



Towards a Stronger System of International Environmental Governance

International Conference in Berlin, 26 May 2005

Summary of the Chairman

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About 180 participants, representing more than 35 countries and several international organizations, academia and civil society groups accepted an invitation from Ecologic – Institute for International and European Environmental Policy – to participate in a conference on international environmental governance. The event was financially supported by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and co-organized by IDDRI – the Institut du Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales. R. Andreas Kraemer, Director of Ecologic, chaired the conference, which took place on 26 May in Berlin. The following is a brief summary of the event.

The international conference mainly addressed the upgrading of UNEP into a full fledged UN agency, in particular its political, institutional, financial and legal implications. The excellent presentations made and the productive discussions contributed to furthering the ongoing reform debate within and outside the UN system. Questions and discussions were extensive, open and sometimes controversial.

The conference was opened by the Environment Ministers Jürgen Trittin (Germany) and Serge Lepeltier (France) who welcomed the recent call of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan for a more integrated structure of international environmental governance. They proposed that the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly in September should start a process leading to negotiations on the establishment of a UN Environment Organization (UNEO) in Nairobi. They were joined by Wangari Maathai, the Vice Environment Minister of Kenya and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, who also requested a stronger UN institution for the environment.

Most participants of the conference were concerned about the current state of international environmental governance in general, and the situation in which UNEP has to operate in particular. However, participants agreed that UNEP - given its status and funding - has a remarkable record of achievements.

Participants generally agreed that the addressing of the shortcomings of international environmental governance does not require a total overhaul of all parts of the current system. Changes should build upon existing structures, including UNEP and the multilateral environmental agreements.

Support for a reform has been increasing significantly. Many participants asked for an upgrade of UNEP into a full fledged U.N. Agency. Others underlined that they are still considering their position.

Participants recognised that the reform of international environmental governance is closely linked to two other issues: First, the ongoing overall UN reform process, which addresses the various institutional weaknesses in the current UN system, including the lack of coherence in

environmental protection efforts at the global level. Secondly, the inextricable linkages between global environmental problems and other issues, such as poverty, good governance and security.

The manifold discussions during the day repeatedly touched upon several issues:

- **Sustainable development** as the overarching goal of a reform of international environmental governance. There was agreement that mainstreaming environment into development policies and thus ensuring sustainable development faces tremendous difficulties. Several participants mentioned that the three pillars of sustainable development in the UN system are currently rather imbalanced. They stated that strengthening the environmental pillar would rebalance the system and improve the implementation of sustainable development.
- The **institutional design of a UNEO**. Several developing countries were concerned that a UNEO might have enforcement powers comparable to the WTO. The UNEO proponents underlined that such an agency would not follow the institutional model of the WTO but that of UN specialized agencies such as WHO or FAO.
- The contribution of **enhanced co-ordination** to decreasing the potential conflicts between different bodies as a UNEO could act as an umbrella organization. However, some participants stated that in light of underlying political conflicts co-ordination problems will persist also under the auspices of UNEO.
- **Financial aspects**. Several participants were concerned that in case of the establishment of a UNEO developing countries would have to contribute financially according to the UN scale of assessed contributions. Others mentioned that this would be part of the negotiations.
- The potential to **reduce the administrative burden** of international environmental governance, for instance by clustering of MEAs along thematic issue areas. Currently, ongoing negotiation processes and reporting requirements put significant costs on developing countries, in particular. Resources that are freed this way could be used for implementation of international commitments on the national level.

There was seen an urgent need to further the debate and to reach consensus rather soon.