

Final Comments by NGO Major Group to CSD 11 Closing Session

Mr Chairman,

The NGOs are pleased that we are now able to implement the Implementation Plan of Johannesburg. We congratulate your efforts and those of your colleagues, but we also do this with some caveats.

We are pleased at the recognition of Major Groups contribution to the implementation of Agenda 21, past, present and future. We support greater participation of stakeholders through the existing Major Group modalities, resource assistance would also be welcome.

We are disappointed, however, with the complications that emerged regarding Major Group status and accreditation of WSSD participants. It seems that some governments are unclear about the function and contribution of Major Groups to the CSD; wish to restrict or slow down greater participation; or overestimate our potential power.

The massive public support needed to implement Agenda 21 will require the UN and its member states to broadcast widely the inclusion of Major Groups and make this concrete by the speedy accession of the Major Group participants who came for the WSSD last year.

Their enthusiasm and commitment to the implementation of Agenda 21, and their sacrifice of scarce resources, should not go unrecognized or be unduly hampered by procedural barriers.

NGOs and other Major Groups will be paying close attention to how ECOSOC deals with the accreditation issue. The success of the CSD depends in large part on Major Group contributions and participation. An unfavourable result or one which takes too long will diminish energy for implementation.

Perhaps it is an editorial error but we note with concern that Major Groups are not included within the activities of CSD Review Sessions in paragraph 2, sub-paragraph (b).

Experience, best practice and learning which are the subjects of this sub-paragraph are our core strengths. Major Groups also wish to participate in this exchange constructively.

Mr Chairman,

Allow me to invoke the precautionary principle on one point. There is concern that the large business sector may hold inordinate weight on policy-making through:

1. The ill-defined category of “scientific experts” – whose views will they represent? There are already great controversies over what constitutes environmentally sound and sustainable technologies and practices, such as the struggle between biotechnology and biosafety. A significant body of scientists

hold, correctly, that insufficient scientific testing has been conducted on genetically-modified organisms. Meanwhile there are industry-backed experts who claim that their products are safe, claims based on no appreciable research. The huge financial and ideological backing for unsustainable technologies and practices should not be further strengthened by privileged elevation into a category of scientific expertise. The Science and Technology Major Group already exists for participation from this community, and it is only one group of 'experts' from the larger expert community of Major Groups.

2. We have cautioned time and again that partnerships should not become private-sector dominated. We also hope that the private-sector perspective does not get enforced by Learning Centres also. This would be undesirable for the credibility of either.

On a positive note, we welcome the thematic clusters as proposed in the Annex. They make sense, they bridge sectoral concerns and appear integrative in spirit. We look forward to working with them.

We also welcome the progress on special consideration for SIDS and share their concerns. The situation of SIDS are close to our hearts and represent many of the toughest sustainability challenges.

We would like to see a human rights-based approach to sustainable development supported in the preamble and in the work of the Commission. We feel it is judicious to point out that alongside political rights there are also important economic, social and cultural rights which all governments at some point champion.

Finally, recalling your mention of troubled times, peace, stability and security must triumph over the scourge of militarism if our ambitious 14-year plan is to have success by 2017.

Mr Chairman,

The NGOs see the implementation of Agenda 21 as a collective endeavour between governments and Major Groups. We welcome this forward movement together within a multilateral system. We thank you for your efforts and wish you a safe journey home.