

OUTREACH 1997

The Voice of the NGO Community at CSD*

Countdown to Earth Summit II

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WINDING DOWN WEEK ONE

AT A GLANCE

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OUTREACH '97
CSD NGO Steering Committee

World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA)

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OUTREACH 1997

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TREES ARE FOR HUGGING

Trees and forests epitomize the idea of renewable resources. They are everlasting until they are cut or uprooted. Trees can be used for almost any product - ranging from clothing material to chemicals, from houses to energy. The forests play a pivotal role in maintaining the stability of global climate. The forest reserves are of global importance.

At the beginning of the 90s, forests and wooded land covered almost 40 percent of the Earth's landed area. This area had declined by almost 2 percent during the 80s as a result of man's need for products coming from trees.

The total world roundwood production is now about 3.5 billion cubic metres annually. The South is supplying the world market with roughly 60 percent of the total quantity. More than half of the total is used for energy purposes.

The figure 3.5 billion cubic metres is probably meaningless to most of us simply because of its size. A way to conceptualize this figure, is to consider that every minute, an area the size of 50 football fields filled with fully-grown trees are cut down to reach this annual total. No wonder many fear for the forests of the world.

In mythology, trees are often associated with life itself. We often hold and nurture sentimental feelings about trees. The felling of a tree often provokes sad as well as angry feelings. This, combined with inaccurate information about trees and forests, has often led us to believe the wrong stories and draw the wrong conclusions about trees and woods.

In an industrial world dedicated to fighting smoking, and preserving the image of unspoiled nature pristine lakes, the expression «the green lungs of the earth» conjures up pictures of harmony and well being. And we have been led to believe that cutting the rainforests would diminish the oxygen in the atmosphere. The poor farmer in the South, cutting a few bushes to kindle a small fire so she can cook dinner for her family, has morally been charged with carrying the burden of guilt for depleting the oxygen

layer, diminishing the rainforests and advancing the deserts.

Do various groups in the north have a vested interest in keeping some of these stories alive?

True, 60 percent of all the trees cut down, come from the South. But almost 80 percent of all tree products are consumed in the North. True, the major source of energy for the poor farmer in the South is fuelwood, and more than half of the world's tree production goes to energy use. But of all the energy produced on earth by man, only 14 percent is fuelled by tree production - and the poor African farmer consumes less than 1 percent of this.

And as for the oxygen argument - this has never been scientifically accurate. The oxygen level in the atmosphere is constant and does not change. And besides, have your lungs ever produced oxygen?

Should the forests of the world be a universal reserve presided over by an international body? In that case, shouldn't the world's oil reserves also be?

The forests of the world are of global importance for many reasons: their bio-diversity, their role as genetic reserves, as a carbon sink, as climate stabilizers, as a renewable resource base. We have come a long way since Rio in understanding the complexities of the forests and in working towards an agreement for sustaining them.

Let the work for the forests move forward in a sensible way. There are still pitfalls to be avoided, as one brave NGO highlighted when he described the illicit trade in trees during the IPF negotiations. We publish in today's "OUTREACH" an NGO insight into the difficulties in negotiating a sound and lasting convention on forests. We also shed light on the IPF negotiations.

Commentary (con't)

As we approach the last day of the first week of the Intersessional, hopes are still high for reaching a document reflecting a mutual understanding between government delegations and NGOs.

But experience shows us that anything can happen in the closing days of a UN conference. Let's look forward to a relaxing weekend and an exciting next week.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING CALENDER

For more information on other side events and meetings, consult the newsletter "ISWG-CSD Today" which can be obtained every morning in Conf. Room C and in the main meeting room. Or contact the CSD Secretariat - tel: 963-8811 / fax: 963-1267.

DAILY MEETINGS:

9:15 a.m. Conf. Room C
CSD NGO Steering Committee

2:00 p.m. Lunch Room
MEDIA CAUCUS

FRIDAY, 28 FEBRUARY:

12:00-1:00 p.m. Conf. Room C
Sustainable Communities Caucus

1:15-2:45 p.m. TBA
Briefing by GEF Secretariat on how NGOs can work with GEF

3:00-4:00 p.m. Conf. Room C
ENERGY CAUCUS

4:30 p.m. Conf. Room C
Briefing by NGOs participating in the Commission on Social Development

The opinions, commentaries and articles printed in OUTREACH are the sole opinion of the individual authors or organizations, unless otherwise expressed.

They are not the official opinions of the NGO/CSD Steering Committee or of WFUNA.

NEWS FROM THE CONFERENCE ROOM

*INTERVENTIONS BY NGOs
ON THURSDAY, 27 FEBRUARY*

TRANSPORT

UNED-UK

Statement on behalf of the CSD/NGO Transportation Caucus and the CSD/NGO Steering Committee (abbreviated).

The planet is heading for a motorization and mobility crisis. The planet, and our cities, towns and villages are threatened by current patterns of mobility and, in particular, the increasing dependency on the private automobile in all parts of the world. This phenomenon has been characterized as 'Mad Car Disease'.

I would urge that due consideration is given to not only the issues of atmospheric emissions, but also to the many other effects of car dependency which include urban congestion, physical dangers and health hazards, encroachment on agricultural land and biodiversity habitats, noise and visual intrusion of traffic and roads.

Earlier this week we heard about the growth of Local Agenda 21 and other local initiatives. In cities transport is emerging as a key priority for both residents, who want cleaner and safer cities, and for business, which places a high priority on modern and efficient public transport networks for the efficient movement of goods and people. We commend Local Agenda 21 and related initiatives.

In moving forward on sustainable transport, we call upon delegates to advise their Heads of Government to adopt a Political Statement that includes at least the following **4 key points**:

1. adopt TRANSPORT as a priority area for the CSD work programme over the next five years, to begin at the earliest opportunity;

This should examine practical ways of reducing the growth in traffic demand and transferring existing journeys to mass transit where appropriate, and supporting non-motorized travel.

2. Call for appropriate land use planning policies which reduce car dependency in our towns, cities and villages.

The scattering of jobs, homes, shopping, leisure and other activities has created an urban structure which is uneconomical and inefficient and inequitable against those without access to cars.

3. Give support to car free areas in cities and give priority to public transport and non-motorized travel.

Transport policy should be about meeting people's mobility needs in a sustainable and equitable manner rather than merely moving vehicles.

4. Implementation of the polluter pays principle:

This is not a call for taxation. That is something quite separate. Rather, it is a call for fair and efficient pricing. At present neither congestion costs nor wider health or environmental 'externalities' are charged to the car user. Abundant roads and parking spaces are provided free of charge to the automobile

user - often on very valuable central urban land; furthermore, the costs of road transport are far from transparent but are hidden within the costs of policing, emergency services and traffic-related medical costs, all paid out of general public funds.

Therefore car users neither pay - nor are aware - of the costs of their journeys, whilst public transport is seen as a subsidized form of travel - the exact opposite of what is normally the case.

In this regard we were encouraged by the statement made by the United States' Ambassador Richardson on Monday (24/2/97) where he said, "there is an urgent need to ensure that costs are internalized so that the market can provide both the signals and the incentives in favor of sustainability in all countries". This should apply to transport as much as any other sector.

This review of Agenda 21 provides a unique opportunity to build on the successes of Rio and the good practice emerging at the local level. Governments need to go further and they need to go faster. The solutions exist and civil society is demanding we do.

HEALTH

INDIGENOUS CAUCUS

On behalf of the Indigenous Caucus, I would like to make some brief comments with regard to Health issues.

Indigenous peoples in both the North and in the South continue to suffer from serious health problems. The fundamental underlying cause behind this, is the dispossession of our lands and territories and the disruptions of and to our cultures.

The identification of indigenous peoples as one of the major vulnerable groups requiring protective measures in the chapter on health in Agenda 21 has been a step in the right direction. However, our **News from the Conference Room (con't)**

special circumstances are in many instances not given their due focus and attention.

We therefore call upon the CSD to focus more attention on these special circumstances in both the rural areas and in urban settlements, both in the North and the South, and ensure further that the environmental and developmental dimensions of these problems are effectively addressed in a conducted manner by all relevant UN agencies.

Raja Devasish Roy, Bangladesh Indigenous and Hill Peoples' Association for Advancement

DID YOU KNOW...

On Wednesday, 5 March, UNA-NY has organized a meeting with H.E. Mr. Razali Ismail, President of the General Assembly, at the UN Church Centre from 6:00-7:30 p.m.

The Sixth International Conference of the World Information Transfer will be held at United Nations Headquarters on 17-18 April 1997. Running parallel to CSD V, this conference, which is being co-sponsored by the Government of Chile, will focus on "Environmental Degradation: Its Effect on Children's Health." Further information can be obtained by contacting the following:

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"OUTREACH 1997"* ...speaking for the NGO Steering Committee for the CSD

The NGO Steering Committee for the CSD was established at the Commission for Sustainable Development in 1994 to facilitate the involvement of NGOs and other major groups, where appropriate, at the CSD. Membership of the Steering Committee is determined in annual elections held at the CSD, and includes Major Groups, grassroots organizations, regional, national and global NGOs and networks. Our work includes facilitating NGO Working Groups, providing support for participation of southern and eastern NGO representatives, and organizing facilities which strengthen the voices of NGOs in the sustainable development debate. The Steering Committee is facilitating activities around the CSD Intersessional, the CSD V and Earth Summit II.

FEATURES..

FORESTS PRINCIPAL?

Outcome of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests

The fourth and final session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) concluded its two year process of dialogue on forest issues, Friday, February 21 1997 in New York. The Panel was designed to discuss and develop specific language and Proposals for Action on eleven broad thematic areas, or programme elements, to be negotiated and approved by the panel in its fourth meeting. Numerous Proposals for Action were developed but the follow-up process for their implementation remains unclear.

Debate at this final session was largely dominated by the question of whether or not there was a need for a legally-binding forest convention covering all types of forests. The pro-convention advocates were led by the European Union and Canada, supported by the recent addition of Malaysia and Indonesia. Opposition was led by the United States bolstered most strongly by India and Brazil. As the debate proceeded at IPF VU, the uncertainty of what a convention would and would not contain, and the failure to reach consensus on several other matters, led the vast majority of other countries to state that it was premature to advance the idea of a convention.

The NGO Community, by and large, also rejected the idea of a forest convention at this time, expressing their view in plenary and, perhaps most dramatically, in the form of several declarations: the African Forest Action Network Declaration, a European NGO Declaration, and the International Citizen Declaration Against a Global Forest Convention. The latter was signed by seventy-eight environmental organizations from around the world and presented at a press conference on the day prior to IPF IV.

The convention fight dominated IPF IV and detracted critical attention away from important questions regarding the implementation of the negotiated Proposals for Action developed over the past two years through the IPF process. This disappointed the majority of governments and the NGO community which had begun a dialogue over those two years advancing important issues and furthering an understanding of forest issues that was unprecedented in any intergovernmental forum to date.

In the end, the Panel, unable to reach consensus, was forced to forward three main options to the CSD regarding the post IPF follow-up. One, a continuation of the policy dialogue; a second to continue dialogue but with a mandate to reach consensus and then proceed to negotiations on a convention; and third, an immediate call for negotiations without parallel dialogue.

Why NGOs do not want a Forest Convention now

At first blush, the idea of a forest convention that could theoretically coordinate policy on forests in a comprehensive, holistic and integrated way is appealing. Unfortunately for the majority of NGOs following forest issues for the past several years, addressing the complex problems leading to forest decline worldwide is not that simple. NGOs believe that convention advocates are putting the cart before the horse, motivated by the promise of free trade and political reward. A thorough review of existing

instruments and agreements has yet to be undertaken to identify gaps and overlaps in the existing forest regime that would determine whether or not there is a clear need for a new instrument. Until such a review is undertaken, NGOs remain skeptical that a convention can solve problems which are yet to be defined.

The proponents of a forest convention state that current measures on forests are scattered and that a new convention would consolidate actions on forests. Many forest-related problems currently are already covered by existing conventions (e.g. the Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate, and Desertification). These agreements are still quite young and have yet to fully mature, particularly those issues with relevance to forests which have been largely sidelined pending the outcome of the IPF. Proponents claim that a new convention on forests would also be a magnet attracting financial and technical resources to the forest sector. However, if there is sufficient political will to achieve sustainable forest management, it should not matter whether the arrangement is legally-binding or voluntary, global or regional. Furthermore, the reality is that "new and additional" financial resources are very limited, and therefore existing resources need to be spent on fulfilling past commitments before embarking on new ones.

NGOs signing onto anti-convention declarations feel that if negotiations were initiated now, consensus would result in the weakest, lowest common denominator commitments, thus

Features (con't)

formalizing unacceptably weak forest management standards. The result would provide an international seal of approval for unsustainable forest practices, cripple several existing and stronger forest initiatives, and would render obsolete national and regional standards currently in various forms of development.

NGOs also believe that negotiations will be dominated and driven by powerful timber and commercial trade interests, and fail to address the predatory and unethical behavior of an increasing number of transnational timber corporations. The predominance of trade-related concerns over environmental ones in the contemporary intergovernmental forest dialogue is demonstrated by the failure of the IPF to examine something as fundamental as the concept of protected areas when it established its mandate two years ago. If the IPF is indicative of the current state of the intergovernmental understanding of forests, then the forest negotiations will ignore or avoid some of the world's most critical and controversial forest

problems, many of which lie outside the traditional forest sector. Negotiations also risk undermining the important non-governmental initiatives (e.g. the independent certification of forest management and forest products_ and could undermine the ability of indigenous peoples and rural communities to determine the fate of their own forests.

Perhaps the most important of all, negotiations will stall or block immediate action on a wide range of critical forest problems being discussed in other policy arenas during the years of lengthy convention debate, negotiation and ratification. The IPF process did reach consensus on many important issues and advanced the political understanding of forest problems on the intergovernmental policy level. Accordingly, NGOs advocate a continuation and enhancement of the intergovernmental policy dialogue under the CSD furthering the process of agreement on implementation that can be taken at national levels and on the ground. It is essential that this continuing policy dialogue must be action oriented and that it work toward effective implementation of the Forest Principles, the forest-relevant chapters of Agenda 21 and the IPF Proposals for Action. The primary rationale for the continuation of the policy dialogue must be to focus on problem solving initiatives, based on clearly defined targets and timetables, while continuing to work toward consensus on issues where agreement has not yet been reached.

Both articles submitted by:

Claudia D'Andrea ,
Sustainable Development Institute &
Scott Paul,
Global Forest Policy Project

RIO GRINDS overheard at the coffee bar

“One of the more interesting ideas the NGOs have put forward has get to gain support on the floor of the debate

at the CSD I. That of having a Ben & Jerry's ice cream parlor next to the Vienna Cafe! Government delegates it seems, are worried it might effect their diet.

The CSD I and IPF before it has produced tons of paper, it has been noticed by some that the NGOs opposition to a convention on forests is based on the worry that several forests in Malaysia might be needed to produce the paper for an INC process.

Czar Strong met with NGOs on Thursday worried about his reputation as an inclusive open participatory, focussed individual. An offer to train his small NGO "The Earth Council", so they could participate in the main NGO deliberations, was welcomed.

Momentum grows for Mostafa Tolba to head the CSD 5 meeting. Though some concern exists within the EU that we may be just replaying old records.

If the macro North-South issue is reflected in the micro North-South Korea relationship, then the future looks gloomy.

Reform Czar Strong did not raise his voice during his meeting with the NGOs.”

UPDATE...

NGOs Meet Strong & Tolba

Mostafa Tolba

Mostafa Tolba of Egypt, who has emerged as one of the strongest candidates to chair the upcoming session of the CSD, met with NGOs Thursday afternoon and zeroed in on what he views as the overriding obstacle to the successful implementation of Agenda 21: the lack of specific targets for the work of the CSD.

As a target for countries with high energy consumption, Mr. Tolba suggested a ceiling of about 8,000 kilowatts per person per year. He explained that this target was not unrealistic even for a country like Canada that now consumes approximately 12,000 kilowatts, given that the Nordic countries have an average consumption of only 6-7,000 kilowatts per person per year.

Tolba challenged the NGO suggestion on abolishing the High Level Advisory Board saying he felt it could be a mechanism which afforded a frank and open exchange of views outside the parameters of official negotiations. Tolba also felt that the target for ODA of 0.7% was unrealistic, citing that when governments committed to increase development assistance in 1992, it was at a level of 0.34% while today, it has dropped to 0.27%. He suggested that rather than pushing for 0.7%, NGOs should first focus on getting levels of ODA back to 1992 levels by 2002.

Maurice Strong

Maurice Strong, dubbed the "Reform Czar" in the earlier issues of "OUTREACH", came back to his roots when he met with NGOs Thursday evening. He stressed that he was not the reform leader. Furthermore, as his job is only to advise Secretary-General Kofi Annan on these matters, he did not at this time, want to share his view with the NGOs before he had the chance to share them with his boss. He expressed, however, that he would very much like to pick up ideas from the NGO-community which he would take into consideration in his work.

On questions regarding UNEP, Mr. Strong stressed that the world needs a strong environmental voice. However, the weaknesses of UNEP did need to be addressed. Abolishing UNEP was not the solution. He declined to comment on the Earth Council's participation process for Rio+5, and referred that question to Maximo Kalaw.

Mr. Strong shared the view that the CSD-process had been successful, especially mentioning the Local Agenda 21 initiatives. But he added that it obviously could be improved!