

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

Secretary-General's High-level Panel on UN System-wide Coherence
in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance, and the Environment

CONSULTATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Geneva, 2 July 2006

AGENDA and ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

Objectives of the consultation:

- Exchange views between Panel members and representatives of civil society organizations who are actively engaged on UN issues, and with specific expertise on gender, human rights and sustainable development.
- Enhance understanding among Panel Members of civil society views, perspectives and proposals with regard to (i) the opportunities and challenges of improving UN system-wide coherence in the context of UN reform; (ii) the policies and measures that are needed to ensure that the main horizontal policy themes - sustainable development, human rights and gender - are taken into account in decision-making throughout the United Nations.
- Develop understanding among Panel Members with respect to the type of proposals that they could put forward that would be ambitious and bold, yet practically realizable within the current inter-governmental context and consistent with the general framework of system-wide coherence to be proposed.

Structure of the consultation:

The consultation will be held in two sessions over the course of one day, Sunday 2 July 2006. An issues paper has been prepared by the Panel Secretariat to guide the discussions.

The Panel Secretariat has consulted several civil society organizations on the list of participants to be invited to the consultation. The Secretariat, in consultation with Panel members, will decide on the speakers who will make presentations at the meeting. The following criteria have guided the Secretariat in this task: (i) broad substantive expertise from a policy, advocacy or programmatic perspective on issues related to the work of the High-level Panel, particularly the 3 cross-cutting issues of sustainable development, gender equality and human rights; (ii) representation of organizations or networks of a public interest nature, focused on the 3 cross-cutting issues; and (iii) balance in terms of regional perspective, gender and sectoral representation. The agenda will be structured so as to maximize the number of interventions from participants on specific topics. A

speaker's list will be prepared at the opening of the meeting to optimize use of time without detracting from the interactive nature of the exchange.

In its consultations with country-level practitioners, Panel members have had constructive discussions with a range of civil society organizations. Unfortunately various constraints prevent the Panel from inviting a large number of civil society representatives to the consultation in Geneva. However, to ensure that the Panel benefits from the perspectives of a broad range of civil society organizations from around the world, a website has been set up by the UN's Non-Governmental Liaison Service, to solicit written contributions on key issues. (*Details forthcoming.*)

Sunday 2nd July

High-level Panel Consultation with Civil Society Organizations

Morning session chaired by Ms. Josette Shiner

9.30 - 9.45 am **Welcoming Remarks by Panel Members:** Ms. Josette Shiner and Ms. Ruth Jacoby

Topic I: Improving UN system-wide coherence: opportunities and challenges.

9.45-10.15 am Presentation: Martin Khor, Director, Third World Network. (tbc)
Presentation: Bill Pace, Executive Director, World Federalist Movement (tbc)

10.15-11.15 am - *Open discussion on questions outlined in issues paper*

Topic II: Gender: mainstreaming and institutional architecture.

11.15-11.45 am Perspectives from four civil society representatives (7 mins each)

11.45-1.00 pm - *Open discussion on questions outlined in issues paper*

1.00-1.15 pm - *Chair's summary of discussion*

Lunch break [1.15 – 2.30 pm]

Afternoon session chaired by Ms. Ruth Jacoby

Topic III: Human Rights: coherence, mainstreaming and effectiveness

2.30-3.00 pm Perspectives from four civil society representatives (7mins each)

3.00-4.15 pm - *Open discussion on questions outlined in issues paper*

4.15-4.30 pm - *Chair's summary of discussion*

Topic IV: Sustainable development: mainstreaming, normative to operational linkages and institutional issues.

4.30-5.00 pm Perspectives from four civil society representatives (7 mins each)

5.00-6.15 pm - *Open discussion on questions outlined in issues paper*

6.15-6.30 pm - *Chair's summary of discussion and closing remarks*

DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Geneva, 2 July 2006

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

Introduction

The 2005 Summit Outcome Document reaffirmed the UN as a universal multilateral framework with unique legitimacy and broad ownership. World leaders also reaffirmed that development is a central goal by itself and that sustainable development – in its economic, social and environmental aspects – constitutes a key element of the overarching framework of UN activities. The internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs, provide the broad normative framework to guide the work of the UN in the economic, social and related fields.

In recognizing the importance of equipping the UN with the capacity to respond to these expectations, the Outcome Document invited the Secretary-General to launch further work to ensure that the UN maximizes its contribution to achieving these internationally agreed goals, including developing proposals for more “tightly managed entities” in the field of development, humanitarian assistance and environment.

The establishment of the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel comes amid increasing demands from all Member states for a substantially strengthened, effective and coherent role for the UN in international development cooperation at all levels. The Panel will be expected to develop a comprehensive set of proposals and recommendations to guide the UN into a new era in which it can effectively leverage its unique legitimacy and role in realizing the ambitions contained in the Outcome Document.

Topic I - Improving UN system-wide coherence: opportunities and challenges

While the UN continues to retain complex structures and processes to address a large number of development issues, there is an emerging consensus that constrained and unpredictable funding, lack of coherence in policy and operational activities, the UN’s role and relationship with other international development actors – IFIs, bilateral and regional agencies – and institutional fragmentation have combined to severely restrict the UN system’s ability to play a more effective role in supporting Member States achieve their national development objectives.

- What are the key challenges to the role of the UN at the country level (policy advice, capacity building, operational activities), and global level (governance, policy coherence, effectiveness) with regard to development, humanitarian assistance and the environment?
- How should the UN interface with the rest of the development system – BWIs, regional development banks, bilateral aid flows, global funds and particularly NGOs?

- How can decision-making by governments in different inter-governmental fora and governing bodies of international organizations be better coordinated? How should conflicting policy advice by different international organizations be addressed in order to ensure policy convergence to achieve national development objectives and goals?

Topic II - Gender equality: mainstreaming and institutional architecture

Despite international and national efforts, the goal of gender equality is still far from being realized. The 2005 Summit Outcome Document reaffirmed Member States' commitment to fully and effectively implement the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It also recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming as a tool for achieving gender equality, and undertook to actively promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, and to strengthen the capabilities of the UN system in the area of gender. Various parts of the UN system play a role on gender equality, or are part of gender mainstreaming efforts. There is, however, a sense that UN action could be more strategic and coherent, especially considering the immense challenges entailed in supporting country-level efforts to achieve gender equality.

- How can gender equality, including through gender mainstreaming, be better and more fully addressed in the work of the United Nations, given its roles in standard setting, advocacy, analysis and operational activities? Where do you see the clear added value of the UN vis-à-vis other development partners (in particular civil society organizations)? And are there areas in which the UN in your view does not have sufficient comparative strength and should withdraw?
- Do you see gender equality issues as effectively integrated into UN agencies' policy frameworks and programmes? Why or why not? If you've had experience working with UN agencies on these issues – either at the country level or policy development – what lessons would you draw to improve the UN's performance in this area?
- To what degree have gender mainstreaming initiatives been successful? Which aspects (or enabling factors) of gender mainstreaming are in place within the UN system, and what constraints still hinder the implementation of effective mainstreaming?
- What measures need to be taken to achieve clarity throughout the UN system with respect to institutional responsibilities and concerted action on gender equality? What specific role do you see in this for the UN's gender-specific entities? What lessons should be drawn from progress across the system to date? What gaps and challenges remain, and how can outcomes be improved?

Topic III – Human Rights: coherence, mainstreaming, effectiveness

The 2005 Summit Outcome Document resolves to integrate the promotion and protection of human rights into national policies and to support the further mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system, as well as closer cooperation between the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and all relevant United Nations bodies. Human rights mainstreaming has been central to UN reform efforts since 1997, and important progress has been made in many agencies and areas of work across the UN system. Notwithstanding certain achievements (such as the adoption of a UN common understanding of a human rights-based approach to development cooperation in 2003), conceptual and methodological advances in “human rights based approaches” to development and humanitarian action are well ahead of actual results on the ground. The tendency of many UN actors to avoid controversial, politically or culturally sensitive issues which are central to the UN’s mandate, and the fact that human rights are subjected to varying interpretations and levels of priority, according to their agencies’ mandates and the perceptions of their governing bodies, have impeded further progress.

- What has been your experience (positive and negative) in terms of engaging the UN on human rights issues, either at the country level, in intergovernmental settings or with specific UN agencies? How have conflicting donor positions and policy agendas in different governing bodies undermined consistency and coherence of action in this area?
- How can engagement of the UN with civil society at the country level serve to mainstream human rights more effectively, thus ensuring that all States - in conformity with the Charter - respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all? How can such engagement help to strengthen human rights machinery and monitoring?
- How can engagement of the UN with civil society help to ensure effective enjoyment of all human rights by all individuals – civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights including the right to development?

Topic IV - Sustainable development: mainstreaming, normative to operational linkages and institutional framework.

The 2005 Summit Outcome Document reaffirmed that development is a central goal by itself and that sustainable development, in its economic, social and environmental aspects, constitutes a key element of the overarching framework of UN activities. The Document also stressed, in the section entitled “Sustainable development: managing and protecting our common environment”, that “poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are overarching objectives of an essential requirements for sustainable development”. It further stipulated the need for stronger system-wide policy coherence by strengthening linkages between the UN’s normative work and its operational activities and the need to ensure that sustainable development, as one of three main horizontal policy themes, is taken into account in decision-making throughout the UN.

- What are the requirements to ensure that sustainable development is mainstreamed effectively into policy frameworks and taken into account in decision-making at national, regional and global levels (norm setting, capacity building and operational activities)?
- How can the normative, technical and scientific expertise of the UN system be brought to bear on policy development and capacity building to achieve sustainable development objectives at the country and regional levels? How can best practice be captured and deployed more effectively?
- There is still a need for better integration of the environmental perspective within the broad principle of sustainable development in UN country-level activities. How should environmental issues best be managed within the context of UN system country operations?
- What would constitute an effective institutional framework for the UN system's sustainable development activities? In this context, what should the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development be?
- How can the UN system better strive for greater integration, efficiency and coordination of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, ensuring that a balance is struck between these three pillars of sustainable development?