

## **Report on the WSSD**

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### **1. Introduction**

The United Nations General Assembly decided in late 2000 to hold the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) to both review progress since the Rio conference on Environment and Development and to identify further measures to implement Agenda 21 and the Rio agreements. The goal of the WSSD: An action-oriented plan of implementation.

With more right-wing governments in power today with economic growth and military security on the brain, it's not surprising that a summit on "*sustainable* development" wasn't given great priority. Despite a more pressing need to address the ever-growing disparities between rich and poor and an environment increasingly endangered, the world leaders weren't inspired to come up with forward-looking policies that would put us on course towards a better future. Not least because the term "sustainable development" doesn't include increased oil production, mass consumerism, further spread of Americanization (aka globalization) and the obliteration of Iraq, clear priorities of the world's only superpower.

Somewhere in the process the environmental component of sustainable development was lost and we were back to the traditional dynamic of developing countries begging for more money and the industrialized countries not taking responsibility for the current state of affairs. The notion of development to the dominant also means trade liberalization (except, of course, where agriculture in the EU and US is concerned) and peanuts for diamonds. Before the Summit, the WTO lingo was throughout the implementation plan bringing fears of WTO rule over MEAs.

Throughout the Preparatory process, it became clear that there was no intention to take stock of where countries stood on the commitments made at Rio. There was pressure to keep the agenda "forward looking", in an effort not to offend the US and ensure George Bush's attendance. Ultimately, we needn't have bothered.

The final preparatory meeting in Bali left delegates with little hope that much would be resolved and accomplished at the Summit. Delegates arrived in Johannesburg with more than 400 points of disagreement on the plan of action, and without having even begun to discuss the political declaration. Between Bali and JoBurg, Kofi Annan launched the WEHAB campaign to try to

invigorate greater commitment and attention with regards to water and sanitation, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB). In part he succeeded, at least in getting countries to concede on certain issues and in putting the environment *somewhere* on the radar screen.

With faint hope, the Canadian delegation headed off to Johannesburg. With the huge range of issues being addressed, it wasn't surprising that the delegation was large (final number unknown because a list just never seemed to appear...). What did surprise the NGO and youth delegates (doubled to 2 representatives each) was the large number of private sector representatives allowed on the delegation (approx.28). According to the Honourable David Anderson, sustainable development didn't work with just governments, didn't work with NGOs *and* governments, and so now we need to try with governments, NGO and the private sector... We all recognize the need to partner with the private sector to achieve sustainable development, but this disproportionate representation and access to decision-makers isn't acceptable and only reinforced the need for corporate accountability at home and in the WSSD outcome. Anderson's other excuse for the imbalanced representation was because "we rely on the wealth of the private sector and Africa receives so little investment" (i.e. the WSSD, another Team Canada tour stop).

## **2. Official Process – Actors, dynamics, conflicts, major issues**

The Summit kicked off on August 26<sup>th</sup> and immediately began the long days and separation of contact groups to resolve contentious issues. Negotiators tried to resolve as much they could before being passed on to the Ministerial level. Being negotiated was the Plan of Implementation including: an introduction, poverty eradication, consumption and production, the natural resource base, health and the environment, small island developing States (SIDS), Africa, other regional initiatives, means of implementation, and institutional frameworks (governance).

The negotiations revealed wide differences between nations. The EU and the US are polar opposites on the adoption of increased environmental standard and more rigorous regulation, with the EU in favour and the US strongly opposed. On financial assistance for poverty alleviation, the fault line runs between north and south, with The divide is even greater between industrial and developing countries on the question of economic assistance for reducing poverty.

Major areas of disagreement were around setting time-bound targets especially for sanitation, renewable energy, elimination of perverse energy subsidies, chemicals and health, natural resource degradation, biodiversity loss and fish stocks; Rio Principles 7 (common but differentiated responsibilities) and 15 (precautionary approach); good governance; trade and finance; globalization; the Kyoto Protocol; and health and human rights.

As the days went on, disappointments grew amongst civil society (and some delegates) with more and more "encourage", "promote", "improve", "where appropriate" being agreed to. The dynamics in the negotiating rooms highlighted the differences between nations. Generally speaking the United States against targets and committing to more funds, and pro trade and globalization; the EU, Norway and Switzerland rallying for targets (except where agricultural subsidies were concerned) and in general wanting to push the world further on environmental issues; the G77 and China pushing the development agenda (more funds, tech transfer, common but differentiated responsibilities) and split on various environment issues (eg. Latin America

strongly in favour of new renewables targets and OPEC staunchly against); small island nations (eg. Tuvalu, St. Lucia) rallying for strong action around climate change and renewable energy; and middle countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and Canada being at times obstructionist, at times mediators, and at times championing an issue or two (eg. New Zealand on renewables and Canada on human rights).

At the UN level, negotiations, in general, are incredibly boring and difficult to sit through. Diplomatic speak to try to edit texts to suit everyone's interests is painstaking. So, on day 4 when the EU walked out of the trade and finance contact group, excitement generated throughout the halls of the convention centre. Outstanding "difficult" issues in the trade and finance section were around agriculture subsidies, corporate accountability, the globalization chapeau (whether globalization was positive or negative), and the characterization of trade liberalization. The EU wanted most issues to go to Ministers where they thought some of the issues could be better resolved. Chaos ensued with accusations flying that the EU wasn't interested in a successful summit. In plenary, the U.S. and the G77 made diplomatic jabs at the EU who in turn made excuses and swore to being committed to resolve differences. After bilateral chats with the South Africans (chairing the Summit), everything settled down and most issues were pushed through the bureaucrats. The two major outstanding issues to go to the Ministerial level were energy and human rights.

A bitter debate over setting targets for renewable energy lasted right up to the end of the Summit, with Europe and several Latin American countries arguing for a firm commitment to move away from fossil fuels. Although the United States, Canada, China, and OPEC were ultimately successful in weakening this provision, the fact that the debate progressed as far as it did reflects strengthened confidence in the ability of new energy technologies to move quickly into the marketplace, a perspective that was shared by many industry representatives in Johannesburg. At the final plenary session, more than 30 countries, led by the European Union (EU), announced they are committing themselves to continuing to promote renewable energy sources - in clear defiance of the US.

The summit agreed to ensure that the number of poor people in the world without access to clean water, proper sanitation and energy be halved by 2010 and 2015, though this was fought strenuously by the US.

A substantial number of so-called "Type 2 Partnerships", or projects between NGOs, governments, and private sector, or any combination of those, and their financing arrangements, were also announced at the conference. Many had already been announced at other conferences and had simply been repackaged for the WSSD, but for the purposes of the summit, they were presented as examples of sustainable development in action. Most NGOs were very critical of these. All NGOs recognize the need for partnerships to implement sustainable development, but these Type II's were seen as a way for governments to get out of their commitments to UN environment and development programmes, and as a way to avoid setting and enforcing regulations.

### **3. Canada: Environmental axis of evil, defender of human rights.**

Greenpeace and FOE international dubbed Canada, Australia and the U.S. the environmental axis of evil. Canada lived up to this reputation with a few exceptions.

A select number of Canadian positions:

- Canada's position on energy: "We're much more comfortable with diversified sources of energy... Not comfortable with targets".
- Canada not supportive of corporate accountability because worried about U.S. companies applying restrictions for coming into Canada
- good governance important to Canada, pushed this with much reluctance from G77 (concerns about tied aid)
- not supportive of a target to rebuild fish stocks or prevent fish losses because "not based on sound science"
- on the Rio principles, Canada supports them in their traditional format (verbatim from Rio text) but not expanding them into other areas (b/c of GMOs and not wanting to be responsible for new \$)
- supportive of Monterrey and Doha without expanding financial commitments because "too early to tell the effectiveness/results of Monterrey and Doha to want to change them".
- Canada facilitated group to "significantly reduce the loss of biodiversity by 2010" (ironically with no endangered species act at home, and goes backward from April COP agreement).
- See below for Canada's positive role in defending human rights

#### **4. Update on how Canadian NGO demands for the WSSD were addressed (or not)**

The outstanding issues being negotiated in Johannesburg were many. The Canadian NGOs had developed a list of our priorities prior to the Summit, and this section will address the outcomes of the negotiations in areas pertaining to those identified priorities.

- **Make Human Rights Paramount.**

From the on-set of negotiations, Canada wanted a human rights framework for the plan of implementation. As the preparatory meetings unfolded, most references to human rights were taken out, including one in paragraph 47 (related to increasing access to health services) that Canada said was gavelled without consensus (the US and some of the G77 declared the paragraph closed after a small side-session at Prep Com IV). Canada appealed to re-open it on procedural grounds. The precedent set by allowing this sort of small side agreement to stand as a consensus decision would have had serious repercussions in future conferences, particularly for countries with small delegations, and the omission of references to all human rights and fundamental freedoms would leave the door open to regimes like the Taliban to justify their oppression of women, for example.

From Bali to Johannesburg, Zonny Woods from ACPD worked behind the scenes trying to rally support from other NGOs abroad to in turn rally support from their governments. Once in Johannesburg, members of the delegation worked throughout the Summit trying to garner support for Canada's proposal ("in conformity with all human rights and fundamental freedoms"). Canada held out the approval of the entire Plan of Implementation for this inclusion (using an amended paragraph 6 as hostage). In the end it was only the U.S., Argentina and Egypt

who were against the inclusion. The former because of the possible reference to abortion (interpreted from right to health care services), and the latter mostly because of a saving face issue (for having agreed to it before or something...).

In the end, and thanks to Zonny and the collaborative efforts of the delegation, Canada essentially ‘won’. Winning meant a reaffirmation more than new language. Other references to human rights were included in the text, but their paramourcy is not articulated in the final document, though the introduction includes the “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, as well as cultural diversity”.

- **Undertake Specific Actions to Meet the Millennium Development Goals.**

While the Millennium Declaration called on governments to set meaningful targets, perhaps the only example of a goal that is evident in the text is the commitment to halving the number of people without clean drinking water by 2015. Other parts of the plan of implementation address and recall the Millennium Goals, but fail to set targets to achieve them, notably on Climate Change and Education.

- **Establish a Timetable to Achieve the Goal of 0.7% of GNP for Official Development Assistance.**

Not only was this target not met, but Canada refused to support setting timelines for this, arguing that a domestic timetable was dependant on the budget process, and it was inappropriate to make international commitments that were not certain to be met at home. The final text of the implementation plan, however, recognizes that a substantial increase in ODA and other resources is required and calls for the delivery of the relevant ICFD commitments, and encourages more “efficient and effective” use of ODA. While not in the Plan of Implementation, Chretien recently committed to doubling Canada’s ODA by 2010.

- **Change International Trade Rules and the Process for Negotiating them to Respect Development Needs of the Poor.**

Negotiations related to integrating the needs of the poor were not discussed, rather discussions focused on what was framed as “the major role that trade can play in achieving sustainable development and eradicating poverty”. Of course, the priority was put on expanding markets and increasing trade as the solution, without considering that access to markets doesn’t necessarily translate into equitable distribution of profits within countries.

- **Ensure Corporate Social Responsibility.**

Canada was not supportive of rules surrounding corporate accountability because the government is worried about U.S. companies applying restrictions for coming into Canada, and is not supportive of anything beyond voluntary codes of practice. Canada was a leader in the Sustainable Mining codes.

- **Uphold the Precautionary Principle.**

One of the cross-cutting themes that sparked major disagreement and was referred to a small group chaired by South Africa. By the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, with no resolution in sight, the matter was referred to Ministers. The US and Japan, supported by Canada, led the resistance to references to the Precautionary principle, arguing for the looser “approach”. In spite of arguments by the EU

and others that numerous subsequent international agreements reference the “principle” (a legal term), it was finally agreed that the term “approach” would instead be used.

- **Cancel, Fully and Unconditionally, the Debt of the Poorest Countries.**

While there are no firm commitments to debt cancellation, the section on sustainable development in West Asia encourages further action on, among other things, poverty alleviation and debt relief. The final text on finance calls for a reduction of the unsustainable debt burden and for the speedy implementation of the enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

- **Enact a Tax on Currency Transactions to Control Destabilizing Short-term Capital Flows and Foster Economic Stability.**

There is no mention of a tax on currency speculation in the implementation plan.

- **Ratify the Kyoto Protocol Without Delay.**

Though one of the Millennium Goals was for governments to do everything possible to ensure the Kyoto Protocol was to enter into force by 2002, the US absolutely opposed language in the text to this effect. Canada, Russia and China, however, announced their intention to ratify the Protocol, and text was eventually agreed upon where states that had ratified the Protocol urged others to do so “in a timely manner”. Of course, there is nothing in the agreement that defines “timely”, nor is there any penalty for failing to do so.

- **Endorse the Earth Charter and Act to Achieve its Goals.**

There is no mention of the Earth Charter in the Plan of Implementation. It was initially written into the Political Declaration but taken out after the first edit.

- **Recognize that Gender Equality and Equity are Central to Achieving Sustainable Development.**

While gender equity was mentioned in the negotiations, wording specifically supporting the role of gender equity and equality is absent. This was part of the larger argument that Canada lead on issues surrounding human rights, mentioned above. Women’s empowerment and emancipation are mentioned in the political declaration.

- **Commit to Extensive Consultation with Africans Before Enacting Provisions in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).**

There is no commitment to consult Africans on NEPAD, rather just an affirmation of the commitment to advance NEPAD.

### **Promote Peace and Demilitarization**

In the Introduction, Africa section and the Political Declaration are references that peace and security are “essential for achieving sustainable development”. There are, however, no references to demilitarization or putting portions of military budgets to human security and SD.

- **Uphold the Principle of “Common but Differentiated Responsibilities”**

This was another issue that sparked bitter debate. Some countries wanted this principle to relate only to environmental issues. A major firestorm was touched off when the US and the EU ended

a negotiating session in the contact group on finance with a deadlock on whether the principle applied to financial obligations (the US, not surprisingly, was opposed). Things almost broke down in the plenary when the US accused the EU of walking out of the contact group. Eventually things calmed down, but it took a few hours of confusion. Ultimately, the CBDR is included in the text, but is so watered down that it is virtually meaningless.

- **Make binding commitments to Sustainable Development with specific targets and timetables**

What can we say about this? The final Plan of Implementation included fewer than 35 targets and most were recycled from previous agreements. Obviously, most countries have no intention of even setting targets that would mitigate environmental harm. The document we have come away with does nothing to meaningfully ensure that countries take any responsibility at all, and there are no enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance, even if there were commitments.

## **5. The Political Declaration**

After intense negotiations resulted in, at best, a mediocre document, there was definite negotiator burnout. No one wanted a political declaration that would be controversial or need time to talk over. As hosts of the Summit, South Africa was in charge of drafting the declaration. The first draft produced two days before the end of the Summit was long (9 pages) and full of controversial statements. The Declaration went through two more drafts with Canada's only call to include Children, Indigenous Peoples, and exclude any controversial statement on occupied territories or land tenure. The Declaration is on the UN site:

[www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit\\_docs/1009wssd\\_pol\\_declaration.doc](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/summit_docs/1009wssd_pol_declaration.doc) .

My personal favourite is para 16: "We risk the entrenchment of these global disparities and unless we act in a manner that fundamentally changes their lives, the poor of the world may lose confidence in their representatives and the democratic systems to which we remain committed, seeing their representatives *as nothing more than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals*".

## **6. Canadian NGOs**

In general, a couple of key members of the delegation would meet daily with Canadian NGOs (20-30 regularly in attendance) in JoBurg to give updates on where negotiations were at. Chantal Bois of the CEN drew up minutes from the NGO meetings with key negotiators and the Whelan/Anderson meeting. Essentially the latter meeting with Ministers was closed (their demand) and those attending chose to appoint 6 key spokespeople to address concerns that we all agreed on, namely the importance of having a clear accountability framework with timebound targets in the plan of implementation; the importance of education and the positive role Canada's played and should continue to promote; corporate accountability; the Rio Principles; renewable energy and perverse subsidies; and human rights.

Quebec initiative: On the first day of the Summit, a video conference was held between Canadians and speakers from Johannesburg to 6 Universite de Quebec campuses. Organized by Alternatives, the CEN, Jour de la Terre and the University, the conference included 4 hours of speakers and questions about the WSSD.

Alternative report presentation; The CEN alternative report "Summit or Plummet" was presented at the Heinrich Boell Foundation site at NASREC on Tuesday, August 27 by Chantal Bois, CEN

and Anne Mitchell, CIELAP. During the Summit, a collation of summaries of alternative reports from 22 countries was also launched. The book “Uncovering Greenwash: Challenging our Governments into Action” was sponsored by the HBF and the Danish 92 was coordinated by Gidon Bromberg from FOEME and Nikki Skuce from One Sky.

During a delegation meeting, Canada’s official national report was questioned. Both Clarisse Kehler Siebert and David Runnalls from the Reference Group were there to question the delegation. Essentially the Reference Group had signed off on a mediocre document that was at least somewhat critical of Canada’s performance over the last decade. The report made it through all departments and provinces before being held up in the PM’s office where it was re-edited and changed to the point that the Reference Group no longer supported it and the consulting group Stratos took their name off as authors of the report. For the latter, “it no longer represented the balanced report we were attempting to achieve”. The government’s communication to those involved in the process was nil from last review to the release of the report (March to August). Silence ensued in the del meeting about the process and a lot of interest was generated.

There were dozens more events and workshops that involved Canadian NGOs. We encourage people to write about their own experiences and involvement.

## **7. Johannesburg – The Summit setting and other venues**

**Johannesburg** – Drilled into everyone NOT to walk anywhere, NOT to hail a cab, NOT to go to certain places, it almost felt like living in a fishbowl at times in what’s deemed “the most dangerous city in the world”. I don’t know if it merits that title, although when crime does occur it’s often extremely violent. It’s also not surprising that there’s high crime in a city that reveals enormous discrepancies between rich and poor. A few of those rich must be the owners of barbed-wire and security companies!

Johannesburg is more sprawled out than Edmonton and distances between venues were great adding hours of travel time into busy schedules. Our experience in Johannesburg was falsified in a sense by the Summit with the bus systems set up and the plethora of security. On a positive note, there was a jazz festival with some amazing music to be heard at the same time as the Summit...

**Sandton:** Not only was the Summit located in the richest neighbourhood in all of Africa, it was also set in a shopping mall. The irony of having a sustainable development conference in this consumer mecca was not lost by a number of NGOs. With this setting, tight security and the international make-up of the conference, you could have been almost anywhere in the world in a similarly wealthy shopping district. The total number of participants (for the official process) were over 9,000 government delegates, more than 8,000 representatives of business and pressure groups, and more than 4,000 journalists.

**Ubuntu Village:** “The largest tent in the world” was both a cultural exhibition and trade show. The most ironic sighting while walking through was a bio-tech company set up next to an organic agricultural association. These were the types of things being exhibited as well as countries profiling their wonderful SD projects. For several days various indigenous peoples from across Canada profiled their sustainable development projects. There were also talks such



as a panel chaired by David Anderson on environmental governance. A large tent was devoted to showcasing South African arts and crafts.

**NASREC:** This was the venue for the People's Forum. Both because the ANC and unions essentially took over the venue and because it was over an hour away from Sandton, attendance at NASREC increasingly dwindled as the Summit progressed. A \$150 USD fee for the ten days was also an inhibiting factor.

**Waterdome:** Also like a trade show but focused entirely on water issues. Some interesting initiatives profiled (including a water pump propelled by kids) but enough to visit once (especially being so distant from everything).

## **8. Protests –**

**Alexandra protest:** Angela's story:

On Saturday, August 31<sup>st</sup>, there was a march organized by landless peasant groups from the former township of Alexandra to the exclusive enclave of Sandton, where the Summit and most of the delegates were located.

The march set off from the soccer stadium, moving slowly through the squalid streets. Arriving late, Amelia Clarke and I followed a group of women we mistakenly believed were the tail end of the march around a corner and down an alley. Alexandra is not a place where a couple of foreigners would be advised to wander alone, even in daylight, given a staggering crime rate, among other things. It was soon evident that we had taken a wrong turn, and just as we decided to head back to the larger street, a woman shouted at us.

“Look around you. What do you see? You see where we live,” she said. She pointed to a broken pile of stones in the corner of an opening among the huts. “This is our toilet. It is the toilet for all of these people. This, running down the street, is our sewage,” she pointed to an open gutter in the middle of the narrow path between huts full of stagnating sludge.

She told us to go on, that we didn't want to see how she lived. We insisted we did, and asked her to show us more. And so we met Knowledge.

Knowledge led us through the huts, introducing us to neighbours, showing us the two rooms where she lives with her son, with no electricity or water. We asked her to come on the march with us, and after her initial reluctance, she came. We met more people along the way; she seemed to know everyone. They shouted to her to show us how they lived, to stand up for their rights. Crowds lined the streets in Alexandra, cheering us on and offering water.

As we left Alexandra, the people on the sides of the streets dwindled. We marched on, Knowledge teaching us chants and telling us about her society. As we came down a hill towards Sandton, we could see thousands and thousands of people marching along in front of us, filling the streets (estimated at 20,000 protestors). The police presence became more threatening as the march approached Sandton, with helicopters above and armoured vehicles and paddy wagons lining the streets. The contrast of the main observers of the march now peering over walls topped with razor wire was stark.

Reaching Sandton, we had marched 12 kilometres over 6 hours, with no water. Some of us were lucky enough to be able to buy water at the mall and rest in the air conditioning, but the majority

of the marchers were faced with the prospect of the long walk back to Alexandra following the rally. We took Knowledge to lunch and gave her money to “take a taxi home”.

I have never been so profoundly ashamed of our thoughtless, consumptive lifestyle, and only wish that those US negotiators who fought so hard against targets for clean water and sanitation had spent a night or two in Alexandra - alone.

**NGO walkout:** Nikki’s summary

On the final morning of the Summit, a number of organizations collaborated to stage an “NGO walkout”. Between the conference centre and the Mall, a number of people gathered in black wearing “No more shameful summits” and “W\$\$D.morg” stickers. From within the building, the youth delegates Clarisse and Lindsay and I joined Vandana Shiva, Ricardo Navarro (FOEI) and Bob Brown (Green Party Senator of Australia) for the walkout. The three big names immediately garnered media attention and followed us on the walkout to join the rest of the demonstrators. We arrived to a chain of police shoving protestors out of the area to the streets. The cops were quite aggressive and seemed to be unable to stop pushing people around once we were shoved into the busy street. They kept corralling people along with no end in sight. Fortunately no one was seriously hurt and NGOs definitely made their point. In closing, Kofi Annan acknowledged the need to grant civil society an equal voice that has been given to governments and business.

## **9. Final thoughts**

The ratification of Kyoto is finally coming to a Canada near you (despite the drunken Premier’s campaign from the oil barren, drought-stricken province). Hopefully anyway... the Prime Minister will put ratification to an open vote in the House and currently the majority of Liberals, NDP and Bloc Quebecois support ratification.

With the agreement to have national sustainable development plans implemented by 2005, this is our chance to try to work with our government and hold them accountable.

Despite having 190 of the 195 eligible nations in attendance and a large number of world leaders speaking about the importance of sustainable development, the Summit ended in disappointment. A few strides were made, including committing to halve the number of people lacking basic sanitation by 2015 and eliminating harmful chemicals by 2020, however the final document has fewer than 35 targets, and most recycled from previous agreements. The goal of the WSSD was to produce an action-plan. Without targets and timetables, nations can not be held accountable.

As I prepared to leave Johannesburg, I pondered the usefulness of the Summit. Operating by consensus in a globalized world dominated by one superpower, the UN offers a truly international forum where small victories can sometimes have significant impacts. Even though a weak Plan of Implementation resulted, there’s hope that the environment and development are back on government agendas and that most countries, including Canada, will go beyond the lowest common denominator agreed to. The overall answer to the success of the Summit can only be answered with time, but outside of the negotiating halls partnerships were created, networks enlarged, inspiring and innovative projects showcased, ideas exchanged, and evidence shown that people are implementing sustainable development and that it does make a difference. After all, positive change usually comes from the bottom up.