

**WSSD/PrepComs****Regional Preparations for WSSD**

by Michael A. Buenker\*

Ten years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, preparations on the national, regional and international level are underway for an assessment of progress achieved. This review shall take place at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002. Following the first session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-10) acting as Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for WSSD, governments have focused their efforts on drafting up national assessments on sustainable development which have flowed into the respective sub-regional meetings. Regional Roundtables of Eminent Persons from politics and science have also taken place. Five Regional Ministerial Meetings in preparation for WSSD were convened from September to November 2001, organised by the corresponding UN Regional Economic Commissions and UNEP offices. The mandate of all these Regional PrepComs was to outline key policy issues, priorities and follow-up actions and to provide substantial inputs to the preparatory processes for the Summit. The emphasis was not on setting the agenda for WSSD, which will be done in CSD, but on identifying regional priorities.

All five Regional PrepComs produced Assessment Reports on Progress Achieved since Rio, and some form of a Statement or Platform which outlines key areas for follow-up. Across the board, all regions agreed on the general questions, which are to be addressed at Johannesburg, but added points which they view as the most pressing concerns for their region. The results of all the Regional Ministerial Meetings<sup>1</sup> will be presented to the Second Session of the Preparatory Committee for WSSD that is to take place in New York from 28 January to 8 February 2002 and will be covered in the next issue of this journal. Two further sessions of the PrepCom are scheduled from 25 March to 5 April 2002 in New York and the fourth and final session at the Ministerial level takes place in Jakarta, Indonesia from 27 May to 7 June 2002.

So far, there has been much criticism of the apparent lack of synchronisation between the national, regional and international preparatory processes. For example, in many instances States had not completed their national assessments before the Regional PrepComs began. Furthermore, an often-heard complaint is that not enough use has been made of the intellectual potential offered by civil societies who prepare in-depth analyses of sustainable development policies and propose innovative approaches toward problem-solving. Following the CSD Multi-Stake-

holder formula, representatives of non-governmental organisations, trade unions and the private sector were invited to the various meetings. However, they were given varying degrees of access and levels of input at each Regional PrepCom.

The European and North American PrepCom was covered in the last issue. The following is a brief summary of the three PrepComs for Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific and Western Asia and Northern Africa.<sup>3</sup> An excerpt of the African Ministerial Conference is reprinted on page 58.

**Latin America and the Caribbean**

The Regional Preparatory Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean was held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 23 to 24 October 2001 at the Rio Centro – the very same venue where UNCED took place – and was organised by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the UNEP Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC). It was attended by a total of 35 government delegations from the region, including States not associated with ECLAC, as well as by representatives from the UN system, other intergovernmental bodies and civil society. The meeting was preceded by four sub-regional meetings for the Southern Cone, the Caribbean, the Andean and Meso-America, which were held during June and July. The major outcome of the meeting was the adoption of the *Rio de Janeiro Platform for Action on the Road to Johannesburg 2002*.

Immediately prior to the PrepCom, the 13th Forum of the Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean assembled in Rio from 22 to 23 October 2001, in order to adopt a Regional Environmental Plan of Action for the period from 2002 to 2005 and to review the draft texts for consideration of the Preparatory Conference. A special topic under discussion was the “environmental agenda in the new global context” in view of the terrorist attacks of 11 September.

A preparatory Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean Civil Society Networks was also held in Rio from 18 to 20 October. However, many participating non-governmental organisations (NGOs) complained that this meeting was scheduled too far in advance of the PrepCom, thereby making it unlikely that government officials would attend. In addition, they felt excluded from the process of developing the Platform, as they were not given an opportunity to comment on the draft text. In fact, many of them had not even been invited to the PrepCom.

The Ministerial Conference was divided into four seg-

\* Administrative Officer, International Council of Environmental Law.

ments. On 23 October, the meeting began with a High-level Panel on Financing Sustainable Development, followed by a Special Session in which Brazilian President Fernando Henrique addressed the Plenary. Among other issues, President Cardoso emphasised in light of recent events in the US that "terrorism must not gag the agenda for international cooperation". The second day opened with a discussion on a document prepared by ECLAC and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) entitled "the Sustainability of Development in Latin America and the Caribbean: Challenges and Opportunities" which serves as the Regional Assessment Report. The meeting then ended with the adoption of the Platform.

The *Rio de Janeiro Platform for Action* is divided into four sections: a) reaffirmation of principles and commitments; b) obstacles and lessons learned; c) present considerations; and d) future commitments. Among future commitments were listed:

1. Institutional Structure for Sustainable Development.
2. Financing and Technology Transfer.
3. Formulations of Actions.

The first two points were the major areas of discussion during the PrepCom. In line with Principle 10 of Agenda 21, the section on Institutional Structure calls for greater involvement of public and private institutions and for them to be given a stronger role in decision-making processes through the creation of national sustainable development councils. A "lasting strategic alliance" between government and civil society actors should also be formed for capacity building at the local, national and regional level. This was also a theme of President Cardoso's speech, in which he stated, with a view to establishing the foundation for a future based on sustainable development, that the State cannot presume that it can do all this without civil engagement: it requires a State based on the principles of transparency and participatory democracy in order to allow for cooperation at all levels of government, as well as more NGO involvement.

The second point, as evinced by the convening of the High-level Panel on Financing Sustainable Development, was the dominant theme of the proceedings as the primary focus was on the economic situation of the region. Special attention was given to the upcoming International Conference for Financing Development<sup>3</sup> (to be held at Monterrey, Mexico, from 18 to 22 March 2002) which is seen as the touchstone of whether the WSSD will be able to produce decisions which have a chance of effective follow-up. The goal of the International Conference on Financing is to come up with a strategy for combating poverty and achieving sustained growth in an increasingly interdependent world. In light of the relevance of this ongoing process to WSSD and the fact this meeting is to take place in the region, a shocking revelation was that many government delegates were completely unaware of it. Thus, the Panel had an added benefit of filling them in.

In conformance with the above discussion, the Platform makes special reference to

"the burden of debt and debt servicing faced by many countries of the region, particularly in the face

of declining official development assistance and their limited ability to attract new financing and investment, [which has] continued to undermine strategies to mobilise resources for sustainable development ..."

In view of the current debt crisis in Argentina, the need for immediate action on international debt relief appears more pressing than ever. An appeal is also directed toward the international community to establish mechanisms for debt relief of highly indebted countries in the region, as well as to introduce new, innovative financial instruments for the implementation of sustainable development policies. Some delegates, however, were to point out the lack of reference to the forthcoming World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Meeting to be held in Doha, Qatar, from 9 to 13 November 2001 (see page 29) which will be crucial in addressing these issues.

Related to this, as a continent feeling increasingly marginalised by current international market forces, a recurring subject of the discussions was countering the negative effects of globalisation. Several delegates suggested "new globalisation" as a theme for WSSD. Latin American countries preferred the term "sustainable globalisation," while Caribbean States wanted focus to be on the problems of inequity. In the end, a compromise solution was adopted where the proposal as a central theme for WSSD is listed as the very final paragraph of the Platform under Formulations of Actions: "Towards a new globalisation, which ensures that development is sustainable, equitable and inclusive."

### Western Asia and Northern Africa

On 24 October 2001 the Meeting of Arab Ministers Responsible for Development, Planning and Environment was convened in Cairo, Egypt at the headquarters of the League of Arab States. The meeting was facilitated by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the UNEP Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA). It was attended by 22 government delegations from the Middle East and North Africa. With observers from the UN system, other intergovernmental organisations and the NGO community, the total number of participants thus was brought to 140. It was the shortest of all Regional PrepComs, as it was wrapped up in one afternoon session. Originally scheduled for two days, it was shortened on an *ad hoc* basis unbeknownst to a few dignitaries who were still *en route* and thus missed the meeting entirely. Yet, many observers felt that this meeting was better organised than most other Regional PrepComs. First drafts of the documents to be considered had already been developed during the Roundtable of Eminent Persons in April 2001 and the texts had been circulated among the relevant governments for comment. Work was then begun in intergovernmental meetings of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region (JCEDAR) and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE), which took place immediately prior to the Regional PrepCom.

During the opening ceremony, HRH Prince Fahd bin Abdallah Al Saud (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), acting as

the Chair of the Executive Bureau of CAMRE, proposed the establishment of an Arab Council for Sustainable Development at a ministerial level. He also called for the



Plenary Hall at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo, Egypt

Courtesy: IISD

creation of a regional financial mechanism for financing sustainable development, which could act as a role model for a global mechanism. The delegation of Jordan later encouraged other Arab states to establish national Councils for Sustainable Development, and this was seconded by Syria, Tunisia and Palestine. However, Iraq pointed out that this does not fit in with the documents under discussion, since they pertain only to regional affairs.

Due to the brief nature of the proceedings – which has been described as no more than a formal signing ceremony – very limited opportunity was given to civil society actors to address or to engage in an interactive discussion with the State delegations who were present. However, the fact that NGOs were present was viewed as a step in the right direction. The final *Arab Declaration to the World Summit on Sustainable Development* also acknowledges as a constraint the

“relatively limited experience of civil society in participating in the process of development and implementation of sustainable development programmes and activities.”

The three documents that were adopted during the West Asian PrepCom were the Assessment Report, *Arab Declaration and Ministerial Address to WSSD*. The Assessment Report and *Ministerial Address* are still open for comment and will be further discussed in the forthcoming Arab Summit at Beirut, Lebanon on 4 March 2002. The *Arab Declaration*, which is largely based on the *Abu Dhabi Declaration* adopted by CAMRE on 3 February 2001,<sup>4</sup> is divided into three parts where, first, the constraints to achieving sustainable development are listed; second, the challenges and opportunities within the region are outlined; and third, recommendations for action on a regional, as well as an international, level are given.

Among other issue areas, the document emphasises the effective use of natural resources, especially in relation to water management. The Declaration was also praised for drawing attention to consumption and produc-

tion patterns and governance at the national level, which was only briefly touched upon in other Regional PrepComs. As for peace and security-related aspects of the environment, the Ministerial Declaration calls for an integrated pan-Arab strategy aimed at “abolishing foci of tension and weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East on just bases.” This is a lofty aspiration, considering the history of the region, since it entails the realisation that ongoing military conflicts prevent sustainable development and eat up resources which could be better used for human development. In addition, it stymies cooperation on cross-boundary water management projects, which this Region is so dearly in need of.

## Asia and the Pacific

The High-level Regional Meeting for Asia and the Pacific took place at Phnom Penh, Cambodia from 27 to 29 November 2001 and was organised by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) with support from the UNEP and UNDP Regional Offices, as well as the Asian Development Bank. It was attended by close to 200 delegates from 46 ESCAP member states and over 220 representatives from UN agencies, other intergovernmental organisations and civil society institutions. Given the vast geographic size and population of the region, preparations for the Asia-Pacific PrepCom began very early and can be traced back to the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development for Asia and the Pacific held in Kitakyushu, Japan from 31 August to 5 September 2000 where a first *Regional Message for the 10-Year Review of UNCED* was adopted. In order to capture the cultural diversity present and different stages of economic development involved, sub-regional activities were launched on 16 May 2001 with the first Regional Roundtable for Central Asia. Two other Roundtables for East Asia and the Pacific Region and the Central Asia and South Asia Region followed, as well as a total of five sub-regional meetings which took place from July to October.

The Regional PrepCom opened with the Asia-Pacific Roundtable on Sustainable Development on 27 December in which reports of the Eminent Persons' Roundtables and sub-regional meetings were heard and stakeholders were invited to comment. A Chairman's summary of these proceedings was made available, but unfortunately not in time for it to be integrated into the final text of the Regional Platform. A special session on Financing Sustainable Development was also held in which panellists gave presentations and opened the round for discussion. These two events were similar to the Regional PrepCom for Europe and North America, where civil society actors were invited to participate in interactive dialogues with State representatives and UN officials. However, this did not meet the CSD Multi-Stakeholder formula, as very few representatives from labour organisations, indigenous peoples or the private sector were present.

The actual High-level Regional Meeting began on the afternoon of 28 November during which the Cambodian

Prime Minister Hun Sen gave an inaugural address reflecting upon his own country's progress toward sustainable development. Representatives of States, the UN system, other intergovernmental bodies and civil society then proceeded to issue statements on the key documents under consideration. All along, informal consultations among State delegates on the *Phnom Penh Regional Platform on Sustainable Development*, which had begun the day before, continued in parallel, and thus the input by NGOs was sparsely considered in the final document. Negotiations were conducted in marathon sessions, which lasted into the early hours. The finished Platform was then adopted by the Plenary, with only a few minor changes, during the closing session on 29 November.

of economic development, was lauded as a successful pre-World Summit. Their Platform is regarded as the most complete listing of concerns to be addressed at Johannesburg, but makes it hard to pinpoint which areas are to receive the highest level of attention in this region.

Yet, as complete as the Platform may be, it points to the problems that will be faced in the forthcoming PrepComs in New York and Jakarta. A few delegates voiced the criticism that it is nothing but the *Millennium Declaration* rephrased to suit Asian concerns. It lacks a critical evaluation of the underlying obstacles, coherence between the issues, and it does not entail concrete proposals for improving implementation. Arguably, the size and diversity of the ESCAP region make it difficult to bring to-



From left to right: ESCAP Executive Secretary Kim Hak-Su, Cambodian Environment Minister Mareth Mok and Ravi Sawhney of ESCAP's Environment and Natural Resources Development Division

Courtesy: IISD

The Platform is divided into four segments: 1) Regional Assessment of the Implementation of Agenda 21; 2) Key Issues and Priorities for Sustainable Development; 3) Follow-up Actions; and 4) A separate heading for Financing Sustainable Development. Among the Follow-up Actions is an affirmation of achieving international development goals and targets set by the *Millennium Declaration*.

Specific initiatives by the Asia-Pacific region are listed in the following:

1. Capacity-building for Sustainable Development.
2. Poverty Reduction for Sustainable Development.
3. Cleaner Production and Sustainable Energy.
4. Land Management and Biodiversity Conservation.
5. Protection and Management of and Access to Freshwater Resources, Oceans, Coastal and Marine Resources and Sustainable Development of Small Island States.
7. Action on Atmosphere and Climate Change.

Implementation mechanisms for national, regional/sub-regional and global levels are also listed among the Follow-up Actions.

The regional meeting for Asia and the Pacific, which encompasses one-half of the world's population and has the most diverse range of Member States at different stages

together all concerns in a way that will please everyone, but the country statements held at the PrepCom did not contribute to arriving at an holistic approach, as they focused too much on their own national outlooks.

The overall process demonstrates the difficulty of applying the "bottom-up" approach to the preparatory process of WSSD as mandated by CSD. As mentioned earlier, many countries that attended the Regional meetings had not yet concluded their national reports. Observers to the Asia-Pacific meeting also lamented that the results of the Sub-regional meeting had not been effectively integrated into the Regional Platform. This is the same problem the International PrepCom process is confronted with, since it is working under similar time constraints and thus had to start with its global assessment while the national and regional processes were just being launched.

#### Notes:

1 An overview of the outcomes of the preparatory processes at the national, regional and international levels is available at <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/>. A summary overview of the Regional PrepComs prepared by the CSD bureau is also available there. The Regional Ministerial Statements are reprinted in *International Protection of the Environment: Conservation in Sustainable Development*, Oceana Publications, Dobbs Ferry, New York.

2 Based on UN documentation and coverage by *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* available at <http://www.iisd.ca/wssd/regional.html>.

3 <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/>.

4 See *Environmental Policy and Law*, Vol. 31 (2001), p. 182-184.

