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Christian Friis
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
Minister for Development Cooperation
DK-1448 Copenhagen
Denmark

Subject: Development considerations threatened in Rio+20 negotiations

Dear Mr Friis,

As negotiations on Rio+20 reach their final and crucial stages and you prepare for the upcoming Foreign Affairs Council, the following are essential elements that we believe are central to a credible outcome that fully reflects the three dimensions of sustainable development and improves equity between and within countries. We urge you and your colleagues to ensure Europe leads in:

1/Reaffirming in the Outcome Document the key Rio principles necessary for the implementation of sustainable development as well as the rationale and requirements attached to them. This particularly applies to the polluter pays principle, the precautionary principle, Principle 10 on access to information, public participation, environmental justice and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). Concerning CBDR, which is currently being contested, it is crucial to stress that while some countries have emerged as economic powers in recent years, there remain a swathe of developing countries facing significant problems of poverty and inequality. We all recognise too the disproportionate impact developed countries have on the planet and that we remain the largest per capita emitters of CO2 emissions.

2/Reiterating Europe's commitment to all internationally agreed political, economic, social and cultural rights¹ by making specific references to these rights in the Outcome Document for Rio+20, and agreeing to establish accountability mechanisms to ensure fulfilment of commitments. States have the responsibility and the duty to respect and protect fundamental rights. In line with this is the need for legally binding measures for the private sector to comply with in relation to sustainability and human rights requirements.

¹ A wide variety of actors including civil society organizations and human rights experts have called on UN members to reaffirm all agreed rights in Rio+20 negotiations; human rights and accountability mechanisms to assess progress towards sustainable development are essential goals of and requirement for sustainable development. Read the 22 Human Rights experts' open letter to UN member states stating that "If Rio+20 is to deliver, accountability must be at its heart": <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/OpenLetterRio20.aspx> Navanethem Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has also sent an open letter to member states with the appeal "to fully integrate key human rights considerations in the Rio+20 outcome document": <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Development/OpenLetterHC.pdf> See also The petition "Rights at Risk at the United Nations" initiated at the third international meeting for Rio+20 (26-27 March) and signed, up to now, by over 1000 organizations: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/rightsatrisk/>

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In case of violation of human rights and/or sustainable development principles victims must have access to complaints and remedy mechanisms.

Accountability and capacity building mechanisms must be established to assess and contribute to supporting progress towards sustainable development. We therefore call for the establishment of an ombudsperson for future generations at UN level and replicated regionally, nationally and locally. The Commission for Sustainable Development should be upgraded to a Council under the UN General Assembly with the establishment of a universal periodic review to assess progress.

3/Defining the basis for a radically different economy which encompasses the three dimensions of sustainable development and contributes to improving equity between and within countries while allowing for flexibility in implementation. The green economy as presented by the EU, while promoting more ecological practices, still relies on an unsustainable model based on the growth of materialistic consumption and on insufficiently regulated and equitable financial and economic activities. The social dimension - reduction of inequalities, more equitable economic and financial systems to allow for countries' development, provision of the means of implementation for sustainable development to developing countries (access to technology, financing etc) - needs to be fully reflected. In addition, areas key to poverty eradication need to be targeted in development strategies, for example in agriculture, energy and social protection². The importance of agro-ecological approaches and the crucial role of small-scale farmers, in particular women in ensuring sustainable development should be fully recognized. Small-scale decentralised energy projects and energy efficiency practices must be considered as key to sustainability, and access to renewable energy for the poor should be ensured. The provision of social protection for all individuals must also become a reality.

4/Agreeing at Rio2012 that sustainable development should be addressed in a post 2015 agenda while guaranteeing that this process is inclusive³ and fully coherent with the current process for defining such an agenda. Specific thematic areas for the SDGs should not be decided at Rio+20 if UN members want to ensure the legitimacy, inclusiveness, ownership, efficiency and coherence of a post 2015 agenda. There should be an integrated process that leads to a single overarching post 2015 framework. Strengths and weaknesses of the MDGs should be drawn upon to ensure that more ambitious goals are defined. The three dimensions of sustainable development should be reflected in a balanced way. New goals should be based on a certain number of principles such as equity, the precautionary and the polluter pays principles. They should be universally applicable but allowing for the principle of CBDR.

Rio+20 is a crucial opportunity for Europe to play a principled leadership role. Please use your influence in the short time remaining to ensure it does just that.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Stocker
Director of Eurostep

² We welcome, in this regard, the key areas for EU development cooperation proposed in the Commission's "Agenda for change". We are, however, concerned as to the over reliance on the private sector while no commitment is made for legally binding measures to regulate its activities.

³ Besides governments, a wide range of Northern and Southern stakeholders (CSOs, local authorities, indigenous people, the private sector etc) as well as scientists and experts coming from different spheres (development, environment, economics, finance, trade etc) must participate in the shaping of the goals.