



UNITED NATIONS

# JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT 2002



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

Backgrounder

## Covering the Bali PrepCom: What's the Story?

The World Summit on Sustainable Development will be big. There will be heads of State and Government, and thousands of government delegates and citizen activists. There will be leaders from business, local authorities, trade unions and the scientific community. There will be representatives of indigenous groups, women's organizations, farmers and youth. And there will be the press.

All told, as many as 60,000 people may descend on South Africa for the Summit and other events being organized in parallel, making it one of the largest international gatherings ever held. Although there will be many people and many agendas, the Summit will bring them together for one purpose: to promote sustainable development—which ensures a better future for people and the planet through tackling effectively the interdependency between human society and the environment.

Sustainable development, by itself, is not controversial. All countries agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro that it offered the best approach to decision-making, an approach that could meet the development needs of everyone, rich and poor, while protecting the Earth's natural resources and ecosystems for the benefit of future generations. Yet progress since Rio has not met expectations, and the Johannesburg Summit hopes to jumpstart global efforts to renew the sustainable development agenda.

There have been three global-level preparatory meetings in New York where participants have honed in on the essential elements of an agreement. The fourth session of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom), to be held in Bali from 27 May to 7 June, is the last opportunity before the Johannesburg Summit for governments and representatives from key sectors of society to forge the agreements that will, it is hoped, spur new initiatives, action and results.

### Following the Negotiations in Bali

Negotiations are not always easy to cover—delegations often spend days behind closed doors debating details and seeking consensus. Yet in the end, there will be a result that will form the basis of the outcome of the Summit in Johannesburg, which should result in a more secure future for us all — and for our children.

There will be three distinct outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit—a political declaration agreed to by the heads of State and Government; an implementation programme that specifies what priority actions governments agree are needed; and the announcement of partnership initiatives, or specific undertakings that will bring forward real action in particular areas without the need for global consensus on the details.

Both the political declaration and the implementation programme will be negotiated during the Bali PrepCom, and while the partnership initiatives will not be negotiated, there will be discussions there on how to organize and present this outcome in Johannesburg.

None of the talks will be easy. There are major differences in viewpoint among countries, and each will want the outcome to reflect their position. To make the process smoother, countries often negotiate in blocs. The developing countries will be represented by the "Group of 77 and China", a group that actually has 133 member nations. The G-77 usually presents a united position on major economic issues, but within the Group, there are regional sub-groups, particularly for Africa, for Latin America (the Rio Group), and for the countries that form the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). Venezuela currently holds the rotating chairmanship of the G-77 and speaks for them in negotiations.

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The developed countries also have formed negotiating groups. The members of the European Union usually speak with one voice, and often other countries in Central and Eastern Europe associate themselves with the EU. Spain currently holds the Presidency of the EU, and so will generally speak on behalf of these countries in Bali, to be followed by Denmark, which will assume the Presidency in July and so will speak for the EU at the Summit. Switzerland, still an observer State, speaks independently, as does Norway. Another, more informal, grouping is the JUSCANZ countries—Japan, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

At the Bali PrepCom, one part of the story lies in what issues each group wants to address. But more than articulating positions, the evolving story concerns proposals for solutions—who is willing to do what.

The linchpin of the Bali meeting will be high-level discussions on the political declaration, to be held at the Ministerial level from 5 to 7 June. The presence of high-level decision makers is expected to spur countries toward an agreement that would be acceptable to heads of State and Government in Johannesburg.

Another useful event that is part of the official proceedings is the multi-stakeholder dialogue segment, where representatives of all the major groups from around the world participate in discussions on how to move forward. These dialogues will be held on 27-29 May, and will provide a good idea of who the major players are and the nature of the ideas that are in the mix.

## Useful Sources

To assist journalists in tracking the negotiations, the Spokesperson for the PrepCom will hold briefings as needed, and will arrange for key figures in the negotiations to update the press. An initial briefing session on the prospects for the PrepCom and the major issues being discussed will be arranged for the media on the first day of the PrepCom. Information staff in the Media Centre will be available to answer press queries on an ongoing basis. Press conferences by a wide range of government and UN officials, as well as by business leaders, NGOs and other major group representatives, will also provide interesting story material throughout the meeting.

United Nations press releases will provide a same-day summary, in English and French, of open meetings such as the high-level debates in the Plenary, and also summaries of some press conferences. These will be posted on the Summit website ([www.johannesburgsummit.org](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org)) as well as made available in hard copy in the Media Centre. Also, news stories posted on the Summit website can provide interesting angles and quotes.

In addition, the Earth Negotiations Bulletin, a respected independent reporting service, produces a daily one-page summary in English and French of the proceedings, including the informal negotiations. It will be available on-site in hard copy, and it is posted, along with photos and audio, at [www.iisd.org/linkages](http://www.iisd.org/linkages). There will be links to this coverage from the Summit website.

There will also be many side events during the PrepCom, held by groups seeking to highlight various issues, initiatives or viewpoints. Held at the official conference site during the lunch break or at night, these events often provide facts and opinions that can prove useful for a story. The full schedule of side events will be posted on the Summit website ([www.johannesburgsummit.org](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org)) before the start of the meeting, and will be updated during the PrepCom on a daily basis. These updates will also be circulated in the Media Centre.

In addition to those side events taking place at the official conference site, there will be many events at the People's Forum (see [www.jakartapeoplesforum.org](http://www.jakartapeoplesforum.org)) and other nearby venues that will offer unique angles and human interest stories. Some advance information about these events will be included in the Media Schedule, and advisories will be posted in the Media Centre.