poorer rural communities in North America, including aboriginal peoples in the northern and circumpolar regions. Energy poverty also arises when natural disasters destroy infrastructure and disrupt energy service delivery.

15. Globally, demand for energy services is growing rapidly in developed and developing countries. North America is a major consumer of energy and the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. Non-OECD GHG emissions are expected to surpass those of OECD countries after 2020.

16. The Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that the Earth has warmed and its climate has changed on both global and regional scales since the pre-industrial era, with most of the warming during the last 50 years attributable to human activities, primarily the combustion of fossil fuels. Projected rates of warming threaten significant and potentially devastating effects, demonstrating that it is critical for countries to implement fully and expeditiously the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, its Kyoto Protocol, and related climate change agreements, policies, and partnerships.

17. Energy infrastructure investments of some 16 trillion dollars US will be required by 2030 to meet projected global demand for energy services.³ The current energy infrastructure is unsustainable, vulnerable to natural disasters, and woefully insufficient in many developing countries, particularly in poorer rural communities.

18. Access to secure and affordable sustainable energy is a national priority for many countries, and there is unprecedented focus and demand for action by the public. There is tremendous scope for the deployment and use of more environmentally friendly and efficient energy technologies and related demand side management, particularly in North America.

19. In light of these challenges and opportunities, civil society organizations recommend that the GMEF/GC and individual Governments:

- (a) Request UNEP to initiate and complete a multi-stakeholder process to develop a compelling vision for development based on affordable and secure access to environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable energy services. This vision should prioritize meeting the demand for energy services rather than simply increasing energy supply;
- (b) Mandate UNEP to develop and implement a program to train energy policymakers to understand the implications of energy issues by evaluating the environmental, social, and economic sustainability performance of conventional, emerging, and clean energy technologies (e.g. efficiency, centralized and decentralized renewables, “clean-coal,” nuclear energy, carbon capture and storage, hydrogen), and considering how to promote enabling frameworks for sustainable energy technology innovation and dissemination;
- (c) Advance the technical development and commercial viability of renewable energy systems by implementing a supportive policy framework as outlined by the “Policy Recommendations for Renewable Energies” emerging from the International Conference for Renewable Energies, Bonn 2004; and by committing long-term financial support to the Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP);
- (d) Request UNEP to facilitate a discussion of existing and potential technologies to promote energy efficiency and the enabling policy and implementation frameworks that would support more widespread use of these options;
- (e) Commit to developing and implementing international frameworks and initiatives for reducing global greenhouse gas emissions after 2012 (when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends) and promoting adaptation in vulnerable regions and communities in accordance with best available scientific understanding of climate science;
- (f) Publicly report all government subsidies related to the production and consumption of energy; Governments should collectively agree to phase out all environmentally and socially harmful subsidies over the next decade;

³ INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY, WORLD ENERGY OUTLOOK 2004, Executive Summary at 2, available at <http://www.iea.org/textbase/npsum/WEO2004SUM.pdf>.

- (g) Request UNEP to complete a full energy audit of UN facilities, implement energy efficiency, commit to purchase the most sustainably available energy, use flex-fuel or alternative-fuelled vehicles, and offset its greenhouse gas emissions; UNEP should define energy performance indicators, and monitor and report on the basis of them;
- (h) Commit to significant investments in raising awareness at all educational levels about energy efficiency, renewable energy, clean energy systems, global climate change, and air pollution.

Tourism and the Environment

20. Tourism plays an important role in the global economy and in the livelihoods of millions of people across the world. More than 8% of all jobs are linked to tourism and travel. Tourism can have key impacts in the fight to reduce poverty and in progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. For 40% of developing countries, tourism is the main source of foreign exchange.

21. Because of its dependence on a healthy global environment, the tourism industry is acutely sensitive to environmental change and degradation, including from chemicals, wastes, and climate change effects. Tourism can play a positive role in promoting a shift to cleaner energy consumption, “zero waste” strategies, and best practices in the responsible production, use, and disposal of chemicals.

22. Principles of sustainable tourism have been articulated in a number of declarations and charters during the last 25 years. Recognizing the significant effect of tourism on global and local environmental, social, and economic trends, such principles should be applied beyond “eco-tourism” to all types of tourism. Sustainable tourism principles should also be applied to post-disaster reconstruction efforts.

23. Building on Paragraph 43 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, we call upon the GC/GMEF and Governments to:

- (a) Recognize the important contributions to sustainable tourism made by the World Tourism Organization and UNESCO;
- (b) Request Ministers to design country-specific sustainable tourism policies;
- (c) Encourage the application of international labor rights norms in the tourism context, noting the first global Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment hosted by UNEP in January 2006;
- (d) Recognize the impact of tourism on the mandates of various UN agencies, for example UNDP’s Poverty Alleviation Programs; clarify the mandates of organizations and agencies within the UN system in respect to tourism, and advocate for better coordination among such entities;
- (e) Convene a meeting of Ministers of the Environment, along with their counterpart country representatives to the World Tourism Organization, to review and implement the

UNEP/WTO publication, “Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers”;

- (f) Include tourism indicators in UNEP’s Global Environmental Outlook, acknowledging both the negative impacts of tourism and the positive impacts of sustainable tourism policies;
- (g) Promote tourism frameworks that encourage the retention of greater portions of tourism receipts in local economies;
- (h) Explore the issue of offsetting and decreasing carbon emissions from civil aviation related to tourism; encourage UNEP to offset carbon emissions produced by UNEP employee flights, and support sustainable tourism infrastructure in agency events, whenever possible;
- (i) Integrate environmental and tourism planning to ensure the inclusion of sustainable management practices, particularly in non-protected areas;
- (j) In light of Paragraph 145 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome adopted by the UN General Assembly, request local authorities to ensure that, when bidding for mega-sporting events such as the Olympic Games, provisions for sustainable tourism education are incorporated into such bids and sustainable tourism policies are codified into law to ensure compliance;
- (k) Recognize that hosting such mega-events provides opportunities for local authorities to redesign transport and infrastructure systems in ways that can improve the health of humans and ecosystems;
- (l) Request that UNEP prepare a report on the opportunities offered by post-disaster reconstruction with respect to the planning and management of tourism, including the possibility of long-term benefits to local economies and environments;
- (m) Request UNEP to examine whether existing “green” tourism certification schemes can and should be streamlined, with the goal of increasing accountability and promoting consumer support and action;
- (n) Urge UNEP to ensure that the budget implications related to tourism be taken into account in the preparation of the next UNEP biennial budget; ensure that all of the recommendations in this statement are fully funded in the budget.

Concluding Recommendation

24. In light of the importance of the issues and the substantial amount of time and financial resources that civil society organizations and UNEP devote to the Global Civil Society Forum, including the Regional Consultations, we request the Executive Director of UNEP to report to each GC/GMEF on how UNEP, Governments, and others responded to the recommendations and requests included in the Regional Statements and Global Civil Society Statement that were presented at the preceding GC/GMEF.

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