



UNITED NATIONS

JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT 2002



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

PRESS RELEASE

LEADER OF 2002 JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT CHALLENGES BUSINESS TO BECOME FULL PARTNER IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

World Summit Secretary-General Nitin Desai Calls for Governments and Advocates to Forge Partnerships with Corporate Sector

(4 February 2002, New York) – Speaking at the World Economic Forum meeting in New York, Nitin Desai, Secretary-General of the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, today called on major corporations around the world to dramatically increase their involvement in sustainable development initiatives.

Sustainable development is an approach to managing the world's resources that integrates economic, social, and environmental decision-making to improve the quality of life of people today while preserving natural resources for future generations. Mr. Desai's remarks were made as part of a World Economic Forum meeting held to examine progress made since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and discuss goals for the upcoming Johannesburg Summit, to be held from 26 August to 4 September 2002.

"Some environmentalists and industrialists still do not see that environmental protection and sustainable economic growth are compatible goals," said Nitin Desai. "Yet enlightened businesses are increasingly recognizing that they will benefit from sustainable development, and are seeking ways to integrate their profit-oriented 'bottom line' with broader social and environmental considerations. The need now is to greatly expand these endeavors, for the world's major conglomerates to fulfill their role as global citizens, and for governments and advocates to work together with business in achieving the goals of sustainable development."

The Johannesburg Summit will focus on accelerating global implementation of Agenda 21, the blueprint for action on sustainable development. The basic social, environmental and economic needs of the world's people are great. Currently two billion people lack access to commercial energy, one fifth of the world's population must survive on less than one dollar a day, and over 800 million people are undernourished.

Although a major report released in December by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan found progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 since the Rio meeting to be poor in many respects, there has been increasing corporate awareness of the need to ramp up business involvement in sustainable development. A number of major industry-wide institutions such as the International Chamber of Commerce and the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, which counts many major corporations among its members, have embraced the issue.

"Business has an immense impact upon the world's natural resources, and a unique influence with its consumers and employees," noted Nitin Desai. "It is critical for governments around the world to recognize the importance of the corporate sector as a prime ally in efforts to implement and expand sustainable development, and to engage in private-public partnerships wherever possible to help accelerate this process."

Agenda 21 and The Secretary-General's Ten Point Action Plan

The Johannesburg Summit will base its work on Agenda 21, the landmark plan of action adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development – the Earth Summit – held in Rio de Janeiro.

“The best-crafted plan is only as good as its implementation, and we need significant improvement in that area,” said Mr. Desai. “The Johannesburg Summit will ask participants to move beyond talk to action, and will seek to establish clear, quantifiable targets to guide our efforts to improve conditions for this and future generations.”

To focus efforts in Johannesburg on achievable results, Secretary-General's report on sustainable development that was released in December, *Implementing Agenda 21*, offers a suggested ten-point plan of action:

1. Make globalization work for sustainable development
2. Eradicate poverty and improve livelihoods in rural and urban areas
3. Change unsustainable patterns of production and consumption
4. Improve health through safe and affordable access to freshwater, a reduction in lead in gasoline, and improved indoor air quality
5. Provide access to energy and improve energy efficiency
6. Manage ecosystems and biodiversity on a sustainable basis
7. Improve freshwater supply management and arrange more equitable distribution of water resources
8. Provide financial resources through increases in official development assistance and private investment
9. Support sustainable development in Africa
10. Strengthen international governance for sustainable development

More details of the action plan and a copy of the report are available on the Summit website at www.johannesburgsummit.org under Documents.

The Second Session of the Summit's global PrepCom (Preparatory Committee meeting), currently under way in New York until 8 February, is identifying practical initiatives and new partnerships between governments, business and other groups that will accelerate sustainable development.

For More Information

Press releases, logistical information, and other background materials are available on the Summit website, www.johannesburgsummit.org, under Media Info.

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