

Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future

3 Bloomsbury Place • London • WC1A 2QL • UK
Tel: + 44 (0)20 75806912 • Fax: +44 (0)20 7580 6872
www.stakeholderforum.org



Stakeholder Forum's Contribution to the Panel Consultation on Sustainable Development

Thank you, Chair and members of Panel for giving me the opportunity to share some thoughts of Stakeholder Forum.

Chair I urge the Panel to “dare to dream” and to be bold in their suggestions.

In September 2005, Stakeholder Forum organised a workshop on the CSD. Participants expressed concern that the CSD is losing what little political traction it once had, and that ineffective processes are weakening its ability to focus and carry out its mandate. The workshop made 18 recommendations which could improve the present CSD within its present mandate.

Despite 15 years and several reform measures, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) remains a weak global authority on sustainable development; the two-year process has highlighted inherent flaws in its mandate; the secretariat is very weak; and it continues to be dominated by the Ministries of the Environment who are, in most cases, the weakest in governments with inadequate funding.

Today although we believe many of those reforms were necessary and the ones we are suggesting critical, we ask for more, we ask for boldness from the Panel. That boldness I speak of is the creation of a Council for Sustainable Development under the General Assembly, if Human Rights can be elevated to a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly, then why not Sustainable Development? Why would we hesitate?

We all know that despite being the high-level forum on sustainable development, the CSD has struggled to appropriately address the three pillars of sustainable development, and as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it often has lacked the appropriate political decision-making powers that the General Assembly or its subsidiary organs has. A new Council on Sustainable Development should assume the sustainable development decision making functions of the General Assembly's Second Committee

Despite its weaknesses, the Commission has, over the years, proved to be an important 'home' for keeping the broad sustainable development agenda under active review, and has been instrumental in launching a number of new initiatives and securing intergovernmental cooperation. Now is the time to offer political leadership.

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The new Council on Sustainable Development, I speak of could be based on a new relationship with an enhanced economic pillar for sustainable development. In the short to medium term, the scenario proposes enhancing the role of UNCTAD, ILO and WIPO as the key pillar organisations. The existing CSD and DSD activities regarding sustainable consumption and production could be transferred to the UN Industrial Development Organisation and UNCTAD. What we need to address, as Third World Network said is the lack of a political agreeable forum to discuss the relationship between trade and sustainable development, particularly as it relates to multilateral environmental agreements, the UN system and the World Trade Organisation. Given this situation, the Council would provide a high level space to address options and common approaches for addressing system-wide coherence. Issues regarding trade and sustainable development would be addressed by an Open-ended Consultative Group. Similarly, a key element of the economic pillar is the need to address the relationship between the UN system and the Bretton Woods Institutions, including proposing that the Council establish an Open-ended Consultative Group on Financing for Sustainable Development.

The lack of an operative function, particularly at the country level, for sustainable development within the UN system and the fragmented coordination of the UN's work has led to overlap, duplication, and confused priorities. The time has come for the country office of the UN to be put under the UN Secretary General and for the UN to operate at the country level as one body.

The challenges facing us in the area of environment are many. Again I ask the Panel to be bold, the chance for reform comes only once in a generation. Is UNEP an adequate response to the needs of the environment? I think not! One recommendation that we ask the Panel to make is that the secretariats of the MEAs should be brought under UNEP and to urgently continue the process of clustering the conventions. If added to this a strengthening of the scientific base of UNEP is achieved then we will have a bold organisation representing the environment relevant to the twenty first century and the challenges that we face.

In the area of inter agency coordination we also need to be bold we need a strengthened Environment Management Group taking a similar role to the UN Development group with a long-term target of merging the two inter-agency groups into a UN Sustainable Development Group.