

Environmental Governance: Key issues and perspectives

2005 World Summit Outcome

Resolution A/60/L.1, Paragraph 169

December 5th, 2006

Chair:

Roma Stibravy, Chairperson, UN NGO Committee on Sustainable Development

Speaker:

Ambassador Peter Maurer

Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the

United Nations

Presentation:

Ambassador Peter Maurer discussed the merits and deficits of the environmental governance discussion which is part of the ongoing UN Reform.

Due to the publication of the Stern Report, public discussion of environmental policies and environmental governances has increased considerably during the last month. The Stern Report clearly emphasizes that if current trends are left unchecked, the economic costs of climate change will be far greater than previously thought.

Ambassador Maurer draws the conclusion that new political and environmental discussions are necessary to find ways of influencing environmental policies effectively. Furthermore effective legislations are necessary to change behavioral patterns in society. Environmental governance is to be more responsive to environmental challenges.

The Ambassador explained that the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 2005 World Summit Outcome A/60/L.1 Paragraph 169, is a compromise of different countries reflecting the differences between the countries. None the less this Report gave a mandate to the Secretary General and will soon be on the agenda of the intergovernmental discussions.

In order to achieve effective environmental governance the normative work of the United Nations system and its operational activities should be strengthened and scientific cooperation needs to be enhanced. The discussion on the fragmentation in environmental governance is a big challenge. The fragmentation is reflected in the many entities that work on environmental governance: UNEP, The World Bank, MEAs etc. The big question, according to Ambassador Maurer is how to organize the work more effectively. The ongoing debate favors on the one hand to merge the different organizations into one single organization to be more effective. Or, on the other hand, keep up the several organizations in order to reflect the diverse environmental challenges such as water, desertification, deforestation etc.

The MEAs are a good proof of the successful cooperation of the different countries, but they constitute a burden of work at the same time. A clustering of some of the MEAs and organizations and secretariats could reduce the normative burden of work but raises at the same time the question of how to maintain the existing legal system.

Ambassador Maurer continued his discussion by highlighting the importance of coordination as it can be a tool to bridge the gap between policy advice and normative legal acts. Both at national and international levels, there is a tendency to focus on rule-making rather than on implementation, and on structures rather than on practical functions.

One solution could be the coordination of environmental issues on the governing boards of the various agencies so as to ensure that they pursue a coherent policy in assigning mandates and allocating resources throughout the system. Furthermore it is important to explore areas where countries can benefit the most from the work of international organizations such as the United Nations.