

Brussels, 19 June 2012

Text of Letter sent to EU Heads of State and Government

Securing a sustainable future for all: The EU's responsibility in Rio

This week's Rio+20 Sustainable Development Conference has been identified as a once in a generation opportunity¹ for the world's leaders to adopt a set of agreed measures needed to secure a sustainable world for current and future generations. Continued failure to bridge fundamental differences in the preparatory process of the conference suggest that the prospect for any meaningful conclusion is clearly bleak. Yet the consequences of failure to seize this opportunity are alarming. As scientific assessments clearly indicate, with increasing urgency, the lack of decisive action to address unsustainable practices increases the risk of disastrous consequences impacting on us all.

It is clear that the negotiating positions towards an agreed outcome of Rio+20 are substantially informed by national interests to secure and safeguard the access and use of natural resources for economic recovery and growth. While recognising current economic challenges, and the importance of a viable economy, contentious competition over the Earth's limited resources cannot lead to sustainable development. On the contrary it will reduce future options for achieving sustainability.

The EU has championed itself as an ambitious UN partner and has devoted much of its energy in trying to convince other UN members, in particular developing countries, to agree to implement green economy strategies. Without doubt the use of more efficient ecological practices is a vital component to promoting sustainability, but it can only be part of the solution. The need to diminish inequalities between nations and within societies has become increasingly paramount, through effective approaches to economic and social inclusion that go beyond mere rhetoric. Sustainable development in which these are embraced cannot be achieved without radical reforms in approaches to economic development. The concept of a green economy in which these are not fully reflected will not address the root causes of the crisis, nor fundamentally tackle inequalities and power imbalances. It is more likely to foster continued contention over natural resources, enabling corporate interests to be the main beneficiaries. Nor would they sufficiently regulate corporate sector activities.

The EU's promotion of fundamental principles such as equity, human rights and the integration of these within the three pillars of Sustainable Development is also viewed with caution. While these principles resonate well around the world there has been considerable concern in the context of the EU's proposals

¹ Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary General, 15 June 2012.

to the conference their application will re-enforce inequality and inequity rather than the contrary. Set alongside existing EU trade and economic policies and practices, they are seen as a part of the EU's strategies to increase opportunities for its own interests. Furthermore, EU policies and positions, such as the promotion of biofuel cultivation obstruct the realization of the right to food, as well as undermine the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) in the context of Rio+20 negotiations. This suggests a lack of coherence between the fundamental principles promoted by the EU and the EU's actual actions.

Clearly the EU faces testing economic and fiscal challenges. A viable and sustainable economy in Europe is vital for its own citizens, as well as for the rest of the world. But more of the same, even with increased ecological efficiency is not a solution. For the EU to show real leadership in the pursuit of true sustainable development strategies and to be consistent with the principles and values that it espouses it must demonstrate its commitment to fundamental changes in its policy framework based on the principles adopted in Rio 20 years ago. It must demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that policies and practices pursued within and outside the EU are consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

As the Rio+20 Summit reached its conclusion we urge you to ensure that the *Opportunity of a Generation* is grasped and the decisive measures needed to move towards sustainable development are put in place. These have to be based on the principles adopted in Rio twenty years ago that are essential for fostering equity and sustainable development. **Specific recognition must be given to the concept of common but differentiated responsibility, recognizing the historic and current ecological impact of economic development. Equally the polluter pays principle, the precautionary principle and Principle 10 on access to information, public participation, and environmental justice remain as valid today as when they were adopted. These principles must serve as guiding principles for the implementation of action plans and initiatives to be agreed in Rio including the SDGs and the green economy.**

The EU must also clearly demonstrate its willingness to provide the necessary means for developing countries to achieve sustainable development, consistent with commitments made in various UN fora and treaties. Even in the current challenging economic and financial circumstances **the EU has capacity to provide new and additional financial resources, as well as to help build capacity and transfer technology on favorable, concessional and preferential terms to developing countries (JPOI).** This is vital for a successful outcome in Rio to be possible and for the EU to be seen as a credible and ambitious partner for sustainable development. It is also in Europe's own interest to enable actions adopted to achieve sustainable development to be undertaken.

The EU puts great emphasis on the private sector and market based mechanisms in its approach to the green economy. While we recognize the important contribution that the private sector can make towards a sustainable economy being realized, this is not inevitable as some will act in ways that hinder such a goal. **Distinctions need to be made between different actors within the private sector and the roles that they play.** Small and medium sized enterprises are the major generators of employment. They are more likely to be rooted in local communities, and be accountable to national regulations and accountability. The corporate sector is less responsive to national interests and strategies. **Regulatory frameworks for corporate sector activities that are consistent with, and derived from, the principles for sustainable development and human rights as well as appropriate mechanisms for transparency and accountability, must be put in place, at both national and international levels.**

The proposals for Sustainable Development Goals as a complement to the Millennium Development Goals could help provide a more comprehensive approach to a common set of commitments as long as the basis for any SDGs is rooted in the respective responsibilities that are inherent in the three pillars of Sustainable Development – environmental, economic and social. Inevitably these will be manifested at different levels, from local to global. Governments must be at the forefront of the design and implementation of policies promoting sustainable development, within a defined international framework, with the active involvement of all national stakeholders. **There are many examples of good**

practices implemented at the local level; these must increasingly be promoted and drawn upon as sound solutions for sustainability.

For the necessary radical changes to be achieved such practices must be encouraged, and must be reflected in reforms to national economies. At the same time there is a need for global standards and norms to be adopted at the UN level particularly with regard to global economic reforms, as well as in the strengthening of mechanisms for ensuring effective adherence and accountability to commitments for achieving sustainable development.

The outcome of this week's summit will be a determinant in defining the opportunities presented to current and future generations. We urge you to recognize its importance, and support an outcome that best safeguards the future for all.

Yours sincerely,



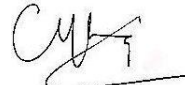
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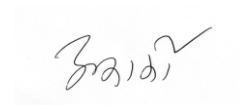
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