

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

26 April 2006

**Secretary-General's High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence
in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment**

ENVIRONMENT CONSULTATION

- *Issues Note* -

Nairobi, 5 May 2006

BACKGROUND

2005 Summit Outcome

In the Outcome of the 2005 World Summit, world leaders recognized the need for more efficient environmental activities in the UN system, with enhanced coordination and improved normative and operational capacity, and agreed “to explore the possibility of a more coherent institutional framework to address this need, including a more integrated structure, building on existing institutions and internationally agreed instruments, as well as the treaty bodies and specialized agencies”.

In terms of the normative work of the UN system, policy advice and guidance, strengthened scientific knowledge, assessment and cooperation were identified as areas which could be further improved. At the operational level, the need was identified for better integration of environmental activities in the broader sustainable development framework, including through capacity building. It was also recognized by the Summit that better treaty compliance, while respecting the legal autonomy of the relevant treaties, was a central consideration.

The Summit Outcome also stressed, in the section entitled “Sustainable development: managing and protecting our common environment”, that “poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development”. Furthermore, the Outcome enumerates an array of sectoral and cross-sectoral issues, including among others, water resources, desertification, biodiversity, natural disasters, energy, climate, forests, chemicals and hazardous wastes.

Context for Panel’s deliberations on environment

The need for coordination and coherence in the field of the environment is a theme that Governments attach considerable importance to, and is one that has evolved and become remarkably more complex as the global UN conferences of the 1990s and early 2000s have added to an already multi-faceted context. This complexity stems in large part from the reality that environmental issues have become more clearly defined, inter-linked and more important in nearly every major sector, and now permeate the work of practically every UN organization. Furthermore, as one of the three pillars of sustainable development, the environment dimension has been adopted as part of the overarching framework of the UN’s activities.

Bearing in mind the increasingly serious nature of environmental challenges, Environment Ministers, in preparing for the 10 year review of the 1992 Earth Summit (UNCED), decided to establish a process to “review the requirements for a greatly

strengthened institutional structure for international environmental governance based on an assessment of future needs for an institutional architecture that has the capacity to effectively address wide-ranging environmental threats in a globalizing world". This process was launched under the auspices of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) and attracted wide-ranging attention and involvement from academic institutions, NGOs and inter-governmental organizations.

It has resulted in a number of recommendations related to the role of the UNEP GC/GMEF in international environmental policy making; strengthening the financial situation of UNEP; improved coordination among and effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements; capacity building, technology transfer and country-level coordination for the environmental pillar of sustainable development; and enhanced coordination across the UN system, through the use of the UN Environmental Management Group (EMG). The outcome of the process was adopted by UNEP's Governing Council/GMEF in February 2002 (decision GCSS.VII/1 on international environmental governance) and subsequently endorsed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

A number of other government-led initiatives have also been launched, with Germany and Sweden hosting seminars with non- and inter-governmental organizations, and Finland embarking on a sustainable development governance process. In 2003, France established an informal working group of some 26 countries to consider the transformation of UNEP into a UN Environment Organization. A series of meetings have taken place in New York and Nairobi to consider strengths and weaknesses of the current system of environmental governance, financing, the needs of developing countries, the role of multilateral environmental agreements, monitoring and early warning systems, communications strategies and institutional arrangements. Thus, in terms of proposals to improve coherence, a wide variety of literature exists, both from academic institutions and as a result of the inter-governmental process on international environmental governance.

Most recently, the General Assembly, on 19 April 2006, launched informal consultations on the institutional framework for the UN's environmental activities. In order to provide a framework for these consultations, its co-chairs, Ambassador Enrique Berruga (Mexico) and Ambassador Peter Maurer (Switzerland) have asked Member States to focus on the following two questions in order to come to a preliminary assessment of the issues:

- In your country's view, what are the major problems and challenges of the UN system in its environmental work, specifically with regard to the needs identified in paragraph 169 of the outcome document?
- What could be envisaged in terms of a more coherent institutional framework aimed at addressing these major problems and challenges?

CONSULTATION OBJECTIVES

- Interaction between Panel members and key actors in the field of the environment, including select experts, UN partners and NGOs.
- Enhanced understanding among Panel Members as to what are the key environmental challenges that the UN system will have to effectively address at the national, regional, and global levels over the short, medium and long term.
- Enhanced understanding among Panel Members of the institutional framework within which environment is dealt with by the UN system, and its strengths and weaknesses.
- Enhanced understanding among Panel Members with regard to a range of, and rationale underpinning, recommendations that have been made with regard building a more coherent institutional framework.
- Enhanced understanding among Panel Members with regard to major challenges to mainstreaming environment in development decision-making; as well as best practices that have effectively linked the normative and operational aspects.
- Development of an understanding among Panel Members with regard to the type of proposals that they could put forward that would be ambitious and bold, yet practically realizable within the current inter-governmental context and consistent with the general framework of system wide coherence to be proposed.

POSSIBLE TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Coherence in the normative and analytical work of the UN in the field of environment

The current system is characterized by fragmentation and a lack of coherence, including between the normative and operational aspects, hampering effectiveness and efficiency:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current institutional framework within which normative and analytical aspects of the UN's work in the field of environment are undertaken, including with regard to work undertaken under the auspices of multilateral environmental agreements?
- How could the UN develop a stronger scientific and analytic capacity in monitoring, assessing and reporting on critical environmental trends?
- How could the UN system ensure that global issues are adequately and adeptly addressed by the UN system (i.e. climate change)?

Institutional framework for the UN system's environment activities

- What could constitute an effective institutional framework for the UN system's environment activities, at the country, regional and global levels?
- How could the UN best provide more comprehensive and coherent management and monitoring of the implementation of the growing range of multilateral environmental agreements?

Mainstreaming environment in development decision-making

- The need for better integration of the environmental perspective within the broad principle of sustainable development in UN country-level activities: How can environment best be managed within the context of UN system country operations?
 - Strengthening linkages between the UN's normative and analytical system and its operational activities;
 - Enhancing the participation of Non-Resident Agencies in UN country-level development activities and the role of the UN Resident Coordinator System;
 - Clarification of the relative roles of normative and operating organizations;
 - Ensuring that the main horizontal policy theme of sustainable development is taken account of in decision-making.
- How to ensure the better integration of the environmental perspective within capacity building and technology support undertaken by the entire UN system.
- Bearing in mind that principle 4 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) stipulates that "In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it" – what have been the challenges encountered, particularly by UNEP, in mainstreaming environment in development decision-making?
- What best practices exist for the integration of environment into development at the country level and how can the UN build on such practices?
