

Brussels, 11 May 2012

Eurostep is a network of autonomous European non-governmental development organisations working towards peace, justice and equality in a world free of poverty. Its membership, rooted in their own societies, works together to influence Europe's role in the world, particularly in pursuing the eradication of injustice and poverty. It advocates changes in Europe's policies and practice based on the perspectives drawn from direct experiences of an active involvement of its members and their partners in development in over 100 countries across the world. The members of Eurostep include: 11.11.11 (Belgium), ACSUR Las Segovias (Spain), Alliance Sud (Switzerland), Concern Worldwide (Ireland), Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (Germany), FDSC (Romania), Hivos (Netherlands), Kepa (Finland), Marie-Stopes International (UK), NEWW (Poland), Oxfam Novib (Netherlands), People in Need (Czech Republic), Sloga Platform (Slovenia), SNV (Netherlands).

Dear Ambassador,

**Subject: Last opportunities for a balanced, fair and therefore successful outcome for Rio+20**

As negotiations on Rio+20 reach their final and crucial stages, with the last round of informal-informal negotiations starting next week we urge you to help ensure effective leadership from Europe in delivering a credible outcome that fully reflects the three dimensions of Sustainable Development (SD), and which promotes equity between and within countries. We take this opportunity to identify what we believe are the essential elements for the outcome to be credible.

**1/The Reaffirmation of the key Rio principles necessary for the implementation of SD 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). These principles must serve as guiding principles for the implementation of all action plans and initiatives, such as the green economy roadmap and the SDGs, to be agreed in Rio. CBDR remains as valid today as ever before. As the emerging economies put increased demands on the earth's limits to sustainability, this only increases the urgent need for a greater equitable use of natural resources for all. The majority of developing countries continue to face significant problems of poverty and inequality. Since developed countries use a disproportionate share of planet's ecological capacity per capita it carries a larger responsibility for enabling equity to be achieved.

**2/Reiterating Europe's commitment to all internationally agreed political, economic, social and cultural rights<sup>1</sup> by making specific references to these rights in the Outcome Document for Rio+20.** States have the responsibility and the duty to respect and protect fundamental rights. In line with this is the need for legally binding measures all actors to comply with sustainability and human rights

<sup>1</sup> A wide variety of actors including civil society organizations and human rights experts have called on UN members to re-affirm 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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requirements. We particularly stress this in relation to the role of the private sector as increased emphasis is being placed on contribution that they should make. Establishing independent control mechanisms and ensuring democratic accountability of the private sector should be made mandatory at Rio+20. In case of violation of human rights and/or sustainable development principles victims must have access to complaints and remedy mechanisms. Civil society actors are deeply concerned about the over emphasis on the private sector in some UN members' positions for Rio+20, including that of the EU, while insufficiently addressing the lack of regulation of private sector's activities and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few<sup>2</sup>.

**3/Defining the basis for a radically different economy which encompasses the three dimensions of SD and contributes to improving equity between and within countries while allowing for flexibility in implementation.** The green economy as presented by the EU, may promote more ecological practices, but it 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 is crucial for reducing inequalities (one of the greatest challenges of our time and for the achievement of SD<sup>3</sup>), for promoting more equitable economic and financial systems that allow for countries' development, and for the provision of the means of implementation for SD 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 protection<sup>4</sup>. 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 that sustainable development should be addressed in a post 2015 agenda while guaranteeing an inclusive process<sup>5</sup> and full coherence 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<sup>6</sup>. 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.

**5/The establishment of strong accountability mechanisms that balance the three dimensions of SD and ensure fulfilment of commitments made.** We 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. The Council's jurisdiction should extend to all multilateral bodies including the International Financial Institutions and the WTO. The Council should advise multilateral bodies and stakeholders and assess progress towards the implementation of and coherence of policies for SD. A universal periodic review mechanism on sustainability should be

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<sup>2</sup> Read the petition/ CSOs statement "Ending corporate capture of the United Nations" <http://tiny.cc/2iipew>

<sup>3</sup> This should include the effective taxation of corporations, the establishment of a tax on financial transactions, stronger regulations, increased transparency and systematic evaluation of human rights and environmental impacts of the financial and economic sectors' activities. Reforms of intellectual property rights regimes to ensure the access for developing countries of environmentally sound technologies must be undertaken. There is also a need to strengthen anti monopoly mechanisms to avoid concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few transnational companies. Also, reforms of the Bretton Woods institutions' and the WTO's governance structures towards improved representation, accountability and considerations for SD as a multidimensional concept must be ensured. Particular attention should be given to policy coherence for sustainable development in international relations with complaints and redress mechanisms in case of violation.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Sustainability should be measured against environmental and ecological limits. Increase in well being should be assessed according to human rights fulfilment and equity criteria. The economic dimension of SD should also be reflected in goals that focus on improving the transparency, regulation, governance and equity dimension of the financial and trade system.

established. The council should also be inclusive (stakeholders participation) and democratic. The mandates for the processes relating to the normative aspects and follow up mechanisms for the implementation of SD (devising of SDGs, setting up of alternative indicators to GDP, development of an international green economy roadmap or the establishment of an information sharing platform) should be given to the future Sustainable Development Council.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Stocker', with a stylized, cursive script.

Simon Stocker,  
Director