

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement
10 September 2007

UN General Assembly
Informal Consultative Process on the Institutional Framework for the
United Nations' Environmental Activities

Delivered by Michael Snowden, Adviser, Permanent Mission of the United
States of America to the United Nations

- The United States thanks the Ambassadors of Mexico and Switzerland for the Options Paper they have produced. The U.S. has been fully engaged in this process, and we note the progress made to date in consolidating the views of member states.
- In the interest of time, allow me to make general remarks about how the U.S. wishes to see this process move forward, and then offer a few general remarks on certain elements in the Options Paper. With the Chairs' indulgence, I hope to have specific reactions to each of the building blocks in the near future.
- The United States supports increasing the efficiency of the UN Environment Program (UNEP), improved coordination among various environmental bodies and multilateral agreements, and the improvement of international environmental governance (IEG).
- We are fully prepared to work with delegations to continue discussion of the Options Paper to identify points among the building blocks on which we might find consensus and which could provide the substance of a General Assembly resolution. We of course do not agree, however, with all of the points of the Paper or with all of the building blocks

- Regarding the broader transformation of the IEG system, the United States firmly holds the view that increasing efficiency does not mean increasing centralization. On the contrary, experience dictates that, far from seeking greater centralization, we should be moving in the opposite direction – toward practical, bottom-up approaches rather than rigid top-down legal instruments that often do not get implemented.
 - For example, in forests, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) has worked regionally with mahogany range states to address their compliance needs for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and helped to integrate CITES implementation into individual country projects funded by ITTO. While CITES itself does not have capacity building as an aspect of its work, this complementary role by ITTO is within the mandate and scope of the International Tropical Timber Agreement and addresses a real need.

- We view the current system of international environmental governance – with its problem-specific blend of legal instruments, non-legal instruments, and practical grass-roots approaches – as responsive and nimble, decentralized, specialized, relatively efficient, and flexible, and we have serious reservations regarding the need for an overarching institution.

- The United States firmly believes that any serious attempt to address efficiency/effectiveness within the UN system must include recognition of the value of further decentralization that favors bottom-up practical approaches.

- Given the wide divergence of views among governments on this very important issue, we believe significant further study is required on the range of options included in the Co-Chairs’ text, particularly on the matter of the broader transformation of the IEG system.

- We are prepared to continue our discussions, formally or informally, to identify pathways to consensus. We believe these efforts should focus on our common goals of improving UNEP and other UN bodies

so that they can support governments' efforts to protect their environment while promoting sustainable development.

Specific Comments

Allow me to offer general comments on a few of the suggestions contained among the seven building blocks which could, in our view, win general consensus and possible inclusion in a General Assembly (GA) resolution.

- Regarding scientific assessment (BB1): UNEP should institute greater cooperation with national laboratories and agencies in order to facilitate cooperation between those with established procedures and experience with those that are in the process of developing new programs and procedures.
- UNEP should not seek to develop substantive expertise in all areas. Rather, UNEP's need for in-house capacity should be limited to expertise that will allow UNEP staff to understand issues, evaluate information and research, facilitate access to information and expertise, and manage/coordinate assistance utilizing others' expertise.
- A variety of methods exist to improve coordination and cooperation at the agency level (BB2):
 - **Improve cooperation between UNEP and the UN Development Program (UNDP) by building on UNEP/UNDP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):** The UNEP and UNDP secretariats should go through a process in which the respective roles of both UNEP and UNDP are clarified vis-à-vis sustainable development in order to reduce duplication and maximize resources for capacity building.
 - **Improve utilization of the UN Development Group (UNDG):** Where UNEP is present, integrate UNEP into

the undg. Where UNEP is not present, use UNDP as a proxy through a UNEP/UNDP MOU.

- **Utilize UNDP's comparative advantage :** UNDP has presence in a greater number of countries than UNEP. UNEP and UNDP should coordinate so UNDP can facilitate UNEP's programs in program in particular countries, so that they can jointly assist governments in promoting sustainable development.
 - **Coordinate more closely with regional commissions (BB4):** Regional commissions receive funding from the UN regular budget and additional voluntary funding for technical programs and capacity building. Coordinate activities in UNEP and CSD more closely with technical programs through the regional commissions.
- With regards to multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) (BB3), the U.S. prefers that MEAs cooperate on their own initiative, as needed, and on an ad hoc basis. We would not want to see UNEP or any other centralized UN entity take on a directive role with regard to the MEAs.
- "Clustering" of MEAs raises significant legal and policy issues, given, among other things, the fact that some states, including my own, are party to some MEAs and non-party to others.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, there are several points among the building blocks that hold potential for winning broad consensus and inclusion in a possible future GA resolution. The United States thus recommends further consideration of those practical elements of the Options Paper that have wide agreement.

Again, with regard to the more divisive issue of transforming the IEG system, we believe this topic will require significantly more discussion in either formal or informal processes before consensus might be achieved. I reiterate, however, the willingness of the United States to continuing playing its part in this process.

Thank you.