



## **DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

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**Commission on Sustainable Development  
acting as the preparatory committee for the  
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# **MEETING OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS OF THE AMERICAS**

**Background Paper No. 5**

**SUBMITTED BY  
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**DESA/DSD/PC3/BP5**



**MEETING OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS OF THE AMERICAS  
MARCH 4-5, 2002  
Ottawa, Canada**

**Ministerial Communiqué**

1. We, the Ministers of Health and Environment of the Americas acting on the commitment made at the Summit of the Americas held in Québec City in April 2001, recognize the different levels and patterns of development of our countries, their cultural diversity, and the diversity of ecosystems within the hemisphere. We are aware of the relationship between the environment and socio-economic factors such as poverty, poor housing, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, inequity in distribution of wealth and the debt burden, and their impact on health. We particularly note the very negative impact that terrorism has on human life, human health and the environment and reject terrorism in all of its forms. While progress has been made to tackle health and environment issues in the region, economic, social and other challenges, such as the lack of adequate infrastructure and urban and rural planning, contribute to the persistence of certain diseases such as diarrhea and respiratory ailments. In addition, chronic and acute diseases can arise from inappropriate exposure to chemicals and other aspects of development. The burdens on health of environmental degradation affect current generations and may have increased impact on future generations. In particular, they affect vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and women as well as the least protected groups such as indigenous populations, rural populations, and the very poor. We express grave concern over this situation and recognize the need to focus our effort on common objectives, domestically and regionally, that open equal opportunities to achieve sustainable development throughout the region to achieve better health and improve living standards for all our people.
2. We thank the Government of Canada, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP-RONA, UNEP-ROLAC) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) for their active participation and technical expertise in the preparation and organization of this meeting.

***Setting Future Directions for Health and Environment in the Americas***

3. We reaffirm commitments made at the Pan American Conference on Health, Environment and Sustainable Human Development held in Washington D.C. in 1995 which resulted in the Pan American Charter on Health and Environment in Sustainable Human Development and the Regional Plan of Action. To fully accomplish these commitments, we take into account the urgent need to strengthen action plans bearing in mind common but differentiated responsibilities as set forth in Principle 7 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Countries should seek to further mobilize resources for their implementation and follow-up.
4. We acknowledge that action begins in our countries, where we commit to work in cooperation with all levels of government, the private sector, and civil society, encouraging enhanced community participation. Each country has primary responsibility for decision-

making and for investing in health and the quality of the environment, recognizing the interdependence of ecosystems across the region. These investments are one critical pre-condition to reducing inequality and alleviating poverty, leading ultimately to improving quality of life and social justice within the context of sustainable development for all people in the Americas.

5. We recognize the need to further strengthen and consolidate partnerships between ministries responsible for health and environment. Furthermore, building bridges between health and environment and other government sectors is vital to ensuring that health and well-being become increasingly recognized and systematically translated into national policies and programs. We are committed to improving communication, enhancing collaboration, and undertaking shared domestic action on human health and the environment, building upon action plans and strategies already in place or to be agreed upon. These efforts can contribute to our shared objective of promoting sustainable development in the region.
6. We acknowledge the significant progress in improving human health and the environment in the region since the endorsement of the Pan American Charter and Regional Plan of Action. With a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges, we underscore the value, importance, and need for the health and environment sectors to work more closely together in defining problems, identifying solutions, and implementing joint initiatives involving the public and private sectors as well as civil society. In this respect, we urge the OAS, PAHO, UNEP, the IDB and other relevant organizations to continue to take steps to formally integrate issues related to health and environment in their respective work programs and to strengthen interagency cooperation so that it is part of their *modus operandi*.
7. We agree on the need to consider a follow-up process that will help each country advance our work at the national and regional level, in preventing and mitigating threats to the environment and to human health. We agree to meet regularly prior to the Summits of the Americas to set directions and assess progress. In this regard, we agree to establish a task force comprised of countries throughout the Americas to make proposals on a follow-up process that does not duplicate work of existing international and regional organizations. We also agree that this task force take advantage of existing fora – such as PAHO Ministerial Councils, UNEP Regional Offices, as well as other relevant international, regional, and sub-regional organizations to maintain momentum in the realization of our objectives. In addition, we note the critical role of the OAS and the IDB in this vital matter and urge their continued engagement in these efforts as well as their support for member countries' strategies and programs related to sustainable development in the hemisphere.

### ***Issues of common concern and shared goals***

8. While we recognize there are differences among our countries, we also realize that we have many common concerns regarding threats to the environment and to human health and we recognize that these concerns can be more effectively addressed when we define and act on shared goals. In the spirit of protecting our ecosystems as service-providers for development, we agree that the following areas of priority require concerted action across the region:

- a) Integrated management of water resources, including water contamination and basic sanitation;
  - b) Air quality;
  - c) Health implications of natural and human-made disasters;
  - d) Sound management of chemicals;
  - e) Potential health impacts of climate variability and change particularly with respect to small island developing states;
  - f) Workers' health, including the detrimental impact of HIV/AIDS on productivity;
  - g) Food security and safety; and
  - h) Ethics of sustainable development from a health and environment perspective.
9. As initial goals, we agree to consider working towards:
- a) advancing the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council Vision21 Goals 2015 and 2025 towards universal coverage and hygiene, adopting the Millennium Summit Goals related to water, and developing and using practical technologies related to both water and sanitation;
  - b) preventing and abating water pollution from urban, industrial and agricultural sources through integrated water resource management and through efforts to fulfill commitments made in the 2001 Montréal Declaration on the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA);
  - c) undertaking an economic and technical assessment of sewage and water treatment systems in the region, including a comparative analysis of best and affordable practices in the application of instruments (economic, regulatory, policy) and a valuation of health benefits to fully promote access to services and gradually internalize costs in a fair and equitable manner;
  - d) exploring and using best practices for the improved management of solid wastes (including biomedical wastes);
  - e) fulfilling our commitment to phase out lead in gasoline and to further this work by developing national strategies to phase out lead from other sources;
  - f) developing national action plans to reduce air emissions from transportation sources including actions to decrease sulfur in gasoline and in diesel;
  - g) developing strategies to improve indoor air quality in homes, workplaces and public facilities;

- h) bringing into force the Stockholm Convention, with a focus on the development of POPs inventories, and in particular on reducing reliance on, and seeking alternatives to, DDT;
- i) developing pollutant release and transfer registries as a tool to manage exposure to chemical releases;
- j) developing prevention, preparedness and response plans in cases of emergencies and disasters to reduce vulnerability of populations;
- k) undertaking scientific research to improve our understanding of the health and environment effects of climate variability, including vector-borne diseases and of climate change; and
- l) to enhance efforts between UNEP, UNDP, PAHO, and ECLAC, in building a regional proposal on the ethics of sustainable development to be taken to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

***Building and Sharing Our Capacities to Respond to Threats to Human Health and the Environment***

10. We recognize that scientific and relevant traditional knowledge is the foundation of effective action in addressing threats to human health and the environment. High on our agenda is a commitment to expand and improve our understanding of the linkages between health and the environment and to improve the availability, understanding, and use of information, including relevant traditional and local knowledge, at the regional, national and community levels. To further the development of this capacity across the region:
- a) We agree to enhance our surveillance and monitoring of the health of populations, and of ecosystems.
  - b) We agree to support the development, through capacity-building, of integrated health and environment assessments for the region, building on existing knowledge and recognizing that capacity to carry out scientific assessments is key to decision-making and developing consensus for regional and national action.
  - c) We agree to further develop, harmonize as appropriate, and use indicators to inform decision-makers in environment and health management, and in national public policy, both domestically and within the hemisphere, of the current state of affairs and on the progress which is made. As a first step, we would work together to develop a set of indicators for children's health and the environment and water quality.
  - d) We agree to further exchange and disseminate knowledge through all mechanisms possible including conferences and other fora.
  - e) We agree to review the capacities of our current pan-national institutions to determine their abilities to assist nations and to review the capacities of individual

countries to access, understand and use knowledge to address the common and unique problems which exist in each country and across the region.

- f) We agree to explore and recommend means for improving the sharing of information for action and the exchange of best practices, with a focus on information and communication technology.
- g) We agree to cooperate on training and development programs across the region because available and trained human resources are at the centre of the required research, analysis, and dissemination activities.
- h) We agree that one of the most effective mechanisms to further the goals of improving both health and the environment is a population that understands the linkages and the action needed. We therefore agree to facilitate and support programs of public education and awareness, particularly with respect to encouraging compliance with and enforcement of laws and regulations.

### ***Messages for the World Summit on Sustainable Development***

- 11. We renew our determination to comply with the commitments entered into at UNCED, in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, in particular, Chapter 6, *Protecting and Promoting Human Health Conditions*.
- 12. We underscore the need to establish a dialogue that leads to the creation of an ethic for sustainable development.
- 13. As Health and Environment Ministers, we acknowledge the relationship between poverty, environmental quality and human health. We recognize the important preparatory process that is now under way in advance of the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa in August and September of 2002. We underscore the importance of investments in health as a key component of ensuring sustainable development, domestically, in our hemisphere, and globally.
- 14. We recognize the integrated management of water resources as an issue of special importance in the relationship between health and environment and we underscore the importance of establishing the economic and financial mechanisms to enhance our ability to ensure the quantity, availability and quality of water resources.

15. We urge:
- a) leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to explicitly recognize the need to make the integration of action and approaches to human health and environment a focus for development by building stronger bridges between ministries responsible for national health and environment, and other ministries. This can be done through enhanced communication, strengthened collaboration, and the development of shared agendas.
  - b) more specifically, leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to make the protection of vulnerable populations, especially children, as they represent our future, a high priority.
  - c) technical and financial cooperation organizations to mobilize expertise and resources to support the development and implementation of programs and policies aimed at vulnerable populations.
16. We look forward to sharing the results of our efforts. We encourage leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to make capacity-building, sharing information and best practices a priority. We recall and support the re-affirmation of the principles and commitments made in the October 23-24, 2001 Rio de Janeiro Platform for Action on the Road to Johannesburg.\*

### ***Final Messages***

17. We stress the important role of civil society and other stakeholders in shaping national and regional action to mitigate and prevent threats to human health and the environment. We are committed to ensuring that civil society and other stakeholders are appropriately engaged in the development and implementation of national strategies.
18. We recognize the importance of on-going international efforts to mobilize and better manage investments to promote sustainable development. We encourage leaders participating in the UN International Conference on Financing for Development to be held in Monterrey, Mexico on March 18-22, 2002, to agree upon a path forward for financing development that is sustainable and consistent with the relevant health and environment goals of Agenda 21 and stress financing for the integrated management of water resources.
19. This meeting of Ministers of Health and the Environment of the Americas has given us the opportunity to establish a hemispheric agenda which reflects our common concerns. We are prepared to put forward actions from this agenda which will enable us, within a framework of strategic regional integration, to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of our peoples on the path to sustainable development for the entire region.

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\*The United States did not participate in the negotiation of the Rio Platform for Action on the Road to Johannesburg. As a non-participant in the Rio Platform, the United States cannot reaffirm all of the principles and commitments contained therein.