

The Global People's Forum Civil Society Declaration 24 August - 3 September

A Sustainable World Is Possible

We, the delegates to the Global People's Forum, representing the people of the world, meeting at Nasrec, Johannesburg, from 24 August to 3 September 2002, hereby submit the following declaration which pronounces our convictions, commitment and call for renewed action towards the attainment of the ideals of sustainable development. We are the major social groups named in Agenda 21 including, women, youth, labour, indigenous peoples, farmers, NGOs, and others including, disabled people, the elderly, faith-based organizations, peoples of African descent, social movements, people under foreign occupation and other under-represented groups.

As the key agents of social change and sustainable development, we are determined to take leadership for our future with utmost seriousness. We will advance our cause through networks and alliances of people's organisations and in solidarity with impoverished, marginalized and subjugated people the world over, based on the principle of oneness of humankind.

Ten years ago at the Rio Earth Summit, we agreed that the protection of the environment, and the promotion of social and economic development are crucial pillars of sustainable development. However, we note the fact that after ten years of the Rio Summit, there is visible lack of progress in the implementation processes from all of us and in particular our Governments. This can be exemplified by the growing gap between the North and the South, and the ever-growing social-economic disparity between the rich and the poor, with particular impact on the people of African descent and the ongoing degradation of natural resources.

The vision that drew us to Rio and to Johannesburg continues to guide our efforts, values and convictions. The Earth and all its integrated, diverse and interdependent life support systems must be sustained, and its regenerative powers guaranteed for the present and all future generations.

We note the urgency and the magnitude of the problems that confront humanity and nature in the world that compels us to act with speed and urgency. We call on all governments to fulfil commitments made in Rio and Johannesburg. The period of empty promises and lack of seriousness should be challenged side by side with actions and campaigns to ensure the full involvement of civil society in the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Program of Action of Rio and all the other UN Conferences, including Johannesburg.

We believe that civil society organisations have got a vital role to play in the advancement of the ideals of sustainable development. The definition of civil society includes, the major groups defined in Agenda 21, formal and informal community-based organizations, NGOs that work with and represent the poor and NGOs that work with and represent peoples who are victims of racism. Organizations of civil society have a central role to play in the translation of the Rio Principles and Agenda 21 into concrete programs, projects and implementation strategies for sustainable development.

We affirm that solidarity and partnerships for sustainable development are those entered into on the basis of clearly defined human needs and related goals, objectives and actions for the elimination of poverty and the enhancement and restoration of the physical, social, and universal spiritual environment. Partnerships for sustainable development are those entered into on the basis of mutual respect, trust, transparency, joint-decision-making, accountability and a shared vision of a healthy environment.

CORE ISSUES

SOCIAL

1. EQUALITY

We reaffirm the equality of all people, with special attention to historically disadvantaged groups such as Indigenous Peoples, Women, Youth, Workers, the Disabled People and People of African descent their inalienable right to meaningful participation in sustainable development policy formulation, design, program and project planning, decision-making and implementation processes. Such participation must reflect an agenda for development that is set by the community at risk with a view to empowerment.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS

We demand that International conventions, including ILO conventions, UN conventions on economic, social, political, civil and cultural rights (provided that they confirm with international human rights standards and MEAs) and MEAs must be respected and enforced by all states, including the rich and powerful.

We affirm the rights of Indigenous Peoples and call for the rights of refugees to be acknowledged. Every person must have the right to income, food and social security. Persons affected with HIV/AIDS and other debilitating illness must not be discriminated against.

We believe that all peoples have the right to land, jobs and access to resources for development in addition to basic services such as water and sanitation, preventive, promotive and curative health care (including occupational health and safety), education, housing, energy, equality of opportunity and freedom from racism, tribalism, apartheid, religious fanaticism and all other forms of discrimination. We support the right of access to information and the right to freedom of choice. We believe those to be cornerstones of sustainable development and life itself.

ECONOMIC

1. FAIR TRADE

We advocate FAIR TRADE because the current 'free trade' system is far from free and not fair. Fair Trade reaffirms the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility. Fair Trade also reinforces and supports the right of developing countries to protect their own industries and natural resources against outside externalities including currency fluctuations and such as imposed by the WTO and other global institutions.

2. REDISTRIBUTION

We believe that the resources of the world can still be and should be shared among all the people of the planet without creating pockets of wealth amidst seas of poverty and hunger. It is a principle, which obliges the rich countries to reducing their excessive consumption of the world resources and to sharing their incomes in the interests of the present and future generations. Relevant countries must also agree to adequately address reparations.

3. CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY

We believe that legally binding global rules and obligations to regulate corporations especially Multi-nationals, must be developed and implemented, especially in critical areas of economic, social and environmental concerns.

4. DEBT ERADICATION

We believe that multinationals and governments who have benefited from the exploitation of the human and natural resources in under-developed and developing countries are morally bound to repay the economic, social and ecological debt that has been accumulated as a result. We further believe that current debt servicing and repayment arrangements remain major impediments to sustainable development in many countries of the South. We insist on debt cancellation, reparations and the revision of existing conditionalities associated with current and future debt obligations, to reflect the principles and guidelines of Agenda 21.

5. ANTI-PRIVITISATION

We believe that natural resources and basic services must be held in the public domain for the common good of all people. These include the provision of water and sanitation, health care, education and housing. If sectors are considered for privatisation for reasons of efficiency then we must adopt a humanitarian privatisation approach. We must also address the question of inequalities in access to resources between urban and rural communities.

POLITICAL

1. TRANSPARENCY

We believe that there must be prior notice, consultation and participation and public disclosure on all transactions and agreements affecting the lives of the people in communities at risk. These include government - government and government - business transactions, and is especially so where resources for sustainable development are involved and administered by the United Nations and other multilateral and bilateral agencies. Of special importance are issues of the military and trade agreements.

2. SOVEREIGNTY

We believe that the right to self-determination, respect for human rights and the principles of human and environmental security and justice should be the root of all political, economic and environmental agreements and interventions.

3. PARTICIPATION

We believe that people must be involved in the design of plans and strategies for their development and engagement in decision-making processes at the local, national, regional and international levels on social, economic and physical planning as well as resource mobilization and allocation. We call for the inclusion of all major and organised groups to be involved in all areas of the United Nations. We call for the commitments to support the realization of the positive change in the lives of children.

4. MILITARISM

We advocate that the current spending on wars further entrenches conflicts and decreases the chances of sustainable development. We believe that peace-making and building processes and mechanisms should include organizations of civil society that work with and represent the communities at risk and should address economic injustices that often lie at the root of conflict. At the same time, peace with justice should be promoted and entrenched as part of the process of sustainable development. The massive spending on armament and war must be diverted to sustainable development initiatives and attacks to gain access to resources must be declared as a crime on humanity.

ENVIRONMENT

1. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

We believe that all communities and peoples must have control over biological resources as well as their rights to direct all development, including in agriculture and aquaculture, towards models that are ecologically and socio-culturally sensitive, and which conserve or enhance biodiversity and biodiversity-based livelihoods. Natural resource management is central to sustainable development. Traditional and indigenous knowledge systems developed over the ages should be recognised as legitimate. Climate change is an important issue for all countries as the impact is global, we call for the remaining countries to ratify the KYOTO protocol.

2. GENETIC ENGINEERING

We categorically reject the use of genetic engineering until the specified uses are proven safe. We believe in accordance with the Precautionary Principle, governments must ensure a GE free environment in our countries and in farming systems and support our efforts to raise awareness amongst farmers and consumers about real and potential impact of GE to the environment and to human health.

3. MARINE, INLAND FISHERIES AND COASTS

We believe that current systems of unequal ownership, access to and use of marine and coastal resources should be transformed into systems based on sustainable and equitable use with direct benefit to the local communities at risk according to clear timelines for the conversion.

4. RENEWABLE ENERGY

We believe that fossil fuel continues to contribute towards climate change, which is felt most heavily by poor people. We call for the phasing out of the fossil fuel industry and the promotion of the use of renewable forms of energy according to clear timelines for the conversion. We call for the phasing out of nuclear reactors.