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Sustainable Development Summit Concludes in Johannesburg: UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan Says It's Just the Beginning

Johannesburg, 4 September—Efforts to promote sustainable development received a major boost today as the World Summit on Sustainable Development concluded today with significant commitments to improve the lives of people living in poverty and to reverse the continuing degradation of the global environment.

“This Summit makes sustainable development a reality,” United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said at a closing press conference in Johannesburg yesterday. “This Summit will put us on a path that reduces poverty while protecting the environment, a path that works for all peoples, rich and poor, today and tomorrow.”

“Governments have agreed here,” Mr. Annan said, “on an impressive range of concrete commitments and action that will make a real difference for people in all regions of the world.”

The overriding theme of the Summit was to promote action and major progress was made in Johannesburg to address some of the most pressing concerns of poverty and the environment. Commitments were made to increase access to clean water and proper sanitation, to increase access to energy services, to improve health conditions and agriculture, particularly in drylands, and to better protect the world's biodiversity and ecosystems.

The major outcome document, the Plan of Implementation, contains targets and timetables to spur action on a wide range of issues, including halving the proportion of people who lack access to clean water or proper sanitation by 2015, to restoring depleted fisheries to the preserving biodiversity by 2015, and phasing out of toxic chemicals by 2005. In addition, for the first time countries adopted commitments toward increasing the use of renewable energy “with a sense of urgency,” Although a proposed target for this was not adopted.

But rather than concluding with only the words of an agreed document, the Summit has also generated concrete partnership initiatives by and between governments, citizen groups and businesses. These partnerships are bringing with them additional resources and expertise to attain significant results where they matter—in communities across the globe.

“The Summit represents a major leap forward in the development of partnerships,” Mr. Annan said, “with the UN, Governments, business and civil society coming together to increase the pool of resources to tackle global problems on a global scale.”

As a result of the Summit, governments agreed on a series of commitments in five priority areas that were backed up by specific government announcements on programmes, and by partnership initiatives. More than 220 partnerships, representing \$235 million in resources, were identified during the Summit process to complement the government commitments, and many more were announced outside of the formal Summit proceedings.

The true test of what the Johannesburg Summit achieves, Mr. Annan said, are the actions that are taken afterward. "We have to go out and take action," he said. "I am not saying that Johannesburg is the of it. Johannesburg is the beginning."

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