

Ms Connie Hedegaard  
Commissioner for Energy  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi 200  
B-1049, Brussels, Belgium

Brussels, 16 April 2012

Dear Ms Hedegaard,

Rio+20 constitutes a critical moment to revive past commitments and find common grounds between UN member states for a sustainable future where social progress is globally and equitably ensured within the limits of our planet's carrying capacity. Any delays will only increase the environmental, economic and social costs of the necessary changes.

While much of Europe's attention is focused on the sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone and its implications within the EU as well as on finding new opportunities for rapid economic recovery, the EU must adopt a long term vision and cannot step back from its commitments to strive for improved human rights, equity and the advancement of sustainable development in general. Increased inequalities and inequities, as well as unsustainable use of natural resources and its consequences on the climate and capacity of ecosystems to regenerate, are already threatening the existence of many, and if not addressed properly, will have dramatic consequences for future generations, including those of the EU.

The Rio+20 negotiations on the amended zero draft have now intensified and have further and more precisely highlighted UN members' political orientations as well as differing visions on crucial issues, issues which are substantial to the long-accepted concept of sustainable development.

A wide range of actors including civil society organizations and UN representatives have expressed great concern and apprehension when observing the state of the negotiations and their orientation. The positions of some UN members, including the EU, are serving to undermine some core UN principles and agreed rights, despite these having been elaborated and accepted throughout the years by the multilateral, representative and democratic framework of the UN. These principles have contributed to forging a common understanding of sustainable development and ways to achieve it among a wide variety of actors. In this light, the attempts to depart from them constitute an immense regression. In such critical times, the focus of some actors on preserving short term and narrow interests and on trying to dismantle the core pillars of the UN development agenda to the detriment of wider and future populations is simply not acceptable.

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The EU must be coherent with the principles and values it has adopted since its creation, adopt a constructive approach towards all its UN partners and support proposals and positions that are essential for sustainable development to become a reality. We therefore urge the EU to:

- Reaffirm key Rio principles that are necessary for the implementation of sustainable development as well as the rationale and requirements attached to them. This particularly applies for the polluter pays principle, the precautionary principle and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Concerning the latter, which is currently being contested, even though this principle is at the core of the development and sustainable development agendas, it is crucial to stress that while new countries have emerged as economic powers, developed countries are historically responsible for the current state of the planet and are still the greatest per capita emitters of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It is therefore essential that developed countries take responsibility for their past and current practices and show great ambition in their responses to the current challenges. The special situation as well as the different responsibility of developing countries must fully be acknowledged. Recognizing the CBDR principle is about acknowledging responsibility, ensuring the realisation of the right to development, striving for more equity, committing to differentiated targets for sustainable development and providing an enabling environment for developing countries in international relations and assistance according to countries' needs. Reaffirming this principle is fundamental for any ambitious and successful outcome at Rio+20; the EU cannot shy away from its previous commitments and undermine the development and sustainable development agendas by doing so.

Moreover, the green economy as presented by the EU, while promoting more ecological practices, still relies on an unsustainable model based on materialistic consumption growth and insufficiently regulated and equitable financial and economic activities. These issues need to be addressed to ensure the link between the green economy and the three core dimensions of sustainable development.

- Reiterate its commitments for specific and internationally agreed rights and convince its partners to do likewise. The EU's commitment to human rights in general throughout the zero draft document is commendable but spelling out specific rights such as the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation, which is currently being undermined by some EU member states, is necessary. Furthermore, we strongly support 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"<sup>1</sup> and calling for the integration of "specific references to all human rights" in the Rio+20 outcome document and for the establishment of effective accountability mechanisms to monitor and assess the implementation of commitments made in Rio.

The petition "Rights at Risk at the United Nations"<sup>2</sup> initiated at the third international meeting for Rio+20 (26-27 March) and signed, up to now, by over 1000 organizations also reflects the concerns of CSOs around the world as to the attempts of some UN actors to undermine previously agreed rights and fundamental principles. Human rights are legal guarantees that contribute to people's empowerment and improved equity and ensure equal protection of people before the law; they are fundamental requirements for a sustainable world. Given the EU's laudable engagement on human

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/OpenLetterRio20.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/rightsatrisk/>

rights, to improve democracy, inclusiveness and participatory approaches and increase the role of civil society organizations in decision making processes, we urge the EU to listen to these pleas.

The EU presents itself as playing a leading role in tackling poverty, climate change and in promoting sustainable development. Its credibility in playing such a role will be judged on the positions it takes towards the outcome of Rio+20, but also on the actions it takes to mitigate the impact of climate change and to promote all aspects of sustainable development in the future. At the moment civil society organizations and other actors are anxious when considering the potential outcome of Rio+20. The EU's position has contributed to these sentiments. Another outcome is possible - the EU should gear its actions towards an ambitious outcome to the summit that is necessary to secure a better future for all.

"We have reached the threshold of criticality" said Maurice Strong, the Secretary General of the first Rio summit. The multiple crises have further demonstrated the limits of a model that needs radical rethinking and reform. These changes are needed now, and these must build on past agreements for sustainable development.

Yours sincerely,



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With the collaboration of ALOP.

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