

STAKEHOLDER FOURM SUBMISSION TO THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL

GENEVA, 2nd July

Despite 15 years and several reform measures the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) remains as weak global authority on sustainable development. 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) often lacks the appropriate political decision making powers of the General Assembly or its subsidiary organs. The CSD has been particularly inefficient in addressing the means of implementation, such as finance and technology transfer- as per its UNCED/WSSD mandates.

The CSD and its parent body ECOSOC are current failing to effectively oversee the system-wide coordination of sustainable development, as well as the balanced integration of economic, social and environmental aspects of United Nations policies and programmes. Attempts to reform both bodies have provided limited remedial benefits and the renewed focus on system-wide coherence in light of the World Summit 2005 and the urgent need to meet the MDG and JPOI targets in its self points to a problem with the current system. 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. A similar situation arises that the UN leading environment body, the UN Environment Programme, has no operational mandate at the country-level, and the numerous multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) are not implementing agencies, and their mandates only allow these bodies to play a facilitative role for the Parties to undertake their commitments. The Executive Director of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Koïchiro Matsuura, "UNESCO must be extremely wary of any tendency towards separating operational activities from normative, analytical and policy matters." Noting that "this is a false dichotomy and is a recipe for incoherence, not coherence," he said " he could not accept the G-13's argument if it meant that specialised agencies are no longer expected to involve themselves in implementation on the ground; the global and local roles of specialised agencies are inseparable in my view."

The CSD is, however, not alone. All systems of global governance and management exhibit weaknesses that diminish the prospects for achieving sustainable development objectives (Moosa, 2002).

PROPOSAL

The need for a bold transformation of the UN's sustainable development framework, and particularly the role of the CSD, should be one of the highest priorities of the Panel and related UN reform processes. As Pieter Van Geel, the Dutch Minister of the State Secretary for Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, has said "we must guard against 'management by relabelling'."

Stakeholder Forum (SF) proposes the following reforms that aim to strengthen the UN system's ability to address the three pillars of sustainable development. The reform scenario proposes strengthening the role, mandate and function of the 'pillar' institutions of sustainable development- the UN Environment Programme, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the UN Development Programme, the Commission on Sustainable Development, and the UN General Assembly. The reforms would also address new mandates and functions for the UN Environment Management Group, and other inter-agency bodies.

The scenario proposes transforming the CSD into a **subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, renaming it the Council on Sustainable Development**, including assuming responsibilities of the sustainable development decision making functions of the Second Committee. The Council would be mandated to address the poorly constructed relationship between the Council, treaty bodies and governing councils and include the authority to address coherence and gaps in international decision-making related to sustainable development. The Council would thus be empowered by the General Assembly to address the lack of coherence in the normative approach to sustainable development across UN decision making bodies. A key feature of the new Council would be a **strengthened knowledge and leadership base**, which could include the mandate to establish Open-Ended Consultative Groups, creating ministerial-led time-limited Council Panels, and establishing expert scientific and technical bodies.

A more robust Council would be situated with the context of a **more tightly managed UN system at the intergovernmental decision making level**, and concurrently with a **revised UN system-wide approach to sustainable development at the operative level**. The new Council on Sustainable Development would 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. It also proposes that the existing CSD and DSD activities regarding sustainable consumption and production should be transferred to the UN Industrial Development Organisation and UNCTAD. Of immediate concerns 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.

Regarding proposals to **strengthen then social pillar of sustainable development**, the scenario identifies the need for UN Development Programme needs to develop a more coherent and coordinated approach to mainstreaming the environment and sustainable development elements within poverty eradication programmes; addressing agriculture and sustainable development, advancing gender equality, including developing an effective gender mainstreaming strategy, addressing the links between human rights and three pillars of sustainable development, and progressing on the important relationship between health and sustainable development.

On strengthening the **environment pillar of sustainable development**, the scenario envisages a strengthened role for UNEP's Regional Offices; addressing the specialised agency proposal by building on the Cartagena Package on international environmental governance, addressing the relationship between the MEAs and the broader UN System on sustainable development, and a new role and mandate for the Environmental Management Group.

As a key element of **system-wide coherence** the scenario introduces the idea of the Council conducting a triennial assessment of the UN's sustainable development work, in conjunction with similar reviews for the environment, social and economic pillars. The scenario also envisages the strengthening of the environment and economic pillars at the country-level, in particular addressing the environment and sustainable development work of the UN's country and regional operational presence.

While several of the ideas proposed in the scenario require further elaboration and consideration, other proposals are within the immediate scope of the current UN reform process and thus actionable by the General Assembly. However to address many of the systemic issues a more detailed assessment of the UN's work in the area of sustainable development is required. As immediate short-term measures, the Panel should consider recommending that the General Assembly and related governing bodies and decision making fora:

- a. Initiate Mandate Reviews on the CSD, UNEP, and other pillar organisations;
- b. Initiate a Mandate Assessment of UN Agency programmes on the three pillars of sustainable development¹;
- c. Hold high-level roundtable discussions on the reform of the UN's sustainable development and initiate a detailed reform process as part of the five year anniversary of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

¹ The report of the Eminent Persons Panel on Strengthening UNCTAD, recommended that a United Nations system wide registry of mandates could be a useful tool for monitoring the proliferation of mandates with a view to avoiding duplication and ensuring effective implementation and coherence. The Panel proposes that Member States may wish to consider extending such a registry to cover mandates of all UN organizations and specialized agencies in a manner easily accessible to all organizational entities, particularly their respective governing bodies (UNCTAD, 2006).