

Programme for the  
Further Implementation of  
**AGENDA**  
**21**

Adopted by Governments  
at Earth Summit +5,  
special session of the  
United Nations General Assembly,  
23-28 June 1997,  
New York



**EARTH SUMMIT**



**UNITED NATIONS**

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## INTRODUCTION

At the close of “Earth Summit+5”—the nineteenth special session of the United Nations General Assembly, held from 23 to 28 June 1997 in New York—delegates from over 165 countries adopted the *Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21*. The session was called to assess progress in the five years since the 1992 Earth Summit—the UN Conference on Environment and Development—and chart the course for future work based on Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development adopted at the Rio Summit.

Fifty-three heads of State or Government and 65 environment and other ministers attended the session to lend political impetus and visibility to the talks. The final document was the outcome of several rounds of negotiations, beginning at inter-sessional meetings in March 1997, continuing at the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in April/May, and concluding at the General Assembly special session.

In the final document, Governments acknowledged that the global environment has continued to deteriorate since 1992, with rising levels of greenhouse gas emissions, toxic pollution and solid waste. Renewable resources, notably fresh water, forests, topsoil and marine fish stocks, continue to be used at rates that are clearly unsustainable.

On the positive side, growth in world population is slowing, food production is rising, local air and water quality is improving in many developed countries, and the majority of people are living longer and healthier lives. At the same time, the number of people living in poverty has increased, and gaps between rich and poor have grown, both within and between countries.

To address these concerns, Governments took action on several fronts at the special session, as reflected in the final document. Among other decisions, they agreed to:

- reconfirm the political commitment to sustainable development from all members of the international community, as well as from all major groups of civil society;
- reconfirm the financial commitments and targets for official development assistance (ODA) made by industrialized countries at the Earth Summit, and call for intensified efforts to reverse the downward trend in ODA;
- establish an Intergovernmental Forum on Forests under the Commission on Sustainable Development to continue policy dialogue on this issue, including more focused consideration of elements for a possible legal instrument;
- open high-level intergovernmental dialogues on fresh water, and on energy and transport, which will be taken up by the Commission on Sustainable Development at upcoming sessions;
- make a stronger commitment at the global level to such issues as tourism, changing production and consumption patterns, and eco-efficiency; and
- set a more focused work programme for the Commission on Sustainable Development through the year 2002, when the next General Assembly review will be held.

In the spirit of Rio, some 1,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended the special session, in addition to the over 2,500 government delegates and 1,000 journalists. Dozens of side events advanced new ideas. For the first time, statements were heard in the plenary by representatives of the “major groups” of civil society as defined in

Agenda 21: women, children and youth, indigenous people, NGOs working on environment and development, local government officials, trade unions, business and industry, scientists and farmers.

Earth Summit+5 was significant in that it conducted an in-depth, honest and participatory political assessment of progress achieved since Rio, and laid the ground for continuing work. While there are broad areas of agreement reflected in the final document and a clear path forward, these results were achieved after intensive negotiations and there are areas of disagreement still remaining. In striving to build consensus, the session highlighted the political importance of the issues at the heart of sustainable development, and again placed the future of the planet at the forefront of world awareness.

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## I. STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

1. At the nineteenth special session of the United Nations General Assembly, we—heads of State or Government and other heads of delegations, together with our partners from international institutions and non-governmental organizations—have gathered to review progress achieved over the five years that have passed since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and to re-energize our commitment to further action on goals and objectives set out by the Rio Earth Summit.

2. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was a landmark event. At that Conference, we launched a new global partnership for sustainable development—a partnership that respects the indivisibility of environmental protection and the development process. It is founded on a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level. Agenda 21,<sup>1</sup> adopted at Rio, addresses the pressing environment and development problems of today and also aims at preparing the world for the challenges of the next century in order to attain the long-term goals of sustainable development.

3. Our focus at this special session has been to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 21 in a comprehensive manner and not to renegotiate its provisions or to be selective in its implementation. We reaffirm that Agenda 21 remains the fundamental programme of action for achieving sustainable development. We reaffirm all the principles contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development<sup>2</sup> and the

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Forest Principles.<sup>3</sup> We are convinced that the achievement of sustainable development requires the integration of its economic, environmental and social components. We recommit to working together—in the spirit of global partnership—to reinforce our joint efforts to meet equitably the needs of present and future generations.

4. We acknowledge that a number of positive results have been achieved, but we are deeply concerned that the overall trends with respect to sustainable development are worse today than they were in 1992. We emphasize that the implementation of Agenda 21 in a comprehensive manner remains vitally important and is more urgent now than ever.

5. Time is of the essence in meeting the challenges of sustainable development as set out in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. To this end, we recommit ourselves to the global partnership established at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and to the continuous dialogue and action inspired by the need to achieve a more efficient and equitable world economy, as a means to provide a supportive international climate for achieving environment and development goals. We therefore pledge to continue to work together, in good faith and in the spirit of partnership, to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 21. We invite everyone throughout the world to join us in our common cause.

6. We commit ourselves to ensuring that the next comprehensive review of Agenda 21 in the year 2002 demonstrates greater measurable progress in achieving sustainable development. The present Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 is our vehicle for achieving that goal. We commit ourselves to fully implementing this programme.



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## **II. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS MADE SINCE THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

7. The five years that have elapsed since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development<sup>4</sup> have been characterized by the accelerated globalization of interactions among countries in the areas of world trade, foreign direct investment and capital markets. Globalization presents new opportunities and challenges. It is important that national and international environmental and social policies be implemented and strengthened in order to ensure that globalization trends have a positive impact on sustainable development, especially in developing countries. The impact of recent trends in globalization on developing countries has been uneven. A limited number of developing countries have been able to take advantage of those trends, attracting large inflows of external private capital and experiencing significant export-led growth and acceleration of growth in per capita gross domestic product (GDP). Many other countries, however, in particular African countries and the least developed countries, have shown slow or negative growth and continue to be marginalized. As a result, they generally experienced stagnating or falling per capita GDP through 1995. In these and in some other developing countries, the problems of poverty, low levels of social development, inadequate infrastructure and lack of capital have prevented them from benefiting from globalization. While continuing their efforts to achieve sustainable development and to attract new investments, these countries still require international assistance in their efforts directed towards sustainable development. In particular, the least devel-

oped countries continue to be heavily dependent on a declining volume of official development assistance (ODA) for the capacity-building and infrastructure development required to provide for basic needs and more effective participation in the globalizing world economy. In an increasingly interdependent world economy, the responsible conduct of monetary and other macroeconomic policies requires that their potential impact on other countries be taken into account. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the countries with economies in transition have achieved significant progress in implementing the principles of sustainable development. However, the need for full integration of these countries into the world economy remains one of the crucial problems on their way towards sustainable development. The international community should continue to support these countries in their efforts to accelerate the transition to a market economy and to achieve sustainable development.

8. Although economic growth—reinforced by globalization—has allowed some countries to reduce the proportion of people in poverty, for others marginalization has increased. Too many countries have seen economic conditions worsen and public services deteriorate; the total number of people in the world living in poverty has increased. Income inequality has increased among countries and also within them, unemployment has worsened in many countries, and the gap between the least developed countries and other countries has grown rapidly in recent years. On a more positive note, population growth rates have been declining globally, largely as a result of expanded basic education and health care. That trend is projected to lead to a stable world population in the middle of the twenty-first century. There has also been progress in social services, with expanding access to education, declining infant mortality and increasing life expectancy in most coun-

tries. However, many people, particularly in the least developed countries, still do not have access to adequate food and basic social services or to clean water and sanitation. Reducing current inequities in the distribution of wealth and access to resources, both within and among countries, is one of the most serious challenges facing humankind.

9. Five years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the state of the global environment has continued to deteriorate, as noted in the *Global Environment Outlook*<sup>5</sup> of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and significant environmental problems remain deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric of countries in all regions. Some progress has

been made in terms of institutional development, international consensus-building, public participation and private sector actions and, as a result, a number of countries have succeeded in curbing pollution and slowing the rate of resource degradation. Overall, however, trends are worsen-

ing. Many polluting emissions, notably of toxic substances, greenhouse gases and waste volumes, are continuing to increase although in some industrialized countries emissions are decreasing. Marginal progress has been made in addressing unsustainable production and consumption patterns. Insufficient progress has also been identified in the field of environmentally sound management and adequate control of transboundary movements of hazardous and radioactive wastes. Many countries undergoing rapid economic growth and urbanization are also experiencing increasing levels of air and water pollution, with accumulating impacts on human health. Acid rain and transboundary air pollution, once considered a problem only in the industrialized countries, are

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increasingly becoming a problem in many developing regions. In many poorer regions of the world, persistent poverty is contributing to accelerated degradation of natural resources and desertification has spread. In countries seriously affected by drought and/or desertification, especially those in Africa, their agricultural productivity, among other things, is uncertain and continues to decline, thereby hampering their efforts to achieve sustainable development. Inadequate and unsafe water supplies are affecting an increasing number of people worldwide, aggravating problems of ill health and food insecurity among the poor. Conditions in natural habitats and fragile ecosystems, including mountain ecosystems, are still deteriorating in all regions of the world, resulting in diminishing biological diversity. At the global level, renewable resources, in particular fresh water, forests, topsoil and marine fish stocks, continue to be used at rates beyond their viable rates of regeneration; without improved management, this situation is clearly unsustainable.

10. While there has been progress in material and energy efficiency, particularly with reference to non-renewable resources, overall trends remain unsustainable. As a result, increasing levels of pollution threaten to exceed the capacity of the global environment to absorb them, increasing the potential obstacles to economic and social development in developing countries.

11. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, extensive efforts have been made by Governments and international organizations to integrate environmental, economic and social objectives into decision-making by elaborating new policies and strategies for sustainable development or by adapting existing policies and plans. As many as 150 countries have responded to the commitments established at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development through national-level commissions or co-

ordinating mechanisms designed to develop an integrated approach to sustainable development.

12. The major groups have demonstrated what can be achieved by taking committed action, sharing resources and building consensus, reflecting grass-roots concern and involvement. The efforts of local authorities are making Agenda 21 and the pursuit of sustainable development a reality at the local level through the implementation of "Local Agenda 21s" and other sustainable development programmes. Non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, the scientific community and the media have increased public awareness and discussion of the relations between environment and development in all countries. The involvement, role and responsibilities of business and industry, including transnational corporations, are important. Hundreds of small and large businesses have made "green business" a new operating mode. Workers and trade unions have established partnerships with employers and communities to encourage sustainable development in the workplace. Farmer-led initiatives have resulted in improved agricultural practices contributing to sound resource management.

Indigenous people have played an increasing role in addressing issues affecting their interests and particularly concerning their traditional knowledge and practices. Young people and women around the world have played a prominent role in galvanizing communities into recognizing their responsibilities to future generations. Nevertheless, more opportunities should be created for women to participate effectively in economic, social and political development as equal partners in all sectors of the economy.

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13. Among the achievements since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development have been the entry into force of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I), the Convention on Biological Diversity<sup>6</sup> and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II); the conclusion of an agreement on the conservation and management of straddling and migratory fish stocks (A/50/550, annex I); the adoption of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States;<sup>7</sup> the elaboration of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (A/51/116, annex II); and the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>8</sup> Implementation of these important commitments and of others adopted before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development by all the parties to them remains, however, to be carried out, and in many cases further strengthening of their provisions is required as well as the mechanisms for putting them into effect. The establishment, restructuring, funding and replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) were a major achievement. However, its levels of funding and replenishment have not been sufficient fully to meet its objectives.

14. Progress has been made in incorporating the principles contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development<sup>2</sup>—including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, which embodies the important concept of and basis for international partnership; the precautionary principle; the polluter pays principle; and the environmental impact assessment principle—in a variety of international and national legal instruments. While some progress has

been made in implementing United Nations Conference on Environment and Development commitments through a variety of international legal instruments, much remains to be done to embody the Rio principles more firmly in law and practice.

15. A number of major United Nations conferences have advanced international commitment for the achievement of long-term goals and objectives directed towards sustainable development.

16. Organizations and programmes of the United Nations system have played an important role in the progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21. The Commission on Sustainable Development was established to review progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21, advance global dialogue and foster partnerships for sustainable development. The Commission has catalysed new action and commitments and has contributed to the deliberations on sustainable development among a wide variety of partners within and outside the United Nations system. Although much remains to be done, progress has also been made at the national, regional and international levels in implementing the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development Forest Principles,<sup>3</sup> including through the Commission's Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests.

17. Provision of adequate and predictable financial resources and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries are critical elements for the implementation of Agenda 21. However, while some progress has been made, much remains to be done to activate the means of implementation set out in Agenda 21, in particular in the

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areas of finance and technology transfer, technical assistance and capacity-building.

18. Most developed countries have still not reached the United Nations target, reaffirmed by most countries at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, of committing 0.7 per cent of their gross national product (GNP) to ODA or the United Nations target, as agreed, of committing 0.15 per cent of GNP as ODA to the least developed countries. Regrettably, on average, ODA as a percentage of the GNP of developed countries has drastically declined in the post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development period, from 0.34 per cent in 1992 to 0.27 per cent in 1995, but ODA has taken more account of the need for an integrated approach to sustainable development.

19. In other areas, results have been encouraging since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. There has been a sizeable expansion of private flows of financial resources from developed to a limited number of developing countries and, in a number of countries, efforts have been made in support of domestic resource mobilization, including the increasing use of economic instruments to promote sustainable development.

20. In many developing countries, the debt situation remains a major constraint on achieving sustainable development. Although the debt situation of some middle-income countries has improved, there is a need to continue to address the debt problems of the heavily indebted poor countries, which continue to face unsustainable external debt burdens. The recent World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative could help to address that issue with the cooperation of all creditor countries. Further efforts by the international community are still required to remove debt as an impediment to sustainable development.



21. Similarly, technology transfer and technology-related investment from public and private sources, which are particularly important to developing countries, have not been realized as outlined in Agenda 21. Although increased private flows have led to investments in industry and technology in some developing countries and economies in transition, many other countries have been left behind. Conditions in some of these countries have been less attractive to private sector investment and technological change has been slower, thus limiting their ability to meet their commitments to Agenda 21 and other international agreements. The technology gap between developed countries and, in particular, the least developed countries has widened.