

**Informal consultations on the reform of the institutional framework for the
United Nations environmental activities**

EU statement January 18, 2007

Co-Chairs,

on behalf of the European Union I would like to express our gratitude for convening this meeting and thank you for all your hard work preparing it.

We appreciate that these consultations continue today and we are confident that they will be held in the same constructive spirit that characterized our exchange of views so far.

We hope that our discussions will be as interactive as possible. We would therefore like to make some initial remarks at this point and come back to certain issues and elaborate on them in the light of our debate at a later stage.

I.

Co-Chairs,

I think we all can agree that one of the preconditions for real progress in the area of sustainable development is an effective institutional framework for the environment, which should be responsive to the needs of all countries, avoid duplication of work and improve synergies among the principal actors.

The United Nations Environment Programme is the main UN body on the environment. Its tasks have grown steadily over the years without being matched by status, mandate and adequate resources.

Unfortunately, overall progress on the implementation of the Cartagena reform package has been relatively slow and has not resolved the systemic shortcomings of UNEP.

However, the EU very much welcomes the recent efforts of UNEP and UNDP for an improved co-operation, which is already beginning to bring benefits to both organizations and the implementation of UN programmes.

Likewise, the EU welcomes the efforts of the new Executive Director for the implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan and the mainstreaming of the Plan throughout the 2007 - 2009 Programme of Work.

A significant strengthening of UNEP, along the lines sketched out in Cartagena as well as in the recent announcements of the Executive Director, will help UNEP to become more effective.

In this regard, a number of initiatives could be pursued, such as

- a consistent follow-up to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment,
- improvement of auditing and monitoring capacities,
- better co-ordination and cooperation with all relevant UN agencies, donors and international financial institutions.

We also think that, for example, donors should move from short-term earmarked funding to programmatic support for core budget activities to allow for consistent and long term planning at all levels.

In addition, while allowing for flexibility and respecting the legal autonomy of the Conferences of the Parties of MEAs, a strengthened UNEP should define strategic guidelines to promote coordination and synergies among multilateral environmental agreements.

II.

Co-chairs,

The EU welcomes the outcome of the 2005 World Summit regarding system-wide coherence in the area of the environment as well as the relevant recommendations of the report of the High-Level Panel on System-wide Coherence, including those to strengthen and upgrade UNEP, to advance mainstreaming of environmental concerns and to improve co-operation of the relevant actors. These recommendations are in line with our proposals for the reform of the institutional framework for the UN's environmental activities.

The EU firmly believes that upgrading UNEP into a UN Environment Organization with stable, adequate and predictable resources and with the appropriate international standing, would enable it to fully implement its mandate and to live up to the expectations of all countries.

Such an organization should

- be built on UNEP, with a revised and strengthened mandate,
- be supported by stable, adequate and predictable financial contributions,
- operate on an equal footing with other UN agencies,
- be based in Nairobi,
- make it possible to develop the environmental dimension of sustainable development in an integrated and consistent manner,
- and co-operate closely with multilateral agencies, each using its comparative advantages to best effect.

As a normative body, it could be an authoritative global centre of excellence, a facilitator of implementation of environmental agreements and a leader and a coordinator for the environment.

As the environmental pillar of the UN, it would help to ensure stronger system-wide coherence in the area of the environment, inter alia by making better use of synergies of multilateral environmental agreements, and would contribute to the response to major threats to the global environment.

The Organization could accelerate the mainstreaming of environmental issues into the UN system by supporting the integration of the environment into development activities in close cooperation with the relevant agencies, programmes and funds.

As the authoritative body on global environmental monitoring, assessment and early warning, it could also better mobilize scientific knowledge as well as providing high quality technical support and capacity building. Performing these tasks, it should make use of existing structures, in particular the Resident Coordinator and UNDP networks.

III.

Co-Chairs,

Let me touch upon two other issues addressed in the questionnaire.

Implementation on the country level

The European Union is of the view that in order to improve implementation at the country level, priorities could include capacity-building for environmental assessment, access to and management of information, and enhancement of institutions. Also, our experience has shown the benefits of limiting the number of entry points at national level, and of further specialisation and division of labour, including by lead countries' agencies as well as joint implementation of activities. Clearing house mechanisms such as the Biosafety Clearing House are a good effort to facilitate national implementation.

Partnerships

Partnerships help to build larger constituencies and new opportunities for dialogue among all stakeholders, addressing specific needs adapted to national circumstances. The establishment of national, regional and international networks of experts needs to be enhanced and so must their evaluation capacities and accountability. The EU strongly believes that the involvement of civil society, private business and the science community is beneficial to an effective institutional framework for the UN's environmental activities. In this regard, the Commission on Sustainable Development's provides an experience that could be flagged as a best practice.

I thank you.