

## Call from Civil Society ahead of Rio +20

### **Distinguished Heads of State and Government,**

The 1992 Rio Summit first signalled the readiness of Nations of the World to embark on the path to sustainable development, which seeks to meet developmental needs in an equitable way, and to preserve the biosphere for present and future generations. Since then, it has led to a number of multilateral agreements, negotiations, action plans, which have raised world awareness, multiple grassroots initiatives, commitments by many stakeholders, as well as national and local strategies that have been put in place.

Twenty years later, however, the risks that were once envisioned have materialized: poverty has not been eradicated, inequality has been widened. Access to culture, health and education remains insufficient. Implementation of the three Rio Conventions on Climate, Biodiversity and Desertification has not been rapid enough to prevent the acceleration of natural resource degradation. We must also take on new challenges such as adaptation to this century's new conditions, access to energy, ocean conservation, food security and control of urbanization.

Therefore, we now find ourselves in the middle of an emergency that calls for a timetable of effective, adapted steps to counter the observed deterioration. We should act speedily to transform our world into one that is more equitable and sustainable. Globalization, whether of the economy, information flows or finance, as well as the need for equitable management of resources and the planet's environment, call for global regulation. The June 2012 Rio Conference, known as Rio+20, can mark a decisive breakthrough towards regulation that links together the three components of sustainable development. If all that the conference accomplishes is a mantra-like enumeration of distant goals and the perpetuation of previous modes of action, it will be a serious failure.

Civil society, represented by its many components that include NGOs, associations, unions, businesses, scientists, academia and local authorities, all of which are already very involved in sustainable development processes, and citizens at large are hence particularly worried and issue the following call to all of you :

### **Establishing the institutional framework that will facilitate transformations and global regulation is essential**

- **Sustainable development must have a central place in the UN system**

The global governance of sustainable development must be reformed so it is infused in the work of all UN institutions. Coordination through a new executive body, the Sustainable Development Council, ought to be ensured, in tight cooperation and consistent with other UN bodies, particularly ILO, and WTO.

- **A dedicated environmental organization should be created**

In particular, governance of the environmental dimension must be established on the basis of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) located in Nairobi, Kenya, through the creation of a specialized universal agency. This new World Environment Organization (WEO) will enable broad governance, linking the many multilateral environmental agreements and facilitating their coordination, consistency, implementation and effectiveness. It will have the authority to initiate the development of new conventions.

- **Civil Society actors should be more clearly involved in the decision-making processes**

In order to achieve concrete and swift mobilization and action, one should ensure full implementation of principle 10 of the Final Declaration of the Rio Summit (1992), which states that "environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level". In Rio +20 it is time to facilitate a process for public

participation and access to information and justice for all citizens, which requires, in particular, broadening the membership and role of the UN's Economic and Social Council.

Knowledge management will have to ensure transparency in, timely and equitable access to, observational data, technology and scientific knowledge that can help promote sustainable development and, especially, biosphere preservation.

Within the organization that will emerge from UNEP's transformation, local authorities, associations and NGOs, trade unions and companies will have to be involved as genuine stakeholders. As is the case in existing organizations and conventions, they will take their responsibilities as major actors of civil society, and shape decision-making processes.

Scientists will have an important role to play within it: informing policy makers and other stakeholders, explaining the issues of concern to mankind as well as to the biosphere, on all time scales including the very long term. The future organization should be able to access independent, transparent, collegial and multi-disciplinary scientific assessments, including through support by intergovernmental expert platforms.

### **The green economy, the second theme of the Rio +20 conference, must develop within the framework of sustainable development goals**

Underpinned by principle 8 of the Rio Declaration : "To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption...", this transformation must rely on support by all public and private stakeholders as well as associations. Their innovations, experiences and synergies at both national and local levels enable new development models.

New technologies, innovation should be developed and implemented for all, so as to foster a circular economy, with low-resource consumption, use and production patterns, that are attentive to the distribution of costs and benefits. These models, which are equitable and respectful of natural resources, are key to a new path to development for all peoples.

This new economy, to be supported by quantified objectives, timetables and appropriate indicators as well as innovating finance in the current transitional phase, calls for cooperation and coproduction both on the short and long term. It is characterized by an unlocking of creativity, respect for and promotion of cultural diversity, and strengthening solidarity. It is the way out of the crisis we are currently caught in.

### **Distinguished Heads of State and Government,**

At Rio +20, we invite you to demonstrate your awareness of these dangers and readiness to address them. The time for assessments is up, now is the time to act. Therefore, we ask you to bring all your weight to bear so that the outcome of the conference helps the necessary transition to sustainable development to materialize.

Beyond environmental governance, Rio +20 must be the world conference where civil society's clamour for a paradigm change is heard. The institutional translation of the importance of sustainable development into the United Nations framework, the World Environment Organization, a reform towards real involvement by stakeholders as well as a framework to promote the emergence of a green, equitable economy, will help us rise to the challenges of our century.

Such are our expectations, such is our call.

***The first signatories to this call encourage women and men around the world to sign it and relay it to their organizations, communities, and social networks.***