

## UNITED NATIONS ACTIVITIES

UNEP



### First Global Ministerial Environment Forum

#### Introduction

The Sixth Special Session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) took place in Malmö, Sweden, from 29-31 May 2000. Over 500 delegates from more than 130 countries, together with representatives of intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), took part in this first Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

The Meeting was convened in pursuance of Governing Council decision 20/17 of 5 February 1999, entitled "Views of the Governing Council on the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements," and in accordance with rules 5 and 6 of the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Council.

The Meeting was a unique opportunity for the world's environment ministers to bridge information and policy gaps on critical environmental issues through informal discussions with global leaders from academia, business and industry, and civil groups such as the media.

The Forum reflected what the United Nations has said is a fundamental and important shift of the Organisation towards partnerships to promote peace and prosperity. The United Nations recognises that governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, the business community and private citizens are all necessary partners to meet new and existing environmental challenges.

The Forum discussions cut across a number of economic and social sectors and provided valuable input to preparations for the UN Millennium Assembly in September 2000 and the Rio+10 meeting in 2002.

The Forum had three broad themes:

#### 1. Major environmental challenges in the new century

This discussion raised a number of questions, including:

- What are the policies, trade-offs and financial investment priorities needed to address major environmental challenges?
- To what extent can the "precautionary principle" be applied?
- Can new technologies, particularly new information technologies, dramatically lower environmental impacts?

#### 2. The private sector and the environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Questions raised here included:

- What role and extent should partnerships between governments and the private sector play as tools to promote sustainable development?

- How can environmental objectives be incorporated into the routine operation of all enterprises?
- How can the private sector help developing countries to "leapfrog" the previous environmental mistakes of developed countries?

#### 3. Environmental responsibility and role of civil society in a globalised world

In this regard, themes included:

- How will new forms of information technology change the way civil groups communicate to promote their agendas?
- How can the media be better informed in their reporting of important environmental issues?
- How will a greater role for civil society change national and international institutions such as the United Nations?

#### Forum and Consultations

The Forum, which was opened by the President of the UNEP Governing Council, László Miklós (Slovak Republic), provided UNEP and its Governing Council with a key opportunity to influence the international environmental agenda of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Opening statements were presented after the ceremony:

In a video presentation, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed the hope that the Forum would rise to the challenges of the new millennium. He outlined four areas for further effort, including (1) the development of media and public education to ensure that corporations and consumers recognise environmental consequences; (2) policies and laws that consider the ramification of subsidies and promote environmental incentives, (3) mainstreamed environmental objectives in policy; and (4) sound scientific information to establish the basis for action.

President Miklós stressed that the Forum should reflect on failures while charting the way forward, and reiterated that environmental problems cannot be solved outside politics.

Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director, noted that the Forum was established by the UN General Assembly and highlighted the meeting as the largest gathering of environment ministers in UNEP's history. He described the main global environmental threats as unsustainable production and consumption patterns in developed countries and poverty in developing countries. He noted that although institutions and legislation signalling commitment to tackle these threats exists, environmental stewardship is lagging behind.

Following the opening statements, delegates elected Hossein Moeni Maybodi (Iran) as rapporteur and agreed to continue discussions in ministerial consultations; to establish a Committee of the Whole (COW), chaired by Leandro Arellano (Mexico); and to establish an open-ended working group on the Malmö Declaration, chaired by Swedish Environment Minister Kjell Larsson.

#### *Major Environmental Challenges in the New Century*

The moderator for this theme was Konrad von Moltke (Dartmouth College, USA). In his opening remarks, he explained that the convening of the current meeting with its incomparable format – bringing together government ministers, moderated by a scientist, to discuss emerging global issues – showed a willingness to experiment with new institutional forms. However, he believed that it was necessary for such a forum to be innovative, because of the nature of the problems involved.

In his presentation, Mario Molina, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, discussed the science/policy interface, with particular reference to problems concerning the atmosphere, namely ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect and atmospheric pollution. He drew attention to the difficulty of establishing with scientific certainty whether or not a perceived atmospheric phenomenon was a result of human activity, and noted the need to step outside science on occasion and make value judgements.

In conclusion, he said that the success of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was due in good part to the Multilateral Fund, which entailed the transfer of a relatively small volume of resources to tackle a global problem. He believed that it was necessary to approach other emerging atmospheric problems in the same way.

M.S. Swaminathan, of the Swaminathan Research Foundation, addressed issues of food security and economic access to food and water in the face of rapidly increasing population pressure. Among other things, he noted the need for an approach involving integrated natural resources management; for local community conservation of traditional land races and folk varieties of plants; and for a new paradigm which gave local people in biosphere reserves a role in their management.

Following the presentations, 32 Ministers and heads of delegation made oral contributions. The participants welcomed the interactive debate and the innovative approach initiated by the Forum. Speakers noted a broad range of challenges, including the following: climate change, loss of biodiversity, land degradation including desertification and deforestation, the water crisis – termed the most important issue of the twenty-first century – and its implications for food security, as well as unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.

The delegate from Kuwait said that legislation exists, but that little action is taken when rules are not obeyed. Nigeria urged consideration of debt cancellation for African countries. Tanzania noted that the green revolution had succeeded in Asia, but not in Africa. Denmark called for a globalisation of politics, noting that the riches of the North have increased, but its generosity has diminished.

Tunisia stressed the need for affordable technology transfers. Norway emphasised de-coupling economic growth and environmental degradation, and interlinkages between different environmental processes.

The Netherlands called attention to both poverty and wealth-induced environmental degradation. India stated that poverty should be the central focus. The UK called for the preparation of a world sustainable development strategy. Syria saw water and debt as major challenges.

#### *The Private Sector and the Environment*

The moderator for this topic was Lin Se Yan, former Deputy Governor of Bank Negara. In his presentation, Jürgen Dormann, Aventis, one of the speakers representing the private sector, described the main features of the new economy as being high growth; high value-added; based on research and development and intellectual property; information-technology-driven; service-oriented; and generating new knowledge and information. He noted that, with biotechnology's central role in the new communications and science-based economy, emerging ethical and social questions would be important aspects of sustainable development.

Masashi Kaneko, Nikko Securities, described the successful introduction of green funds in Japan. He said that companies are screened according to environmental criteria and investment in them, especially by young women, who are often more environmentally aware than young men, has exceeded expectations.

Gunnar Brock, TetraPak International, said globalisation is both eroding state authority and necessitating harmonisation of legislation across borders.

Subjects raised by 38 other speakers following the presentations included the following: India said that clean technologies could be transferred through subsidies. Zambia noted that the private sector in developing countries lacks capital and called for partnerships between the private sectors in developed and developing countries. Morocco advocated conversion of third world debt to environmental projects. China said that UNEP should be empowered to assist the private sector in developing countries. Portugal said the private sector is often stronger than individual States, making international agreements imperative for enforcement.

The UK suggested consideration of an international environment court. Kuwait described its policy requesting the private sector to devote five per cent of profits to sustainable development work. Finland advocated improving Eco-efficiency and internalising the environmental costs of production.

#### *Civil Society – Responsibility and Role toward the Environment in the Globalised World*

The moderator was Robert Lamb, Television Trust for the Environment. Charles Alexander, Time Magazine, described the merging of journalism with entertainment in the United States and noted that environmental issues are not considered new and exciting by the media or the public. He stated that the power of advertising to raise environmental awareness has yet to be tapped, and the

US government must become open to civil society organisation.

Yolanda Kakabadse, IUCN President, described the multifaceted nature of civil society and noted that civil society is not working to control governments but rather for governance to the benefit of all.

Martin Khor, Third World Network, said civil society had recently influenced two areas: raising concern about genetically modified organisms and the effects of globalisation. He stressed the importance of full integration of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities into International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) policies.

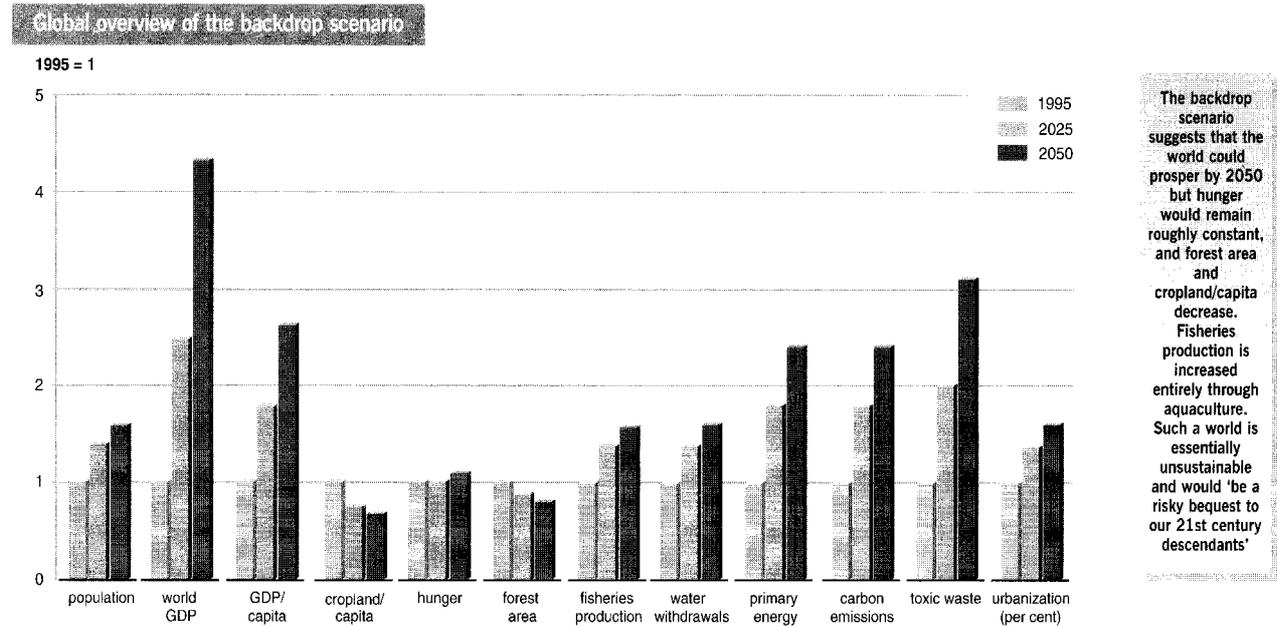
The Committee appointed Bernard O. K'Omudho (Kenya) as the Rapporteur for the session.

During the Committee's deliberations, the secretariat introduced each item to be considered, after which representatives expressed their views thereon.

### Item 7: Report of the Executive Director on the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme

#### a) Activities of the United Nations Environment Programme

In considering agenda item 7, the Committee had before it the following documentation: UNEP/GCSS.VI/6, containing substantial reporting and information material, and document UNEP/GCSS.VI/6/Add.1/Rev.1 on the



New Zealand regretted that the voices of small business, indigenous people and citizens are not heard, and stressed the government's role in reversing this trend.

Poland supported extending the 1998 Aarhus Convention on Access to Information to an international scale under the auspices of the United Nations.

Kenya, supported by Zambia, stressed that NGOs do not always have clear mandates for environmental management and should not be supported by donors at the expense of governments.

### Committee of the Whole

The Committee, composed of senior officials and Permanent Representatives, held three meetings under its Chairman, to consider agenda item 7: Report of the Executive Director on the Activities of the United Nations Environment Programme; item 8: Contribution of UNEP to the Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21; and item 10: Provisional Agenda of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum/ twenty-first Session of the Governing Council of UNEP, as allocated to it by the Council.

water policy and strategy of UNEP.

Both documents covered the period since the twentieth session of the Governing Council, with the Executive Director's report, focusing on the priority areas defined by the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, adopted at the nineteenth session of the Governing Council in 1997 (see *Environmental Policy & Law*, Vol. 27, p. 91), and the five areas of concentration approved at the fifth special session of the Governing Council in 1998.

UNEP Deputy Executive Director Shafqat Kakakhel introduced the report of the Executive Director. He highlighted UNEP's priority areas: (a) environmental information, assessment and research; (b) enhanced coordination of environmental conventions; (c) freshwater; (d) technology transfer and industry; and (e) support to Africa. He noted the re-energised African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) (see report on page 192), and the resulting 1999 Abuja Declaration (see page 202) as important landmarks. He reiterated UNEP's successful monitoring of the environment through the Global Environmental Outlook Report (GEO 2000).

India, and many other delegates, congratulated UNEP on its excellent reports and affirmed that environmental issues should not be used as trade barriers.

During the general discussion, statements were made by many representatives, including the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union (see box).

The secretariat then responded to questions raised and comments made by representatives on the item.

#### EU statement on the activities of the United National Environment Programme

The EU would like to thank the Executive Director for his report on the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme, which lists a number of activities undertaken by UNEP since the twentieth session of the Governing Council, in line with the Nairobi Declaration. In our view, the report represents a major step forward in the quality of reporting to the Governing Council. Whereas the report enumerates the activities of the UNEP, there is no evaluation or estimation of the quality of the work. We invite the Secretariat to elaborate further on this and to take this into account when reporting to the twenty-first session of the Governing Council (GC-21).

In order to develop environmental policy, we require sound environmental information and assessment. In this regard we welcome the Global Environmental Outlook 2000 (GEO 2000). This report highlights a number of key issues we all need to address. We look forward to the third GEO report, which we regard as one of the valuable inputs from UNEP for Rio+10, and we look to UNEP to coordinate their efforts with other key actors.

UNEP has undertaken very positive steps in relation to environmental emergencies. UNEP has proved that it has a role to play in this important area. The EU encourages UNEP to contribute to the work of assessing environmental impacts and needs in emergency situations and catalysing the mobilisation of appropriate responses to such situations. In view of the increased activities of UNEP in this field, the EU would encourage UNEP to develop a strategy for its increased activities in this field. This strategy should be in line with the UNEP mandate and be presented to GC-21.

The EU is of the view that UNEP should continue to enhance coordination among environmental conventions and further develop environmental policy instruments. It should also continue its ongoing work to strengthen enforcement and compliance and also to explore mechanisms for dispute settlements, which we consider to be important for the effective implementation of environmental agreements.

Freshwater is clearly one of the most critical environmental issues that we face today. We will make a full statement on it when we address the Water Policy and Strategy document.

Special attention should continue to be given to sustainable consumption and production patterns, in particular the sound management of chemicals. We look forward to the timely entry into force of the PIC Convention and a successful conclusion of the negotiations on a POP Convention.

This report should give greater emphasis to the UN Inter-agency cooperation, cooperation with other international agencies and regional institutions.

It should describe more clearly the link between the Governing Council's decisions and UNEP's activities and elaborate further on the link between budget costs and developed activities.

... the EU welcomes the report on UNEP's financial situation. The discussion on budgetary and administrative matters clearly belongs to GC-21. At that session we look forward to considering the resource mobilisation strategy that was requested at GC-20. We also expect to consider a proposal for the budget and work programme for the biennium 2002-2003 that is based on realistic income projections.

#### b) Water policy and strategy of the United Nations Environment Programme

The Chair then opened the floor for comments on this addendum to the Executive Director's report (UNEP/GCSS.VI/6/Add.1/Rev.1). In introducing the item, the sec-

retariat described the main components of the water policy and strategy as assessment, management and coordination of actions. All three components stressed the cross-sectoral nature of water issues, and one of the goals of the new policy and strategy would be to identify and promote the tools that would address the critical water issues facing humanity and the environment.

During the discussion, statements were made by representatives from, *inter alia*, Algeria, Australia, Portugal, on behalf of the European Union, India, Argentina, China and the US.

India stated that it does not support multilateral processes regarding rivers. China suggested help for governments to develop appropriate water policies. Portugal, on behalf of the EU, emphasised UNEP's need to work on the intersectoral approach to water management and suggested UNEP link its water strategy to the World Water Vision presented at the March 2000 World Water Forum. Australia, supported by the US and Canada, suggested establishing a working group to look at best practices for freshwater management.

At the end of its deliberations on both issues the Committee considered and approved the following draft decision summarising the discussions held on these issues, for transmission to the Plenary:

The Governing Council,

1. *Takes note*, with appreciation, of the Report on the activities of UNEP presented by the Executive Director in document UNEP/GCSS.VI/6, and its Addendum 1 Rev.1 and the valuable comments made thereon;
2. *Commends* the Executive Director for presenting the report in a consolidated manner on the five agreed priorities;
3. *Requests* the Executive Director to take into account comments made in the further elaboration of the water policy and strategy and *further requests* the Executive Director to take the necessary measures accordingly for its implication and report on the progress made to the next session of the Governing Council;
4. *Welcomes* the information provided in the Executive Director's report on budgetary and financial matters, and requests that future activity reports to the Governing Council and to the Committee of Permanent Representatives should present a clear correlation between
  - a) relevant decisions of the Governing Council and other legislative bodies,
  - b) activities and resources set aside,
  - c) actual budget expenditure, and
  - d) qualitative evaluation of results achieved."

With respect to paragraph 4 in the decision, the Deputy Executive Director reassured the Committee that, while UNEP would do its utmost to ensure requested reporting, the Council should be aware of the practical difficulties involved in changing the existing financial reporting system. The Executive Director would therefore inform the Council through the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

#### Item 8: Contribution of UNEP to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21

The item was introduced by the secretariat, which made a detailed presentation on various aspects of the preparatory process being launched by the Commission on Sustainable Development. Joanne DiSano, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development of the UN Depart-

ment of Economic and Social Affairs in New York, explained the process and expectations of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD).

In its consideration of this item, the Committee had before it document UNEP/GCSS.VI/7, which contained a proposed process of preparations for the 10-year review of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

During the discussion, several representatives made statements. India led the debate on this topic. In its intervention (see box) it made points supported by several other delegations. Indonesia and Cuba stated that Rio+10 should not renegotiate Agenda 21. Uganda requested additional capacity-building funding for Rio+10 preparations.

### India

In its interventions:

- Reaffirmed the historical significance and value of the Rio Conference. The review process would hopefully renew and strengthen the country's commitments assumed earlier and may also help to overcome the 'selective amnesia' evident in some quarters.
- Recalled that the Rio declaration had referred to the goal of establishing 'a new and equitable global partnership' and highlighted the principle of cooperation in 'the essential task of eradicating poverty else an indispensable requirement for sustainable development'. Referred also to the Principle No. 7 which had stated: 'in view of the different contributions to environmental degradation, States have common to differentiate responsibilities'.
- Stressed the need for optimal implementation of past agreements because in its absence the credibility issue came up causing widespread concern. There was little point in spending much effort and resources in negotiating agreements if there would continue to be protracted delays in going ahead with their implementation.
- Stated that the financing aspect had assumed even greater importance than before. UNCED Secretariat had estimated that implementation of all activities under Agenda 21 during 1993-2000 required US\$125 billion a year, which was in addition to US\$500 billion a year from national governments and the private sector in developing countries in order to put their country on a sustainable path. As against this, the ODA levels had come down from the agreed target of 0.7% Gross National Product (GNP) from donor countries to an average of 0.29% of GNP in 1993-95. The lowest level indicates besides. Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding, estimated to be about US\$2 billion, was quite negligible in helping countries to meet their goals.
- Referred to the need to facilitate the transfer of cleaner technologies from developed countries to developing countries, in that context, the need to make required resources available
- Supported the modalities of UNEP contribution to the Rio process by giving a central role of CPR in continuation of such documentation as would be presented by UNEP Secretariat.

New Zealand stated that Rio+10 should be locally driven and supported by UNEP. Japan proposed holding Rio+10 in Asia. Several delegates commented on failed commitments to tackling poverty, stressed financial limitations for implementing Agenda 21, and supported the transfer of sound technology.

South Africa, supported by Argentina, suggested a critical evaluation of the lack of substantial achievements in tackling poverty. The US recommended looking also at past achievements and encouraged an optimistic and forward-looking approach to the proposed review for Rio+10.

At the end of its deliberations on the item, the Committee considered and approved the following draft decision summarising the discussions held on the item for transmission to the Plenary:

"The Governing Council

1. *Requests* the Committee of Permanent Representatives to review, on its behalf, the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme contributing to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21;
2. *Calls upon* the Executive Director, to that end, to prepare a report for consideration by the Committee of Permanent Representatives to be distributed to all Governments for their information and comments and to ensure the active contribution of the United Nations Environment Programme to the preparatory process for the 10-year review of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development;
3. *Further requests* the Executive Director to submit a final version of the above-mentioned report through the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session;
4. *Requests* the Executive Director to submit a report on this matter to the twenty-first session of the Governing Council."

### Item 10: Provisional agenda of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum/twenty-first session of the UNEP Governing Council

During the discussion, the representatives of Australia, Canada, Portugal (on behalf of the European Union) and Sweden made statements.

The Committee recalled that at the eleventh Plenary meeting of the twentieth session of the Governing Council, the Council had approved a provisional agenda for its twenty-first session and thus on this basis approved the following draft decision for transmission to the Plenary:

"The Governing Council,

1. *Decides* to include an item entitled Outcome of the First Global Ministerial Environment Forum, on the agenda of the twenty-first session of the Governing Council;
2. *Requests* the Bureau of the Governing Council, in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives and with the support of the Executive Director to decide on the organisational aspects for the ministerial-level consultations at the second Global Ministerial Environmental Forum – the twenty-first session of the Governing Council, and to decide the themes for these consultations."

The COW concluded by adopting, with minor amendments, the draft report of its work (UNEP/GCSS.VI/L.2).

### The Malmö Declaration

The Working Group met in five sessions to discuss the preamble, environmental challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the private sector and civil society, based on the draft Declaration text (UNEP/GCSS.VI/CRP.1).

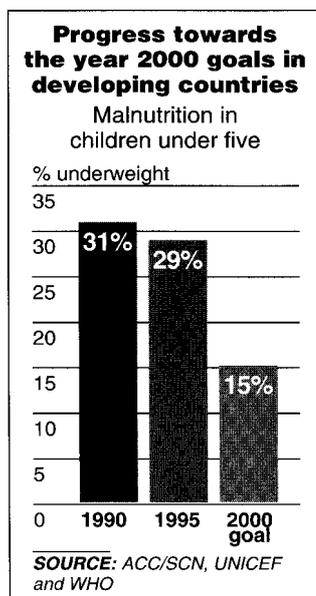
In the Preamble, the Declaration (see page 201) recalls the Stockholm and Rio Conferences, the Barbados Declaration on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and the Nairobi Declaration on the Role and Mandate of UNEP. It notes that despite many successful and continuing efforts, the natural resource base continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate.

Concerning "Major environmental challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century," the Declaration highlights the urgent need for reinvigorated international cooperation and partnership and solidarity in arresting and reversing growing trends in environmental degradation.

Regarding "the private sector and the environment," the Declaration acknowledges that the private sector has

emerged as a global actor with significant impacts on environmental trends through its investment and technology decisions.

On "Civil society and the environment," the Declaration reiterates the increasingly critical role civil society plays in addressing environmental issues. It also emphasises the need for intensified research, fuller engagement of the scientific community and increased scientific cooperation, as well as the need for a gender perspective in decision-making; and the need for an independent and objective media.



Courtesy: WIT's World Ecology Report

Concerning the 2002 review of UNCED, the Declaration states that the review should be at the summit level, not renegotiate Agenda 21, and inject a new spirit of cooperation and urgency. It also states that governments should urgently pursue the ratification of all environmental conventions. The Declaration states that the 2002 conference should address poverty and the excessive consumption and inefficient resource use that perpetuates the vicious circle of environmental degradation and increasing poverty.

### Closing Plenary

The draft report of the Committee of the Whole was introduced by Bernard K'Omudho (Kenya) (UNEP/GCSS.VI/L.2).

Delegates adopted without amendment the decisions on (1) the "Report of the Executive Director on the Activities of the United Nations Environment Programme;" (2) the "Contribution of UNEP to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme for further implementation of Agenda 21;" and (3) the "Provisional Agenda of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum/21<sup>st</sup> session of the Governing Council of UNEP" (see above).

The Chair then introduced the draft Malmö Ministerial Declaration. He noted that the working group's results were linked to the ministerial dialogue to enable incorporation of their conclusions. The Chair underlined the

great political importance of the Declaration, set against the background of the Millennium Assembly and Rio+10, and noted that it is a significant step forward in addressing the critical issues confronting the world.

Madagascar asked for inclusion of the proposal made by South Africa to host Rio+10. The Chair noted that the UN General Assembly would further consider this issue. Plenary then adopted the Malmö Declaration.

Hossein Moeni Maybodi presented the draft report of the Forum. Following suggestions for amendments from several representatives, this report was approved.

Birgitta Dahl, Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, emphasised that while it is important to have the private sector and civil society involved in attempts to achieve sustainable development, popularly elected representatives in local, regional and national assemblies have enormous potential.

"It is not only in the general interest of democracy that we have to involve the democratically elected representatives in the international political decision process that is crucial to the solution of environmental problems. It is also a matter of political efficiency. If parliamentarians and other politicians with popular mandates are made obvious parts of the decision process, they can go back to their voters and act as interpreters or 'ambassadors' for those decisions – as well as, of course as guarantors of an effective and correct implementation of them.

... The NGO's can convince and create forceful opinions, while the democratically elected representatives – at various levels – can debate, discuss and negotiate in order to reach politically reasonable solutions. – And, of course – they, too, have a role to play and responsibility to shoulder when it comes to mobilizing opinion for necessary change and for common achievements. ...

This kind of political dialogue is a central task for members of National Parliaments and of regional and local legislatures and governments."

Speaking on behalf of the African environment ministers at the meeting, Hassan Adamu (Nigeria), congratulated ministers on the completion of the Malmö Ministerial Declaration, stating that it would send the right signals to the Heads of State at the Millennium Summit in September.

Brazil, on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean region, thanked ministers and delegates for a fair, effective and satisfactory meeting.

Klaus Töpfer said, "Unsustainable production and consumption patterns in developed countries combined with poverty in the developing world are the two main global environmental threats facing the world. Here in Malmö, the largest gathering of environment ministers in the history of UNEP have placed these two issues at the top of the agenda for Rio+10 and have engaged in frank and open discussions on the major environmental challenges and opportunities facing the world today."

He noted that the Declaration makes important references to many topical environmental issues, for example, recognising "the central importance of environmental compliance, enforcement and liability." Also, for the first time the concept of a life cycle approach with regard to the responsibility of the private sector is integrated into the text.

The UN General Assembly decision to give the world's environment ministers a forum for discussion such as the Global Ministerial Environment Forum had proven to be a good one, the Executive Director said, and the Forum had provided a good start to the preparations for Rio+10. (MJ)