

UNITED NATIONS PRESS RELEASE

ENERGY AND CLIMATE TO TOP AGENDA OF EARTH SUMMIT COMMISSION

(New York, 16 April 2001) - How to meet the world's increasing energy needs while protecting the global environment — especially the climate and atmosphere — will be the main focus of the ninth annual session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The Commission, which continues the work of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, will meet from 16 to 27 April in New York.

This year's Commission session, chaired by Professor Bedric Moldan of the Czech Republic, is likely to be influenced by the recent setbacks in the Kyoto Protocol negotiations on climate change. Informal consultations on the Kyoto accord will be held separately from the CSD on Saturday, 21 April, in New York. These will take advantage of the presence of almost 40 environment ministers and high-level officials attending the CSD ministerial segment on 18-20 April.

From 30 April to 2 May, the Commission will convene its tenth session to begin preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. The 2002 Summit will assess implementation of the agreements made at the 1992 Earth Summit — especially its Agenda 21 action plan — and consider the way forward.

REDUCING FOSSIL FUELS

According to the United Nations report prepared for CSD-9, consumption of fossil fuels — the leading source of greenhouse gases — is expected to continue to grow over the next 10-20 years, despite increased use of renewable sources and vastly improved energy efficiency. The setback in the Kyoto negotiations and the surge in international oil prices highlight the difficulty of getting energy policies just right - without putting further strain on poor people's pockets, causing more harm to the environment and leaving an unliveable world to future generations.

Developing alternative sustainable energy options, market reform and targeting energy subsidies in order to reduce the use of dirty fuels as well as encourage research and development in cleaner fuels will be some of the most contentious issues to be discussed.

For example, energy subsidies could keep prices below market levels for consumers or above market levels for producers. At the same time under-pricing encourages inefficient use or over-consumption and waste but over-pricing excludes the poorest population's access to energy services. Already nearly two billion people - a third of the world population - still live without commercial energy. An equal number of people in low-income developing countries rely on traditional, non-commercial sources of energy using inefficient technologies such as unventilated stoves or open fires.

Because convenient, affordable energy can contribute to a household's productivity and income-generating potential, the issue of sustainable energy is crucial to sustainable development. The underlying principles guiding the approach to energy for sustainable development include the

promotion of efficient production and use of energy, wider-scale use of renewable resources, and transition to the next generation of fossil fuel.

In 1999, fossil fuels continued to be the world's dominant primary energy source. Petroleum (crude oil and natural gas products) accounted for almost 40.6 per cent of the total primary energy source. Coal and dry natural gas ranked second and third, accounting for 25 per cent and 24 per cent, respectively, of the world energy consumption. By comparison nuclear power accounted for 7.6 per cent and hydro and other renewable energy sources (including solar, wind, biomass, and geothermal) accounted for 2.8 per cent of the total global primary energy source. In order for developing countries to replace less efficient energy systems with more efficient next-generation energy technologies, significantly greater investment capital will be needed.

In addition to the sectoral theme of atmosphere and energy, the Commission will also discuss reports on transport and atmosphere; information for decision-making; and international cooperation for an enabling environment. The Commission's decisions will be considered by the UN Economic and Social Council.

DIALOGUE ON ENERGY AND TRANSPORT

One of the unique features of CSD sessions is a multi-stakeholder dialogue, which this year will focus on energy and transport. The dialogue will involve five key stakeholders, namely representatives of energy and transport-related businesses, trade unions from the energy and transport sectors, non-governmental organizations, local governments, and scientists working on energy and transport-related fields. The dialogue topics will include access to sustainable energy, choices for sustainable energy, public private partnerships for sustainable transport and sustainable transport planning.

To start off the high-level segment of the Commission meeting, a panel discussion on financing energy and transport for sustainable development will be held on Wednesday, 18 April, from 3 to 6 pm. Panel members will include heads of financial institutions, government ministers and corporate executives.

Note to Journalists: For more information, see the Commission website at www.un.org/esa/susdev/csd.

To obtain United Nations media accreditation for the CSD, please fax a letter of assignment to the Media Accreditation and Liaison Unit, Department of Public Information, fax: 212-963-4642 and follow-up by calling 212-963-7164.

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