

# **Statement by NGOs**

## **Meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Networks**

Rio de Janeiro, 20 October, 2001

The representatives of the networks of non-governmental organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean at their regional meeting, prior to the Preparatory Conference of the Governments of Latin America for the summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, stated that:

They recognize the validity of the principles and objectives of the Rio declaration and of Agenda 21 in implementing sustainable development. However they have noted that, even through the governments have assumed sustainable development objectives in their speeches, in actual practice there are setbacks in implementing policies to achieve social equity and environmental sustainability both in the region and in the world.

Failure to fulfill the Rio commitments has exacerbated the socio-environmental crisis, increased vulnerability and uncertainty, and made democracy in the world more fragile. At the same time, growing economic globalization and market expansion has developed under conditions that work against sustainable development principles and implementation.

In the socioeconomic field, poverty and inequity in income distribution continue being indicators of growing social unsustainability. An increase from 5.8 per cent to 8.5 per cent in unemployment in the formal sector over the past decade, in addition to informal employment of more than 50 per cent of the active population and a decrease in job stability, make any improvement in the situation unlikely.

Growing inequality and social marginalization polarizes our societies, threatens peaceful coexistence and generates violence and vulnerability. The increasing and unsustainable amount of foreign debt in many countries in the region has become an insurmountable barrier to reversing this situation and advancing towards human development.

The challenges of achieving healthy regional and world coexistence call for opening up broad dialogue and new opportunities for the participation of civil society in decision-making on development.

In the political sphere, the current development model, characterized by exclusive globalization and the application of a neo-political model, has neither ensured nor can it guarantee sustainable development; in fact, it has caused greater institutional weakness and the loss of autonomy in national states in order to meet the people's needs.

Reversing this situation calls for a participatory democracy that will enable the inclusion of civil society in designing, planning, executing and monitoring local, national and international projects, programmes and policies.

We also reiterate the need to reactivate and strengthen the citizen participation mechanisms established in Agenda 21, such as the National Councils on Sustainable Development open to broader participation, national and local environmental councils and other bodies of social consensus to facilitate the implementation of sustainable development.

In the environmental sphere, the accelerating economic globalization process continues exacerbating the deterioration of the planet's basic environmental components. It causes growing degradation in the quality of life and the vulnerability of rural and urban populations, a situation that is becoming more acute for the poorest sectors and farming communities facing even greater difficulties in maintaining the agricultural reproduction processes in natural ecosystems.

The governments should urgently put into practice a set of concerted actions to enable the recovery, preservation and maintenance of balances that will allow the continuation of life on earth. These challenges demand the strengthening of consensus on decision-making mechanisms between government and civil society to provide the resources needed to attain environmental sustainability in actual practice.

## **Biodiversity**

Biodiversity is the foundation of the planet's ecological equilibrium. Our governments should recognize conservation of biological diversity as an integral part of regional and national development planning, as well as the maintenance of ethnic and cultural biodiversity.

They should guarantee the rights of communities to their territories and the use of their biodiversity, as they should develop effective measures to protect and promote their cultures. They should link biodiversity conservation with policies on overcoming poverty, especially in local communities that live around protected areas and in zones richly endowed with biodiversity, through the sustainable use of the resources.

We reject the intellectual property rights over the living beings and support the protection of collective intellectual rights of local communities and their capacity for innovation.

We demand that the precautionary principle be applied to prevent the production, import, planting and consumption of transgenic organisms, which cause genetic pollution, threaten the peasant-farmer economy and attack food sovereignty and security.

## **Forests**

In the past decade, forest ecosystems have been degraded and the forest cover has been significantly reduced in the region as a result of structural conditions and the application of

policies that provide incentives for the chaotic expansion of the agricultural frontier and of single-crop farming promoted by multilateral bodies and business groups.

We demand that our governments adopt the concept of productive ecosystems in agro-forestry policies and promote the land-use management instruments for land use, management and conservation of forests compatible with the potential of the ecosystems.

We demand the implementation of public policies to combat the underlying causes of deforestation, such as inappropriate regulatory frameworks, tax incentives for single-crop forestry and unsustainable trade and investment policies. At the same time, we issue a warning on the implicit risks of including plantations in the clean development mechanism for the conservation of forests and biodiversity.

We call on the FAO to create a joint working group with civil society to review its forestry definitions and policies.

### **Climate change**

Climate change is the result and product of a development model based on production and consumption patterns that generate social inequity and major socio-environmental impacts. We can see that greenhouse gas emissions have increased since the Rio summit ten years ago, worsening the global environmental crisis.

We demand that governments, business and financial bodies exclude the building of large dams, nuclear power plants and other unsustainable mega-projects from their energy policies, and that they generate the financial resources needed to redirect energy policy towards the use of non-polluting renewable resources, energy decentralization and equitable supply of energy to the population.

We urgently need to harmonize climate protection commitments with agreements to protect biodiversity and prevent desertification, while at the same time, restoring ecosystems that are degraded and endangered by climate change, particularly in the island countries in our region.

### **Globalization and Trade**

We are witnessing the great contradiction between trade expansion and attainment of sustainable development, it has worsened socio-environmental conditions in the region and restricted democracies. The attainment of sustainable development should be the requirement under which trade and investment agreements are negotiated.

The pre-eminence of multilateral environmental agreements and other regional and international conventions that allow internalization of social costs should also be established. These conditions will require far-reaching changes in the current international trade system headed by the WTO.

We demand that our governments establish democratic mechanisms to assess impacts prior to the negotiation of trade and investment agreements, in order to ensure negotiation conditions and agreements that will safeguard social justice and environmental sustainability and ensure benefits for most of the people.

## **Financing**

Achieving sustainable development worldwide will require a new international financing architecture that includes the reorientation of multilateral bank policies towards the objectives of eradicating poverty and protecting the environment. These policies should include a tax on speculative financial operations, the monitoring of capital flows and renegotiations of the debt in developing countries.

We note that, even though the developed countries at the Rio Summit in 1992 committed themselves to allocating 0.7 per cent of the GDP to finance sustainable development, they have not fulfilled that commitment. Furthermore, in our region, investment in the environmental areas does not surpass 0.1 per cent of GDP. We call on the developed countries to fulfill their commitment and on our governments to demonstrate greater political will in reorienting economic policy towards sustainable development, including taxes and subsidies to internalize environmental costs and the improvement of environmental regulations, monitoring and institutional frameworks.

Finally, we recommend a thorough assessment of the Global Environment Facility in order to reformulate the mechanisms for access to the Facility by the government and civil society, as well as its effectiveness in solving socio-environmental problems and in relation to decisions regarding local realities. Special emphasis should be placed on local capacity building and the financing of local sustainability agendas.

## **Vulnerability**

The main causes of the vulnerability in our region are a result of inappropriate development policies and practices. The persistence of poverty and social inequity in the region is the main factor in social, political and environmental vulnerability.

Social exclusion, ecosystem deterioration, the build-up of risks and natural disasters call for coordinated and joint national and regional activities.

We demand that our governments urgently respond with comprehensive policies to address the problems of poverty and economic/political/social exclusion, and to promote local and national capacity building to achieve these objectives.

We also demand that our governments guarantee promotion, permanence and development of the cultural and natural heritage of local and national communities, and that they give priority to a precautionary approach in social and environmental risk assessment.

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