



UNITED NATIONS

JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT 2002



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

United Nations Press Release

South African President to Convene Meeting to Speed Agreement on Johannesburg Summit Outcome

New York, 11 July—South African President Thabo Mbeki has invited 25 countries to serve as “Friends of the Chair” for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in an effort to find an approach to help resolve the remaining differences and achieve a global consensus at the Summit. The group will hold its first meeting in New York on 17 July.

The Summit, which will be held in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September, 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. World leaders will adopt an implementation plan for sustainable development and a political declaration, and will also announce partnership initiatives aimed at delivering results on the ground.

The South African initiative grew out of discussions between President Mbeki and United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan during the Group of Eight Summit in Kananaskis, Canada last month. According to South Africa’s UN Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo, the leaders of the G8 were among the first to accept President Mbeki’s invitation.

The 25 countries were selected based on geographical representation as well as “their common interest in the pending issues, and their overall commitment to the success of the Johannesburg Summit,” Kumalo said.

South Africa assumed the chairmanship of the Summit after the last preparatory meeting in Bali, Indonesia last month. The Bali meeting concluded with agreements on about three-quarters of the Summit’s implementation plan, and the remaining issues, which include some of the most difficult, were left for Johannesburg. The Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Summit was Dr. Emil Salim of Indonesia.

The 17 July meeting will be led by the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, and by the UN Secretary-General. It is South Africa’s hope that the meeting will be attended by Ministers or “sherpas” who report directly to the Heads of State and Government of the invited countries.

President Mbeki, according to the South African Mission to the United Nations, “remains convinced that a focused political discussion of the outstanding issues could result in an approach that can help expedite the process in Johannesburg.”

Johannesburg Summit Secretary-General Nitin Desai said that the South African initiative is part of intensified behind-the-scene activity aimed at building a framework for finding agreement on the remaining outstanding issues. The increased activity was a reflection of the growing interest of Heads of State in the Summit, he stated. In addition to being discussed at the G8 Summit, the Summit was the focus of the "passing the Earth Summit torch" event held in Rio de Janeiro, attended by the leaders of Brazil, Sweden and South Africa, as well as by United Kingdom Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott and other high-level officials.

The Friends of the Chair meeting will not be a negotiating session, which must be open to all Member States. Rather, it provides an opportunity for key players to find an approach or a mechanism that would facilitate the negotiations to be held in Johannesburg.

Still to be resolved are issues concerning trade and finance, globalization, setting targets and timetables, and a number of differences over the interpretation of principles adopted at the Earth Summit.

"Bali took the negotiations as far as they could go at that level," Desai said. The remaining issues require a political resolution, but he was confident that the disagreements "are not insuperable".

The countries invited by President Mbeki to serve as Friends of the Chair include Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States and Venezuela.

Media contacts

Until 16 August:

Klomjit Chandrapanya, tel. (212) 963-9495

Pragati Pascale, tel. (212) 963-6870

Gavin Hart or Meredith Mishel, tel. (212) 584-5031

After 16 August: In New York, (212) 584-5031; see website for contacts in Johannesburg

E-mail mediainfo@un.org; Website: www.johannesburgsummit.org