

The challenge of Johannesburg

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By Poul Nielson

THE Rio Earth Summit of 1992 raised considerable expectations. It agreed on an ambitious and comprehensive strategy to address developmental and environmental challenges through a global partnership.

Ten years down the line, the 2002 world summit on sustainable development (WSSD) will provide an opportunity to revitalize the spirit of Rio, shape a renewed political commitment to sustainable development, and above all, make concrete achievements on delivering not just on Rio but also on the millennium development goals.

The European Union (EU) will, as it has done throughout the preparations, play an active role in Johannesburg to getting concrete results.

We are doing this through an active dialogue with the partners, including those from developing countries. The EU wants the WSSD to send a clear political message on the need to make globalization more sustainable for all, and just as importantly, also to agree on measures to achieve this.

Since the UN conference in Rio in 1992 (Conference on environment and development) North-South relations have fundamentally changed. Today, there is a wide agreement on the fact that economic, social and political developments require an integrated approach. The achievements of the major UN conferences in the 1990s have built a new framework for development policies, with the overarching objective of poverty eradication, and which focuses on human, social and environmental aspects as well as sustainable management and use of natural resources.

Based on these developments, the United Nations millennium summit in 2000 adopted a set of comprehensive goals in order to

approach that the European Union aims to promote and has embraced in its treaty, in the agreements it has signed and in the policies it has adopted. Therefore the EU wants the WSSD to take — after Doha and Monterrey — further steps towards the implementation of the millennium development goals, and to build upon them, particularly in crucial areas such as sanitation and energy.

The EU intends to play an important role in ensuring that the outcome of Johannesburg addresses the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental) and enforces coherent global management. All the players will have a role e.g.: developing countries by implementing sound policies, good governance and the rule of law, industrialized countries by ensuring that markets are open to all.

All the stakeholders should commit to a sense of common ownership, which is indispensable in the follow-up of the summit. The WSSD should adopt concrete commitments with a precise timeframe, carried out on the basis of effective partnership.

One of the implementing mechanisms could be well-developed partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society. There should, however, be a clear link between the political goals and the partnerships decided by the WSSD so that everyone can see how the political goals are being achieved.

The EU wants the WSSD to send a clear political message on the need to make globalization more sustainable for all and to agree on measures aimed at promoting this goal. In order to be clear and coherent in its approach to the WSSD, the EU strategy for Johannesburg follows an integrated approach: We start by putting our own house in order and thus provide leader-

eradicate poverty — the millennium development goals — which set out concrete objectives for the year 2015. Visions like achieving universal primary education, combating diseases like HIV/AIDS and ensuring environmental sustainability can only be realized by a common effort of industrialized and developing countries and the international community.

The positive outcomes of the fourth WTO ministerial meeting in Doha in November 2001 and of the international conference on financing for development in Monterrey in March 2002, provided further important elements towards reaching the millennium development goals. In the "Doha Development Agenda" and the Monterrey consensus a framework was agreed for improving market access, for upgrading multilateral rules to harness globalization, and for increasing financial assistance for development.

The developed countries must now deliver on their commitments and the EU, as the world's leading partner of the developing countries and as the biggest provider of development aid, is fully determined to do so.

The EU and its member states have pledged, as a first significant step towards reaching the UN target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance, to raise the collective average from the current 0.33 per cent to 0.39 per cent by 2006. Concretely, this should result in an additional annual amount of aid of 9 billion dollars by 2006, and about 22 billion dollars between now and 2006.

The developing countries must take their responsibilities by improving internal policies and domestic governance and creating an enabling climate for investment. All countries must work together, recognizing their common but differentiated responsibilities, to ensure that growth is separated from environmental degradation and that the needs of the present generation are satisfied without destroying the capacity of future generations to cater for their needs.

In the light of the Doha and Monterrey achievements, the world summit on sustainable development, to be held from August 26 to September 4, is a unique opportunity to close the implementation gap left after Rio, and to renew political commitments by all stakeholders.

Making development policies sustainable implies tackling problems with foresight, an

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ship in translating rhetoric into action.

This internal strategy for sustainable development was endorsed by the Gothenburg Council in June last year, where poverty eradication and promotion of sustainable production and consumption patterns were identified as overriding objectives for the summit.

In addition to that the community has to make its contribution to promote sustainable development beyond its borders. Putting this into practice, the EU wants to promote progress in five key areas — water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity.

The EU water initiative, for instance, plans to bring together, in partnership with countries and regions, public and private funds, stakeholders and experts to provide sustainable solutions to problems of water management.

Reaching the political goal of halving the number of people without access to clean water and sanitation by 2015 would provide a major contribution to improved health and economic development.

At the European Council in Seville, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to be a constructive force at the Johannesburg summit. We will use all opportunities to achieve a positive outcome; the people and this planet deserve no less.

The writer is European Commissioner for development and humanitarian aid.