

# Battle of sustainable development will be won or lost in Asia

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back from Phnom Penh, Cambodia

MAURICE Strong's words that "the battle of sustainable development will be won or lost in Asia" was echoed at the Asia-Pacific Roundtable on Sustainable Development and the High-Level Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, from 27-29 November 2001. Attended by over 190 representatives from 46 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) States, two associate members of ESCAP, four non ESCAP UN member States, and over 220 representatives from UN agencies, multilateral financing institutions, NGOs and other stakeholders, the Regional Meeting produced two outcomes: a Chairman's Summary of the Roundtable; and the Phnom Penh Regional Platform on Sustainable Development for Asia and the Pacific (Platform), which includes a regional assessment of Agenda 21 implementation, key issues and priorities for sustainable development, follow-up actions, and financing sustainable development. Delegates braved marathon negotiations that stretched early into the morning hours on the last day to produce a Platform that many described as perhaps the best of the products coming out of the five regional preparatory meetings for the WSSD. But the representatives of civil society and media argued that consultation process still lacks people's participation.

In his welcoming address, ESCAP Executive Secretary Kim Hak-Su emphasized the region's interest in an open, participatory and transparent UNCED review process. He said the Roundtable was convened to consolidate the assessment of achievements, identify major constraints and new initiatives, and make new commitments toward overcoming constraints and fostering progress.

The Roundtable chair Cielito Habito stressed the need to: consider sustainable development holistically and in an integrated manner at the sectoral, planning, governance and implementation levels; focus on the "how to" elements of achieving sustainable development; and find concrete ways to operationalize partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector.

Host Cambodian Minister of Environment Mok Mareth highlighted water, coastal and transboundary issues and called for: adaptive approaches to address sustainable development at the national level; poverty reduction through multi-sectoral, gender-integrated economic growth; and collaboration between developed and developing countries for technology development and skills transfer.

Introducing the draft Platform, Ravi Sawhney of Environment and Natural Resources Development Division, ESCAP, expressed hope that the meeting would communicate to the global process the central role of the Asia-Pacific region in sustainable development, and highlighted challenges associated with the region's diversity.

Outlining the East Asia and Pacific Regional Roundtable held from 9-11 July 2001, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Nordin H.J. Hasan (Malaysia) said the Roundtable emphasized, inter alia: a sustainable development philosophy based on local and regional values and lifestyles, which are subject to commercialism and consumerism; poverty as an impediment to achieving sustainable development; and a multilateral approach to food security.

Noting that the region comprises approximately half of the world's population, Asylbek Aidaraliev (Kyrgyzstan) highlighted the issues discussed at the Roundtable held from 30 July to 1 August 2001, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, such as globalization, socioeconomic issues, international governance reform, financial resources and technology transfer, consumerism, and peace and security.

Bulat Yessekin (Kazakhstan) said that the Central Asia meeting identified water management as a major concern and supported an initiative to create public subregional sustainable development forums. Reporting on outcomes of the stakeholders' meeting, Andrey Aranbaev (Uzbekistan) noted the lack of implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and concerns relating to water, desertification and biodiversity, and drew attention to the need for a subregional coordination mechanism on agreements relating to natural resource use and management.

On behalf of stakeholders of the South Asia subregion, Raghunathan Rajamani (India) called for action to eliminate pov-

erty, control population growth, promote accountability, consider issues of governance, enhance global market access, and ensure implementation of the Rio accords.

For the Southeast Asia region, Delfin Ganapin (Philippines), noting the importance of civil society participation and good governance, called for capacity building to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development, including moral and religious aspects, and for the establishment of a regional sustainable development information center.

Park Eun-kyung (Republic of Korea) highlighted the main issues identified at the Northeast Asia subregional meeting, including participation of major groups, education, desertification and land degradation, and biodiversity loss.

Karibaiti Taaba (Republic of Kiribati) noted key issues for the Pacific region such as ocean management, climate change, island vulnerability, energy, health and governance, capacity building, and financial resources for sustainable development.

Reporting on regional industry consultations held on 22 November 2001 in Bangkok, Thailand, Editha

access health services, education and employment. The Japanese Forum for Johannesburg emphasized: environmental education and enhancement of environmental awareness; strengthening of community activities; and effective partnerships among all sectors.

The Third World Network elaborated key sustainable development issues, globalization and militarism, and stated that if the region was proud to be a model of diversity, then it could not expect to have only one model of sustainable development.

The National Council of Women's Organizations called for a sustainable development plan including cultivation of intellectual and leadership qualities. The NeoSynthesis Research Center highlighted ecological restoration and shared examples of experiences and technology used in Sri Lanka to address environmental destruction.

The Asia-Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists noted the role of journalists in raising environmental awareness and supported creation of a regional information center. The World Assembly of Youth called on the WSSD to take

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Cabrera (San Miguel Corporation, the Philippines) called for, inter alia: integration of regional small- and medium-sized enterprises into sustainable development initiatives; improved consumer awareness; and consideration of the impacts of climate change on business.

Global Environmental Action (GEA) emphasized the leadership role of civil society organizations, particularly at the local level, and described a GEA initiative to support access to information among environmental NGOs in developing countries. The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) reported on the findings of its global survey on Local Agenda 21, noting elements of local sustainable development such as: high cooperation between all layers of government; investment in local leadership development; and a new culture of sustainability fostered by local government.

The Asian Women's Network presented a declaration from the Asian Women's Conference on Gender, Finance and Sustainable Development, held from 26-30 October 2001, highlighting, inter alia, increasing poverty and diminishing human insecurity. The Regional Institute for Environmental Technology proposed adding references in the draft Platform to investment as an aspect of economic transformation and to academia and corporate finance as stakeholder groups.

The Indonesian Forum for Environment stressed the need for more regional cooperation on issues such as the timber trade and depletion of fish stocks in the South Pacific, and the need to address high-level corruption, which has hindered the implementation of sustainable development. The Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia highlighted consultations among governments, NGOs and scientists from 11 former Soviet republics, which addressed issues such as poverty, political conflict, governance and public participation. APPROTECH Asia observed that in the draft Platform, biodiversity and natural resource conservation concerns focus on ex situ or "virtual" conservation, and called for text ensuring future access to genetic resources.

The Tebtebba Foundation, on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Peoples' Forum, pointed out critical sustainable development issues absent from the draft Platform, such as environmental and social security, biopiracy, misappropriation of resources by corporations, and alternative development approaches.

Stressing that gender is integral to sustainable development, the Asia-Pacific Peoples' Forum Women's Caucus highlighted the differentiated effects of globalization on women, such as severed

youth into special consideration in Agenda 21 implementation and with regard to participation in preparations and delegations to the WSSD.

The World Wide Fund for Nature-Philippines supported: multi-stakeholder sustainability assessments of trade policies to cover economic, social and environmental impacts; primacy of specific trade obligations set out in MEAs over relevant WTO rules; elimination of harmful subsidies; and inclusion of marine and freshwater biomes in the CBD. The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry noted the increasing marginalization of least developed countries (LDCs) and called for access by LDCs to developed country markets.

The Asian Disaster Reduction Center noted the increasing social and economic impacts of natural disasters, particularly in the region, and said the combat and reduction of natural disasters was insufficiently addressed in Agenda 21, calling for its consideration at the WSSD. IUCN drew attention to a South Asian initiative highlighting possible regional environment conflicts and hotspots and called for civil society involvement in deliberations.

Indonesia proposed a specific reference to forest resources within the draft Platform, supported use of natural resources in sensitive areas only when helping local people, and reported on key issues raised by the Regional Forum on Business Opportunities and Sustainable Development.

## Special Session on Financing Sustainable Development

This session consisted of presentations by panelists followed by open discussion. In his opening remarks, Session Chair Kalman Mizsei, Assistant Administrator and UNDP Regional Director for Europe and the CIS, noted success at the national level in capacity building and regulations development and emphasized the need to link supply and demand sides and to work on law enforcement. Jagdish Pokharel, Planning Commission, Government of Nepal, noted the positive results in financing for sustainable development, such as: tax reforms; environmental taxes; reduced subsidies; and privatization of inefficient sectors.

Emphasizing that investment is more than just a financial mechanism, the Regional Institute of Environmental Technology emphasized the need for an agreement that balances investors' rights against obligations for investment to satisfy recipient country public needs.

The Forum for Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh emphasized access to funding by developing countries, supported domestic resource mobilization, and encour-

aged consultative and participatory policy processes replicating globally acclaimed NEMAP model.

Women's Solidarity for Human Rights described destructive and risky projects financed by governments and international banks, reported extensive corruption, and called for people-centered, environmentally-friendly development. The National Council of Women's Organizations called for political will. The Indonesian Forum for Environment said developing countries should not focus only on new financing from developed countries, but should reduce corruption to increase domestic resources.

The Foundation for Sustainable Development elaborated the negative effects of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) economic "rescue package," stressing that such effects need to be recognized in the consideration of financing for sustainable development. The Tebtebba Foundation noted that natural resources are concentrated in developing countries, especially indigenous lands. The Third World Network called for sophisticated and diverse approaches to ensure that

proposals made on the draft Platform, as well as deliberations of the panel discussion on financing sustainable development.

The Republic of Korea suggested priority areas for sustainable development activities, inter alia, addressing transboundary air pollution issues and desertification and promoting the use of information and communication technology. Iran detailed his country's sustainable development achievements and noted the need to address the root causes of poverty, including wars and armed conflict that also lead to environment degradation.

China outlined progress made in, and positive results arising from, its Agenda 21 implementation, acknowledged poverty and inequity as key challenges, and said unfulfilled international commitments undermined the attainment of sustainable development. Indonesia outlined global factors hindering sustainable development and proposed, inter alia, enriching the Earth Charter as the basis for sustainable development and equipping implementing agents with appropriate analytical skills.

Bangladesh noted that LDCs are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of globalization, described environment issues of national concern such as health hazards from arsenic poisoning of groundwater, and proposed the establishment of a disaster management center and a regional ecological information center. On globalization, the Russian Federation said existing imbalances should be addressed, noted international trade as a source of support for sustainable development, and urged the expansion of WTO membership.

Malaysia noted that intellectual property regimes had raised technology transfer costs, stressed that the increase of speculative and short-term financial flows has introduced more instability into the global financial system, and maintained that domestic resource mobilization did not fill regional resource gaps. Thailand identified challenges in Agenda 21 implementation, emphasized poverty reduction and job creation at the grassroots level, and called for the establishment of a compensation mechanism for damages to the environment and to quality of life.

The Philippines reiterated Maurice Strong's words that "the battle of sustainable development will be won or lost in Asia," endorsed trade and investment flows that improve the quality of life of the poor, and warned that in the

absence of consensus at the WSSD, delegates may meet again at Rio+20 or Rio+30, without discernable changes from 1992. Brunei Darussalam noted that the region's economic crisis diverted needed resources for environmental protection to other sectors, described growing problems of waste management and hazardous and non-hazardous wastes, and implored delegates to work together in good faith and partnership to meet sustainable development goals.

Recalling that the Asia-Pacific region accounts for more than half of the world's population, India emphasized appropriate pricing for fuels and proper valuation of natural resources, cost-effective technologies related to recycling and waste minimization, and the North's ecological debt. Kyrgyzstan emphasized the vulnerable and unstable nature of mountainous habitats, manifested in natural disasters such as floods and mudslides, called for debt-for-nature swaps in the region, and suggested that one factor feeding terrorism networks is the failure to implement concepts from the Rio conference.

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