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Nations Commit to Scaling up Environmental Sustainability in UNEP's 40th Anniversary Year

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Nairobi, 22 February 2012-The world's environment ministers ended their annual meeting by committing to make the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 a success.

In a statement, issued on the occasion of UNEP's 40th anniversary, ministers and representative from close to 150 countries described the conference, known as Rio+20 as "a unique opportunity to address the economic, social and environmental challenges in the context of sustainable development".

The statement underlines the concern of the world's environment ministers 'over the continued environmental degradation' being witnessed across the globe.

It follows the presentation to delegates of the findings for summary for policymakers of the UNEP Global Environment Outlook-5 in advance of the full report's launch in June on and around World Environment Day 2012.

The GEO-5 is underlining that many of the environmental challenges glimpsed in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit are fast becoming reality from climate change, the loss of biodiversity and fisheries to deforestation and the decline in productive and healthy soils.

The UNEP 40th anniversary ministerial statement commits "to making Rio+20 a success and developing concrete actions to address the pressing environmental issues that we face as a global community within the context of sustainable development".

Green Economy

President of the UNEP Governing Council Federico Ramos de Armas, State Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment of Spain, also summarized three days of debates and discussions on the twin themes of Rio+20-a Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and an institutional framework for sustainable development.

He said that the Green Economy was viewed as a tool or pathway to achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication and decent job creation "by increasing resource efficiency, supporting the shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns and facilitating low carbon development".

The President also underlined the fact that there remained many challenges to realizing that economy especially in developing countries in respect to the necessary finance, capacity and access to relevant technologies.

He noted concerns by some countries that there was a risk that a Green Economy might also lead to trade protectionism and signaled that it was vital that more engagement across all sectors of society and between countries would be important to address these risks.

Nevertheless, the President expressed the views of the vast majority of nations in terms of support for the Green Economy because of its potential opportunities for integrating the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

"Many of the activities under the Green Economy approach can provide new opportunities for women to become key players in the local economy, especially in the energy, land management and water sectors," said the President.

Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

The President's summary also reflected the views of ministers and delegates responsible for the environment on the issue of International Environmental Governance (IEG) as part of the broader challenge of reforming the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development.

"While recognizing UNEP's contribution to sustainable development, there is overwhelming support that urgent change is needed to the current system," he said.

There was also a high level of support for strengthening UNEP's mandate, authority and financial resources.

Over 100 countries, including members of the African Union and the European Union, have also backed an upgrading of UNEP to a specialized agency of the UN as part of the Rio+20 outcomes.

Delegates also supported greater involvement of major groups and stakeholders including local and regional authorities, women, indigenous peoples, young people and the private sector in any new institutional arrangements.

Mr Ramos de Armas said in his closing address to the Governing Council: "Time is not on our side. Rio+20 must take quick and immediate action to respond to the current environmental crisis. Delegates stressed there should be a clear decision on the institutional framework for sustainable development and international environmental governance".

Achim Steiner, UN Under Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director, said: "The world's ministers responsible for the environment have sent a clear signal to the Rio+20 summit-namely that there needs to be an urgent focus on scaling up implementation of sustainable developments and that bold, transformative decisions need to be taken in four months' time in Brazil".

"The three take home messages from this Governing Council, the last global gathering of the world's environment ministers, are these. The scientific understanding about what is happening to the planet as a result of past and present development paths is far clearer and far more sobering than 20 years ago and two-there is overwhelming support for a transition to a global economy along pathways proposed in UNEP's Green Economy Report in order for it to deliver positive social and environmental outcomes across all nations," he said.

"Thirdly incremental reforms of the current architecture and management arrangements of planet Earth is leading seven billion down an unsustainable path and a very uncertain future-it is time to implement the decisions and directions of the Rio 1992 Earth Summit so that this generation of world leaders and ministers can deliver on the promises and the vision of a previous generation," said Mr Steiner.

At the end of the Governing Council, governments also took several decisions on specific issues ranging from how best to bridge the environmental data gaps in the world and chemicals financing to a Ten Year Program on Sustainable Consumption and Production.

The full list of decisions will be available here <http://www.unep.org/gc/gcss-xii/>

Notes to Editors

The 12 Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum took place between 20 and 22 February

UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 (Rio+20) <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.html>

UNEP Green Economy Initiative www.unep.org/greeneconomy

GEO-5 <http://www.unep.org/geo/>

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