



UNITED NATIONS

# JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT 2002



WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT | JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA | 26 AUGUST–4 SEPTEMBER 2002

Press Release

## World Leaders to Announce Initiatives to Improve Living Conditions and Environment at UN Summit on Sustainable Development

New York, 22 July — Faced with alarming deterioration in the earth's vital life-supporting ecosystems, world leaders will gather at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August to 4 September to pursue new initiatives to implement sustainable development and build a future of prosperity and security for their citizens.

The Johannesburg Summit offers an historic opportunity to confront serious and growing threats to human well-being: a third of the world's people live on an income of less than two dollars a day, use of fossil fuels is rising rapidly, patterns of production and consumption continue to eat up natural resources faster than they can be replenished, three-quarters of the world's fisheries are fished to their sustainable limits or beyond, mountain glaciers are slowly melting away and the world's forests have shrunk in the last decade by an area larger than Venezuela.

These trends can be reversed, but decisive action is needed. While action is expensive, the cost of doing nothing is even higher. For example, every year land degradation and desertification cause an estimated \$42 billion in damage and lost income, but the cost to prevent degradation would total only \$2.4 billion a year. No amount of money, however, can restore lost biodiversity or bring back plant and animal species, once they are extinct.

The international community will come together in Johannesburg just as southern Africa is struggling to cope with a drought that has parched the entire region, compounding problems of poverty and HIV/AIDS, and threatening famine.

"It is urgent for the world as a whole to learn the lessons of this drought," United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said, "which gives us an ugly picture of the fate that lies in store for us, and for our children, if we do not find models of development that are genuinely sustainable."

"Johannesburg can and must revive political commitment to sustainable development, especially at the highest levels," Mr. Annan said. "We have seen the results that can be achieved when leaders speak publicly about an issue, and put the full weight and resources of their administrations behind it."

Heads of State and Government who will be coming to Johannesburg to forge a new course of action will be joined by representatives from citizen and community groups, as well as business leaders, farmers, scientists and academics, trade unionists, local authorities, women, indigenous people and youth.

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“Alarm bells are going off all over, and if we listen to them, we can reverse the current trends,” Johannesburg Summit Secretary-General Nitin Desai said. “But we need the political will to do something about these problems. We need to adopt practical measures. And we need to develop partnerships to make sure that the job gets done by bringing more global resources to bear on the solutions. That is what we must achieve in Johannesburg.”

## Summit outcomes

The Summit will result in an implementation plan detailing the priorities and actions that countries will pursue after Johannesburg, as well as a political declaration, to be agreed by world leaders, that will provide the political impetus for action. In addition, the Summit will serve as a platform for the launch of new partnership initiatives, by and between governments, non-governmental organizations and businesses, to tackle specific problems and achieve measurable results.

Three quarters of the implementation plan has been agreed upon, and includes significant actions to improve access to water and sanitation, as well as for health.

The remaining issues, which must still be resolved at Johannesburg, include a number of contentious questions, many of which reflect differences and competing interests regarding the use of resources. Also unresolved are proposals for setting firm timetables and targets for action on several issues such as for reducing the number of people who lack access to proper sanitation, increasing the use of renewable energy, and phasing out toxic chemicals. The most difficult issues that remain concern trade and finance, including debt relief, expanded trade opportunities for developing countries, the impact of subsidies, increased official development assistance, and improved access to technology by developing countries.

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