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GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM

POLICY STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Introduction

1. The seventh special session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/third Global Ministerial Environment Forum takes place at an auspicious time as the international community prepares to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of UNEP and also comes together to confront the challenge of how to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development. It comes just six short months before the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and builds on the ground-breaking efforts of the first Global Ministerial Environment Forum, held in Malmö, Sweden, in May 2000. There, environment ministers, through the adoption of the Malmö Ministerial Declaration, set the course for an evolutionary, implementation-centred approach to tackling the environmental challenges of sustainable development facing us in the twenty-first century. This session provides the world's environment ministers with a unique opportunity to present a compelling and united message on the environmental pillar of sustainable development for the Johannesburg Summit.

2. The Malmö Declaration provides us with a vision for developing a world free from hunger, poverty and discrimination, respecting the planet and its resources, as well as the dignity and diversity of all its peoples and cultures. As noted in the Declaration's conclusion:

"At the dawn of this new century, we have at our disposal the human and material resources to achieve sustainable development, not as an abstract concept but as a concrete reality. The unprecedented developments in production and information technologies, the emergence of a younger generation with a clear sense of optimism, solidarity and values of women increasingly aware and with an enhanced and active role in society - all point to the emergence of a new consciousness. We can decrease poverty by half by 2015 without degrading the environment; we can ensure environmental security through early warning; we can better integrate environmental considerations in economic policy; we can better coordinate legal instruments; and we can realize a vision of a world without slums. We commit ourselves to realizing this common vision."

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3. It has become ever more clear that the international community faces many critical challenges, including that of long-term sustainability, which if not addressed adequately could endanger future stability. Globalization, the growing material and psychological gap between rich and poor and its implications for the environment and for security, the rapid spread of technological innovations, the growing strength of civil society at all levels and its new modes of expression, the major changes in the content and direction of international trade, the growing need for cooperation and the increasing realization of our interdependence, and the need for tolerance, respect for human rights, understanding and coexistence – all point to the ever more pressing need to design new and comprehensive ways of addressing these realities.

4. Clearly, now is the time for the international community to take urgent action on the scale necessary to make sustainable development a reality. We must redefine the relationship between humankind and nature, as well as between humans themselves. But this is not new. That was the central message 30 years ago in the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment; that was the message 10 years ago in Rio de Janeiro; and that was the message some 18 months ago in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. It is also a clear message from the second meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development echoing the call of the Secretary-General that the Summit must not be merely about new declarations but decisively a summit for implementation of action.

5. If we are to meet these overriding challenges, the World Summit must find a way to make globalization work for vulnerable peoples and countries, for half of the world still living on less than two dollars a day, for those who have probably never enjoyed a glass of clean water, for those trapped in extreme poverty, for those who yearn to be free from the yoke of hunger, disease and misery, and those who suffer from the externalized environmental costs and unsustainable consumption patterns of developed countries.. The Summit must also address the urgent needs of the most vulnerable including the least developed countries and small island developing States.

6. Coherent and coordinated environmental policy must stand alongside economic development and social responsibility, to ensure the sustainable provision of environmental services and to meet the challenges of a globalizing world, the challenge of sustainable development. Social, economic and environmental policies must be integrated to ensure sustainable development. This is the only path out of poverty. The Summit must have at its core the principle of integration among the three pillars of sustainable development.

7. To achieve this, the Summit must be:

- (a) A summit of implementation;
- (b) A summit of integration and concrete action;
- (c) A summit of partnership and solidarity;
- (d) A summit of responsible prosperity and opportunities for all.

The Summit has to be the foundation and the first building block of lasting, effective global partnerships - partnerships demonstrating solidarity with the poor; partnerships committed to concrete action for change - and change that builds a foundation for peace and prosperity for generations to come. A successful summit would lay the basis of a new peace policy for a secure future.

8. UNEP is well placed to share its experience and vision of how sound environmental practices and policies can contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. A sustainably managed environment is a vital instrument for poverty eradication. With its home in Africa, it is a living witness to the impacts and ravages of unsustainable development. Yet there are reasons for optimism, as opportunities for mankind to achieve sustainable development are concrete and real, given the human and financial resources and technologies at its disposal. A renewed political will buttressed by enhanced human capacity in developing countries and supported by technological advances must underlie our efforts.

9. UNEP's contribution to the process leading up to the World Summit is outlined in the discussion paper already before the Forum in document UNEP/GCSS.VII/3. Elements were also incorporated into the Secretary-General's report on implementing Agenda 21 that was recently considered by the World Summit Preparatory Committee session. But additional contributions should look beyond the preparatory Summit phase, rectify perceived shortcomings and position the organization to begin implementing the outcomes of the World Summit on an urgent basis. Such outcomes, reached by the reinvigorated political commitment of the entire international community, mindful of the spirit and goals of the Millennium Declaration, should be based on measurable benchmarks, supported by enhanced partnerships involving all stakeholders and effective and adequately financed institutional frameworks, domestically and globally.

10. UNEP in the post-Summit era, working with its partners within and outside the United Nations family, must focus on the balance between human needs and those of nature. It must build upon and embrace the values shared between peoples and civilizations. It must explore the interlinkages between the environment and the United Nation's agenda of peace-building, human rights, and social and economic development. It must build upon the long-standing normative work of consensus-building on common principles, rules and standards. It must take into account the need to support an effective compliance and enforcement regime, including the increasing observance of the Rio principles. It must simultaneously work on conserving the commons, mitigating damage already incurred and pursuing innovative restoration projects.

11. Improved scientific assessments of present conditions are imperative, thus allowing for credible early warning of future trends for targeted and informed policy and decision-making at all levels. New and imaginative partnerships with the private sector and the scientific and academic communities will contribute to capacity-building efforts as well as risk prevention, particularly with regard to industrial activities. The use of economic instruments for environmental objectives as well as the observance of the Rio principles, in particular, the "polluter pays" principle, and a clear approach to liability and the rule of law, should underlie this approach. A precondition for this is reinforced global partnerships between developed and developing countries and an improved international architecture of international environmental governance in the overall framework of international governance for sustainable development.

12. Key areas of action by UNEP for the environment will focus on the need for regional implementation, as highlighted in the regional preparatory meetings for the Summit, and in particular on Africa. This will involve such key sectoral issues as energy, water and oceans; cross-cutting issues such as health, food security, urbanization, diversity, globalization and trade; and an emphasis on strengthening the means of implementation through scientific assessments and early warning. Capacity-building, technology transfer and financing must be an integral part of such action.

I. GLOBALIZATION AND DIVERSITY

13. As was recognized in the Millennium Declaration, we need to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the people of the world. While globalization has in some instances led to faster growth and higher living standards, its benefits are very unevenly distributed both among and within countries. For many societies, it has been associated with increased social, economic and ecological vulnerabilities. In addressing the challenges associated with globalization, UNEP has been engaged in the integration of environmental considerations into macroeconomic and trade policy. The outcome of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference in Doha is the basis for constructive dialogue on the nexus between trade, development and environment issues. There is also a need, however, for technical assistance with regard to the interrelationship between trade and the environment. The Capacity-building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development set up by UNEP with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development can play an important role in this regard.

14. Partnerships with the private sector need to be further refined and enhanced. Private sector organizations should be encouraged to strengthen initiatives by which they substantively address their environmental responsibilities, for example through the Secretary-General's Global Compact initiative, the Global Reporting Initiative and voluntary codes of conduct. UNEP has been catalysing the preparation of 22

industry sector self-evaluations. The evaluations consider what a specific industry has done since the Rio Conference, what remains to be done and what commitments the industry intends to make in the future. The reports have led to substantive dialogue with non-governmental organizations and labour organizations. Corporate social responsibility must be stressed in all areas of economic activity and a clear criteria for assessing performance must be instituted. UNEP has undertaken initiatives in this regard to develop such voluntary initiatives starting with the mining and tourism sectors. In this, the year of ecotourism we must try to consolidate some concrete advances. We must move beyond merely discussing a global economy to addressing a global society and a global environment with the capacity to meet the needs of an equitable sustainable development.

15. The cost of globalization should not be the loss of thousands of indigenous cultures and their traditions. Spiritual values, cultural diversity, respect for human rights and indigenous knowledge can contribute positively to the formulation of a new environmental ethic for the twenty-first century based on a code of conduct and a code of moral duty for all human beings. In a world of more than six billion people, we cannot waste or ignore the skills and knowledge of any peoples or civilizations if we are to meet this challenge.

16. Without an understanding of and tolerance among different cultural and spiritual traditions and cultures, peace will remain elusive. Sustainable development is a foundation for securing peace by eliminating tensions regarding natural resources and promoting dialogue and tolerance, especially among the younger generation. Due attention should be given to the need to integrate ethical and spiritual values into sustainable development policies. Concrete measures to harness the full potential of a new economy to make meaningful contributions in areas of information technology, biology and biotechnology should take into account their ethical, spiritual and social implications. Attention must also be given to ensure the preservation of indigenous knowledge and an equitable approach to benefit sharing building on the Convention on Biological Diversity. These issues are central to UNEP's work and should be central to the discussions at the World Summit. The conservation of cultural and spiritual diversity, and the ethical dimension, must become the fourth pillar of sustainable development.

II. ASSESSMENT

17. On the eve of the World Summit, the assessment of the state of the environment and early warning, with regard to new and emerging challenges on the basis of sound science have become increasingly important as the degradation of our natural environment continues unabated. To monitor these new dimensions and to propose remedial strategies, information, monitoring and assessment of the environment must remain a priority for UNEP's work. More than ever, the international community needs information so that policy makers worldwide know where we stand, what path should be taken and where we might wish to go in the future. Environmental policy must be targeted and interrelated to socio-economic decision-making for which clear measures are required.

18. UNEP's third Global Environment Outlook (GEO-3) report - to be released in May - provides the necessary definitive assessment of the global environmental situation, taking a 30-year retrospective and a 30-year forward-looking perspective, and reframing the way the international community understands and responds to the environment in this new millennium. The report analyses key issues facing the world community, from social issues such as poverty and unsustainable consumption patterns; policy issues such as legal and economic instruments, integrated management tools and best practices; the means of implementation such as institutional arrangements, stakeholder involvement and new technologies; public awareness and capacity-building; to available and required financial resources.

19. GEO-3 concludes with a look ahead, noting that the priority for all actors working for sustainable development is to confront the issue of poverty, which includes inadequate access to resources, potable water, sanitation, health care, affordable and safe housing, education and civil and political rights. To address poverty and sustainable development and a healthy environment for all, the report urges all stakeholders to consider a series of actions. At the national and local levels, existing policies need to be

assessed for their effectiveness as well as whether adequate human and financial resources are committed to their implementation. Education on the environment would also build a better knowledge base for informed decision-making. Increased allocations of financial resources for national environmental institutions should enable domestic authorities to meet present responsibilities and emerging problems.

20. The importance of the GEO process has been further signified through intensive engagement of national and regional scientific institutions and experts in the process. This approach underlies the need for building scientific and technical capacities at national and regional level as part of a strategy to utilise international scientific networks for sound policy making. It constitutes a critical input to implementation, based on an ecosystem approach and to addressing new priority areas such as the Arctic and, in this, the International Year of Mountains, the fragile but essential mountain ecosystems.

21. One of the proposals put forward in the context of discussions on the role of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum within the international environmental governance process relates to the possible establishment of an intergovernmental panel, under the auspices of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum and supported by the Executive Director of UNEP, for the assessment of global environmental change and its consequences for social and economic development. This has the potential, if well-designed, to be a vehicle for the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum to take into account emerging environmental trends and consider issues related to environmental assessment and monitoring, early warning and emerging issues, drawing on a strengthened scientific capacity of UNEP. However, careful definition needs to be given to such an intergovernmental panel on global environmental change, to ensure that it performs a valuable anticipatory, early-warning function, and that it fully exploits synergies with other scientific and technical bodies, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and subsidiary bodies of the environment and environment-related conventions, without adding unsustainable demands or overlaps within the existing system.

III. CAPACITY-BUILDING

22. The ability of developing countries to participate meaningfully in the development of international environmental policy and to undertake the requisite implementation of international agreements at the national level must be strengthened if environmental policy is to be translated into sustainable development. Capacity-building is a cross-cutting priority for virtually all areas of activity in UNEP. The need to strengthen the capacity of developing countries remains a major requirement for sustainable development and in particular on issues related to poverty alleviation. Such efforts must include all relevant partners and emphasize in particular capacity-building and training, as well as national-level coordination of environment and sustainable development objectives.

23. Capacity-building and technical assistance, in particular with respect to institutional strengthening in developing countries, remain an important component of the work of UNEP. UNEP provides national Governments with advice on policy, law, technology and cleaner production, and in key areas of institution-building and environmental management. UNEP is also playing an important role in the ongoing capacity-building assessment being carried out by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through its implementing agencies. UNEP recognizes that a strong programme of capacity-building should be clearly defined in its programme of work, and in the context of pursuing the strategic partnership with GEF and in close cooperation with other relevant United Nations organizations. It plans to further enhance its activities to ensure that environmental policy works for sustainable development at the national level, strengthening its partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other field-oriented/operational agencies in coordinating activities of a strategic and catalytic nature. Partnerships with the private sector offer many new and innovative opportunities. In this regard, a proposal for the development of a strategic plan for implementation support to help fill gaps between commitments and implementation needs to be addressed in the context of the international environmental governance process.

24. Human capital and a young population constitute one of the major assets of developing countries. A far greater commitment to investment in education and training at all levels is an essential component of any sustainable development strategy. The emergence of rapid scientific and technical change and new technologies such as those related to information and communication and biotechnology point to the increasing need for developing countries to be able to harness their potential.

IV. TECHNOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

25. Every year the world population grows by 75 million people. How can we ensure a dignified quality of life for present and future generations? Technological progress and scientific findings must be used for the benefit of all humanity, bearing in mind the need for precaution when our knowledge is incomplete or of a preliminary nature. Technology can help find a solution, if there is information on its availability and terms of transfer. The use of technology is linked with scientific analysis, precaution and ethical responsibility. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), through its International Environmental Technology Centre (IETC), its OzonAction Programme and the Sustainable Alternatives Network (SANet), seeks to overcome this barrier. SANet is designed to foster the rapid dissemination and acquisition of cleaner technology alternatives to and within developing country markets and to promote the adoption of viable business practices consistent with global environmental agreements. Cleaner production processes, training in alternative technologies, increasing energy efficiency, decreasing wastes and making better use of water – we need to achieve these through the potential of new technologies, the environmentally sound and responsible use of technology, and technology transfer to developing countries to meet environmental objectives. We must increasingly utilise synergies between clean production technologies and international chemicals agreements in a more innovative manner. For example, we must move not only from controlling the export of hazardous wastes and toxic chemicals but also to limiting their quantity and developing alternatives. In short we must move from merely “end of pipe” solutions to a more sustainable approach.

V. HEALTH

26. There is an intimate link between the health of our planet and human health. The degradation and depletion of water, air, land, marine and biological resources all have profound impacts on human health, as can changes in the atmosphere and climate and the unsafe use and management of chemicals. The health of the most vulnerable in society, those living in desperate poverty, the elderly and our children is particularly affected. Environmental quality is one of the key factors in determining whether a child survives the first years of life, and strongly influences the child's subsequent physical and mental development.

27. The link between poverty, health and the environment is nowhere closer than with regard to water issues. Water is the key to sustainable development and good health. Water sustains people's livelihoods and welfare, and enables them to work for economic and social development. Water is also critical for sustaining the environment, which in turn provides people with the sustainable resources for economic and social development. Yet water pollution, poor sanitation and water shortages kill over 12 million people every year. Women spend many hours carrying water – using valuable energy, which could be used to supplement the family income or educate children. A plan of action should be developed to provide legal and technical assistance for better use of water resources. For its part, UNEP is working to address these problems through integrated water management. UNEP's water policy provides a strategic direction for its work in this area. Capacity-building, technology transfer, development of sustainable policies for water management, and raising of finance for water management projects are some of the very concrete steps that are being taken. Furthermore, the regional seas programme and the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities provide concrete measures to address the interface between freshwater, coastal area management and the marine environment. The Global Programme of Action, the regional seas programme and the Global International Waters Assessment are the basis for a concentrated and coordinated assessment leading to targeted action for the sustainable use of oceans and coastal areas.

28. Dangerous chemicals are also eroding the health of the world's most vulnerable citizens and exacting a heavy toll on the environment. UNEP has been active in this field to promote the environmentally sound management of such chemicals, including work with the World Health Organization (WHO) to reduce reliance on DDT. UNEP promoted the development and implementation of two key chemicals conventions, the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. In taking forward the global chemicals agenda, the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum has before it a proposed new strategy for the management of chemicals, which addresses 18 key areas and aims to build bridges between the various chemicals agreements and conventions. The session will also examine progress on phasing out lead in gasoline and a request that UNEP carry out a global assessment of mercury.

29. A better approach to preventing the negative impacts of air pollution on health particularly in mega cities is urgently required. We must also address more effectively the interactions between climate change and health as the distribution of infectious diseases and the spread of disease vectors in previously unknown areas constitutes new risks.

VI. ENERGY

30. Energy and energy efficiency should be addressed in the context of all dimensions of sustainable development. It is crucial in both rural and urban areas. Some 2 billion people lack the energy they need to heat and light homes, pump water and keep medicines refrigerated: without energy the poor of the world do not have the necessary means to move forward. Renewable energy, at an affordable price, is essential for economic development. The costs of renewable energy have tumbled in recent years, making wind and solar power cost-effective in many parts of the world, particularly rural areas without access to a traditional electricity grid. Despite promising environmental, economic and development benefits, obstacles to its widespread use still remain.

31. Investors require accurate information on the likely levels of electricity a proposed site will generate. Reducing uncertainty by enabling potential developers and investors to match suitable locations to the likely solar and wind resources will demonstrate that these countries have much greater renewable resources than is currently supposed. UNEP's Solar and Wind Energy Resources Assessment (SWERA) project, funded by GEF, can help in this regard. Projects also need to be sustainable and managed over the long term while in the short term, greater attention should be given to increasing energy efficiency. The African Rural Energy Enterprise Development initiative (AREED) and its counterpart in Brazil, the Brazil Rural Energy Enterprise Development initiative (BREED) both financed in part by the United Nations Foundation, seek to develop new sustainable energy enterprises that use clean, efficient and renewable energy technologies to meet the energy needs of under-served populations, thereby reducing the environmental and health consequences of existing energy use patterns. This approach offers rural energy entrepreneurs a combination of enterprise development services and start-up financing. A new UNEP partner and collaborating centre, the Basel Agency for Sustainable Energy, will also be instrumental in this.

32. UNEP is active in providing capacity-building in this field, particularly through its network of sustainable energy collaborating centres. Through enhanced partnerships with other United Nations organizations and the involvement of the private sector, UNEP is working to strengthen this network. Agreements reached by the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn and Marrakesh in 2001 as part of measures to fight global warming have added new impetus to the development of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. These measures include the Special Climate Change Fund, the special fund for the least developed countries, new adaptation funds and the Clean Development Mechanism, all of which have grown out of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. UNEP will work closely with ministers, officials and communities in developing nations and stands ready to advise them on how best to exploit green energy schemes and the opportunities provided by the Bonn agreements and the Marrakesh mandate. UNEP's role as secretariat of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment will be crucial in this

endeavour, as will the services of the UNEP Collaborating Centre on Energy and Environment. With its international group of scientists, engineers and economists, it provides technical and analytical support to UNEP and partners in developing countries.

VII. POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND FOOD SECURITY

33. We need to address the linkages between the quality of the environment, poverty alleviation and food security with renewed vigour. Some 75 per cent of the world's poor live in rural areas, depending completely on agriculture for sustenance. Sustainable agriculture depends on the proper use of the environment as common asset, and the efficient management of water supplies and irrigation systems, avoiding activities that lead to deforestation, desertification and water pollution. In view of the dynamic interaction between all these factors that affect food security, UNEP believes that there should be a comprehensive assessment of all land-related issues. In this regard, UNEP is strengthening its partnership with the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research system, in particular with the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry. In addition, UNEP is also strengthening its cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Such an assessment should also address the opportunities and risks presented by biotechnology. The benefits of biotechnology should be affordable and made available to developing countries, while ensuring that those countries have the ability to assess the risks, and advantages, of genetically engineered crops. UNEP is working to further this aim, particularly through its work in supporting the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

34. Nearly one billion people depend on fish as their primary source of protein. For them, increasingly difficult times lie ahead. The degradation of coastal marine environments, the modification and destruction of habitats, overfishing, subsidies and pollution are causing catastrophic reductions of annual harvests for local fishing communities throughout the world, putting their food supply and livelihoods in jeopardy. In working to combat these challenges, UNEP continues to take forward the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, buoyed by the renewed commitment of Governments to fight pollution and destruction of the marine and coastal environment that result from activities on land, as expressed at the recent review of the Global Programme of Action held in November 2001 in Montreal, Canada. In addition, UNEP continues its work on the impacts of trade and trade-related policies on fisheries and measures required for their sustainable management.

VIII. URBANIZATION

35. Urbanization poses a major challenge in both developed and developing countries. The world's urban population has risen from some 750 million in 1950 to nearly 3 billion today. As cities have grown to enormous size, their inhabitants' consumption and production patterns have generated environmental stresses beyond those due to limitations on the land, water and other natural resources required to feed, clothe and shelter them. In addition, there is a need for schools, health facilities, transport, secure tenure and jobs, as well as open spaces in which to enjoy nature, including clean air and water.

36. Those most negatively affected by the impact of overstressed and overstrained urban resources, especially in developing countries, are the urban poor, who are unable to compete for scarce resources or protect themselves from harmful environmental conditions. Urban poverty is accompanied by many health and environmental problems related to lack of access to basic services such as sanitation, solid waste collection, transport and electricity. We must improve the lives of 100 million poor people living in inadequate human settlements, in accordance with the commitments undertaken in the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda on urban renewal and development. We must promote public-private partnerships for the development and dissemination of technologies for safe water, sanitation and waste management for rural and urban areas in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, with international financial and technological support.

37. Global environmental change and the increasing incidents of man-made disasters pose new risks to urban settlements. Greater attention must be given to land use policies that address the risk to urban settlements from extreme events and in this regard, UNEP is enhancing its relationship with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

IX. IMPLEMENTATION

38. In addressing sectoral and cross-sectoral issues, we need to concentrate on the means of implementation, particularly financing, assessment, capacity-building, and technology and technology transfer. The financial basis for sustainable development should be secured, and linked to the Millennium Declaration goals. Progress must be made at the upcoming International Conference on Financing for Development on the key issues of trade, aid, debt and the management of the global economy, or a negative shadow will be cast on the World Summit.

39. UNEP, in order to play its role, also requires adequate, secure and stable funding. This is one of the issues being discussed in the context of the discussions on international environmental governance. The outcome of the work of the Intergovernmental Group of Ministers or Their Representatives on International Environmental Governance will be based on an assessment of future needs for an institutional architecture that has the capacity to effectively address wide-ranging environmental threats in a globalizing world. This will represent a key contribution to the World Summit.

40. Regional implementation has been reaffirmed in the preparatory process for the World Summit as being essential. From the perspective of Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development constitutes a major framework for achieving African development goals, and reflects a shared vision of the continent's future among African leaders. The New Partnership for African Development contains an environmental element, which recognizes that a healthy and productive environment is a prerequisite for sustainable growth in Africa. The framework adopted recognizes that the range of issues involved in nurturing the environmental base is vast and complex, and that a systematic combination of measures is necessary in a coherent environmental programme. Thus choices will need to be made, and issues prioritized. The core objective of the environment initiative must be to combat poverty and contribute to socio-economic development in Africa. Eight priorities for intervention have been defined: combating desertification, wetland conservation, invasive alien species, coastal management, global warming, transboundary conservation areas, environmental governance and finance. UNEP stands ready to play a strong role in supporting practical activities to address these eight environmental priorities.

X. CONCLUSION

41. We need to work towards a truly holistic approach in addressing the urgent challenges on the environmental agenda in the twenty-first century. In dealing with key sectoral environmental issues, such as water, energy, desertification and biodiversity, we need to consider on the one hand the cross-cutting issues, such as health, poverty, food security, urbanization, globalization and diversity, and on the other hand, criteria for implementation, including capacity-building, technology transfer, financing and assessment.

The Johannesburg Summit should be an important milestone in efforts to build a sustainable world based on concrete action and renewed political commitment. The environment is the major asset of the developing world - the poor have little else. It must be preserved and used responsibly for sustainable development. Concrete action is urgently needed to bring about economic, social and ecological stability. We still have a long way to go but as Confucius said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step". The international community must ensure that we take that single, very big step at the World Summit. Towards this end, the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum meeting in Cartagena must take a decisive approach to contribute the environmental dimension as an integral part of sustainable development.
