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Maurice F. Strong THE OUTCOME OF THE RIO-CONFERENCE*

Abstract

The author argues that the Rio outcome represents a remarkable achievement despite the fact that it did not meet all hopes and expectations in all areas. Much more needs to be done. Programmes and treaties need to be put into force, negotiations of new instruments must be launched. The follow-up to UNCED requires implementation of Agenda 21 within the UN-system but also outside such as regional economic and technological cooperation. In particular the establishment of a high-level Commission of Sustainable Development under Article 68 of the UN-Charter and of an UNCED Secretariat is discussed extensively.

A little over a month has elapsed since the closing of the conference in which all Governments present in this room today participated, most at the level of their Head of State or Government. Thanks to the superb arrangements and wonderfully warm hospitality provided by our Brazilian hosts, this largest and most complex UN Conference ever was also, I believe, by any objective standard, one of its most successful.

I believe that the agreements reached at Rio represent a remarkable achievement by any standard despite the fact that they did not meet our hopes and expectations in all areas. But what was achieved at Rio, particularly Agenda 21, represents the most comprehensive and far-ranging programme of action ever agreed by the world community, and that agreement was at the highest possible political level. Indeed, the results of Rio provide the basis for a new global partnership embracing rich, poor, north, south, east and west. The Declaration of Rio and Agenda 21 provide the basic foundations for this new partnership.

These results were greatly facilitated and reinforced by an unprecedented manifestation of public concern, awareness and action. This was evidenced in the involvement of vast numbers of people from non-governmental organizations and citizen groups representing virtually all major constituencies and sectors of society, in preparations for the Conference, in the Conference itself and at the Global Forum which accompanied it. And the interest and attention of people throughout the world were engaged as never before through the record number of media which covered the conference. All this has provided a basis for building on the results of the Conference a continuing movement towards the new modes of economic behaviour and international economic relations, particularly as between developing and coun-

* This is a slightly abbreviated version of Mr. Strong's Statement on the results of UNCED '92 at the 1992 Substantive Session of the ECOSOC, New York, 20 July 1992.

tries, which will be the key to effecting the transition to a secure and sustainable future for our planet.

The fact that the Earth Summit, the largest gathering ever of Heads of State or Government, was convened by the United Nations is of profound significance. It marks a turning point in the history of this organization, a recognition that the United Nations provides the only forum where the world community can unite to pursue the achievement of the common good, transcending the differences which still divide us. And many countries, particularly developing countries and countries in transition, now look to the United Nations to assist them in implementing the results of UNCED.

While we can be pleased that much was accomplished at Rio and in the two and a half years that have led to Rio we cannot afford to be complacent. Much more needs to be done. The road from Rio will be longer and more challenging than the road to Rio.

Fundamental principles have been agreed to: they will need to be spelt out and translated into instruments for further action. Programmes need to be implemented. Treaties need to be put into force and strengthened. Negotiation of new instruments must be launched. Practical steps must be taken to provide access to technologies and mobilize new and additional financial resources for those who need them the most. Ultimately, the success of Rio will be judged not on what we did in June of 1992 but on what we do in the years ahead to carry out the agreements reached at Rio and fulfil the expectations it engendered.

It is not coincidental that matters relating to the institutional follow-up to the Rio Conference are considered at this session in conjunction with deliberations on the on-going process of the revitalization of the Economic and Social Council itself. A number of important recommendations contained in Agenda 21 on the role of the Council vis à vis the entire family of the United Nations organizations provide an opportunity to actuate, for the first time, the powers and potential of the Council which the founders of the United Nations envisaged for it in its Charter.

In particular, the recommendation of the Conference to establish a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development under Article 68 of the Charter of the United Nations, could contribute significantly to strengthening the role of this Organization in the inter-related fields of protecting the Earth's environment and enhancing global development.

Of course, it will be for the forthcoming 47th session of the General Assembly to determine specific procedural and organizational modalities for the Commission. As you are aware the Secretary-General of the United Nations is currently preparing a report for the Assembly on such arrangements as well as other matters related to UNCED institutional follow-up.

For the first time, the opportunity is at hand to raise the UN system to a higher level of service to the nations and indeed, the *peoples* of the United Nations in whose name the Charter was signed 47 years ago.

In the meantime, I would like at this stage to share with you some preliminary personal ideas on this important subject based on the experience we have gained within the UNCED Secretariat during the preparations for the Rio Earth Summit and a preliminary analysis of its institutional outcome.

Agenda 21 is not a one-time-prescription for curing the ills of our planet. Rather, it is a new framework for co-operation amongst Governments and the many other

institutions and sectors of society that must be engaged in its implementation to effect the transition to sustainable development. Its 115 programme areas do provide the essential ingredients for this transition within a framework that will facilitate the continuing process of co-operation, co-ordination, review and revision that will be necessary. This process must be a continuing and an evolving one. Hence it is of the utmost importance that the mechanisms for follow-up be credible and effective.

The primary intergovernmental mechanism recommended by the Conference for follow-up and implementation of its results is the proposed Sustainable Development Commission. In order to carry out its role effectively, it should become the primary forum for consultation and leadership on measures for the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and global levels.

The Commission should not limit its work to the review of progress achieved. It must be future-oriented, providing a forum for the review, further development and updating of Agenda 21 in the light of future economic, financial, technological, legal and other developments. This would maintain the political momentum and the spirit of Rio, while protecting and enhancing the dynamic and adaptable nature of Agenda 21 itself in the years ahead.

Provision must be made for the active participation in its work of all parts of the United Nations family, financial institutions and other entities both inside and outside the UN system, as well as representatives of the non-governmental sector — all those who together with Governments are the major actors in the evolving global partnership for sustainable development.

It should provide governments with a framework for co-ordinating and concerting their own positions in the various organs and policy-making bodies of the United Nations system and, of course, its own effectiveness will require that they do this.

Agenda 21 is a global programme. But it can only be implemented by actions taken at various levels — local, national and regional and by a broad range of organizations, governmental and non-governmental. Accordingly, one of the first tasks will be for Governments to translate it into their national Agendas 21, for other levels of Governments to do the same; and for each institution to adopt its Agenda 21. The Organizations, Agencies and Programmes of the United Nations system have a primary responsibility to take the lead in doing this. Effective follow-up to UNCED's results within the United Nations, particularly the work of the Sustainable Development Commission and inter-agency co-ordinating mechanisms, will require full participation of all members of the UN family which have a contribution to make to their implementation and further development.

Accordingly, I am greatly encouraged that on the initiative of the Secretary-General, the Administrative Committee for Co-ordination has already established an ad hoc Task Force to review the implications of the decisions taken at Rio, particularly in respect of Agenda 21, for inter-agency co-operation. Thus, it will be important to review existing programmes and co-ordinating mechanisms in both the environmental and development areas to ensure that they are integrated with and fully supportive of Agenda 21. Indeed, this provides a timely opportunity to rationalize and consolidate existing programme review and co-ordinating mechanisms in line with the overall movement towards restructuring and greater effectiveness.

Implementation of Agenda 21 within the United Nations system must be organized under the leadership of the Secretary-General and within the overall framework of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination chaired by him. But I believe the United Nations would also benefit by co-ordination arrangements which further permit participation of representatives of other international and regional, economic and technical co-operation agencies outside of the UN system such as regional development banks.

The follow-up to UNCED will also require adequate and competent Secretariat support. The Secretariat to be established to support the work of the Sustainable Development Commission and inter-agency co-ordination will necessarily be a small one. As it will have neither funds to administer nor command over the Organizations, Agencies and Programmes with which it works, it will have to have a strong mandate, a high-level status reporting directly to the Secretary-General and the highest possible professional quality if it is to win the respect and enlist the full co-operation of the other organizations on which the process of follow-up and implementation depends. This, in my view, also means that it should not be integrated into, or subordinated to any part of the UN which has substantive programme and operating functions that might be seen as competitive by the other organizations involved in the process.

The UNCED process has brought together the members of the UN system and enlisted the co-operation of a broad range of other organizations, intergovernmental and non-governmental, in a remarkable manner, indeed one that is unprecedented in my experience with the UN. At a time when there is a great deal of talk about the need for more effective co-ordination and co-operation within the UN system and between the UN and other organizations, I would submit that UNCED has produced a model which demonstrates that this can be done. In fact I see this as one of the principal products of the Conference and the experience and impetus generated by UNCED should be maintained.

The Secretariat should serve as the principal focal-point not only for the United Nations system, but for the entire international community — in the broadest sense of this word — on all issues related to UNCED follow-up. There is no need for this secretariat structure to be large in size or costly. The useful experience that we managed to accumulate during the preparations for the Rio Conference, in particular through the development of cooperative arrangements within the UN system, shows that a relatively small core staff, reinforced by the full and active involvement of UN and other organizations, can be very effective if it has the mandate and can enlist the broad trust and support which this requires.

The new Secretariat arrangements to be decided by the forthcoming General Assembly will need to incorporate and build on the experience and expertise of UNCED. It is of the utmost importance that, in the current transitional period, UNCED's Secretariat capacity be maintained at a level where it can provide adequate continuity between the UNCED process and its implementation. Given the immense investment in UNCED by Governments, by the UN system and the many others who contributed to it, it is clearly imperative that this interim period be a bridge rather than a break, between the road to Rio and the road from Rio.

One of the most critical issues addressed at UNCED was how the needs of developing countries for the new and additional financial resources required to

support their implementation of Agenda 21 are to be met. This issue is still with us and will be the key to ultimate realization of the Conference results. At Rio, developed countries reaffirmed their commitments to reach the accepted target of 0.7% of GNP for ODA and to augment their aid programmes in order to reach this target as soon as possible. Some countries agree, or have agreed, to reach the target by the year 2000. This particular affirmation by the developed countries needs to be spelt out in terms of specific commitments so that the enhanced aid flow to developing countries are predictable and provide a sound basis for long-term planning.

While a few governments made significant commitments at Rio of new and additional financial resources to support implementation of Agenda 21 by developing countries and there were encouraging indications from many others, these add up at best to only a small proportion of what developing countries will require to support their transition to sustainable development through implementation of Agenda 21.

Agenda 21 has proposed the use of all available funding sources and mechanisms. Amongst these is the International Development Association. It is important that special consideration should be given to the statement made by the President of the World Bank at the Conference which put forward the idea of an "Earth increment" to the tenth replenishment of IDA. The provision of additional funding through IDA, particularly for anti-poverty programmes and related areas of sustainable development, is vital for the effective fulfilment of Agenda 21.

The mechanisms endorsed in Agenda 21 include the Global Environmental Facility. Arrangements need now to be finalized for the proposed restructuring of this facility including provision for universal, democratic participation, transparency, flexibility in expanding its scope and coverage, and predictability in the flow of funds without new forms of conditionality.

The recommendations contained in Agenda 21 in respect of debt relief need to be translated promptly into specific commitments. And it is important that the future programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development include timely consideration of such innovative methods of financing as use of economic and fiscal incentives, tradeable emission permits and mobilization of private funds.

Agenda 21 accords special importance to capacity building in developing countries and the need to provide new financial resources through UNDP for this purpose. Concrete commitments in this area are essential if this vital component of Agenda 21 is to be effectively implemented and I hope there will be a ready response to UNDP's important and timely initiatives in this respect.

Of course, no one could reasonably expect all the financial resources required to be forthcoming immediately, particularly given the severe financial constraints being experienced by most governments today. Rather, what is needed is a substantial and credible first step in mobilizing these resources and an on-going process that promises substantial further increments over a reasonable period to permit progressive implementation of Agenda 21.

As I see it, the most immediate and urgent priority is to translate the various undertaking and indications of increased support that were given by Governments at Rio into specific commitments that will provide developing countries with a basis for planning their own corresponding commitments to implementation of Agenda 21. Agenda 21 recommends that developed countries, and others in a position to do so,

make initial financial commitments to give effect to the decisions of the Conference and report on such plans and commitments to the United Nations General Assembly in the fall of 1992 at its 47th Session. It would be desirable for a meeting of donors to be convened as soon as possible, preferably before the end of the forthcoming General session, for this purpose.

Agenda 21 includes a mandate for review and monitoring of the flow of financial resources. In particular, it requires that the review and monitoring of the implementation of Agenda 21 should be systematically combined with the review of the financial resources available. The mandate is clear and what is needed is an equally clear institutional mechanism for giving effect to it. The mechanism for this will need to be put in place as an essential feature of the institutional follow-up and implementation of UNCED. This could be facilitated by providing for a high-level consultative panel as part of, or related to, the Commission on Sustainable Development.

This will require substantial and continuing efforts within the international community in which the United Nations must continue to take a lead. Provision must be made for the active participation in its work of all parts of the United Nations family, financial institutions and other entities both inside and outside the UN system, as well as representatives of the non-governmental sector — all those who together with Governments are the major actors in the evolving global partnership for sustainable development.

If these arrangements are to be effective it is, of course, essential that Governments themselves take and maintain consistent positions in the United Nations policy-making bodies and in the governing organs of various organizations of the UN system.

The views I have expressed here are my own, as Secretary General of the Conference. I have expressed them candidly because I believe it is my duty as I prepare to leave my present responsibilities, to share with you my thinking and concerns as to the important decisions that must now be taken by member governments and the Secretary-General to ensure that the promise and real potential for change generated by UNCED will be fulfilled. This cannot be taken for granted; it will not happen automatically. It will require continuing, unrelenting efforts to maintain and build on the political will that made possible the agreements reached in Rio.

This cannot be done without the continuing engagement of an aware and informed public and the many non-governmental organizations through which will give effect to their interest and carry out the many activities so critically necessary for the implementation of Agenda 21. The road to Rio together with the experience we shared there truly constituted a high point in the history of the United Nations and the world community. All of us who shared that great experience now share the responsibility for ensuring that the road from Rio is indeed the road to a more sustainable, secure and equitable future for the entire human community. The guidance which you provide at this session will, I am sure, have a significant effect on the decisions to be taken by your Governments at the forthcoming General Assembly for the follow-up and implementation of the agreements reached at the Conference on which history will judge its ultimate results.

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