

A Framework for Sustainable Communities

The World Summit on Sustainable Development provides a key moment to express concern regarding the unsustainable path on which the global community is proceeding. The excessive strain being placed on the world's forests, oceans, rivers, mountains, wildlife and other life support systems cannot be maintained. For example, fifteen per cent of the Earth's land cover is now classed as 'degraded' as a result of human activity. More than half the people in the world could be living in severely water-stressed areas by 2032.

Disparities in wealth continue to increase. In 1970, the richest 10 per cent of the world's citizens earned nineteen times as much as the poorest 10 per cent. By 1997, this ratio had increased to twenty-seven to one. The wealth of the few also translates into highly inequitable consumption of the world's resources. Currently, one-fifth of the world's population enjoys high, many would say excessive, levels of affluence.

These trends must receive serious attention from all governments attending Johannesburg. This document draws on the policies and experiences of the Canadian Council of Churches Commission on Justice and Peace and KAIROS. It is our hope that it contributes to the discussions at the Summit.

1. Ratify the Kyoto protocol immediately

The Kyoto Protocol must be ratified immediately. Very strong linkages exist between the issues of climate change, poverty and sustainable development. Scientists predict that climate change will result in more severe weather events, such as intense rainfall, flooding and drought. These events will lead to a series of short-term and long-term problems— ranging from increased environmental refugees, hunger and malnutrition to more outbreaks of tropical diseases. Within Canada severe impacts are predicted, particularly for the Inuit of Northern Canada, whose hunting and fishing patterns are now being disrupted by warmer temperatures. Industrialized economies, which emit the most greenhouse gases, are in the best position to both prevent global warming and reduce its impact. The developing world, which is expected to bear the brunt of climate change has the least resources and capacity to adapt.

The Canadian government has signed both the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) that emerged from the Rio 'Earth Summit' and the Kyoto Protocol, which was established pursuant to the FCCC. It has yet, however, to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which establishes concrete, international targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and continues to delay taking a decision as to whether it will do so.

2. Introduce measures to reduce unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, including further reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

We live in a world of finite resources that are being consumed in an inequitable, and unsustainable, manner. Not only does 20% of the world's population consume 70-80% of the world's resources, they do so in a manner which far exceeds the Earth's capacity for renewal. Excessive consumption by the consumer classes results in fewer resources available for the other 80% of the world's population, thereby exacerbating poverty. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without fundamental changes in the way wealthy societies produce and consume. Measures to reduce unsustainable patterns of production and consumption may include: (a) raising awareness of the importance of reduced consumption; (b) examining and addressing the role that media and advertising play in encouraging excessive consumption habits; (c) phasing out environmental and social harmful subsidies that encourage unsustainable patterns of production and consumption; (d) shifting the tax structures so as to discourage pollution and waste and to promote sustainable investment; and (e) actively promoting eco-design, eco-labelling and other transparent, verifiable and non-misleading consumer information tools.

3. Give precedence to the international environmental agreements and human rights standards in UN covenants over international trade agreements.

Rules affecting trade and investment must foster sustainability and fairness, not just economic efficiency. As such, they must be compatible with and accountable to the principles and goals for sustainable development and poverty eradication. In particular, the authority and autonomy of international environmental and human rights agreements must be reaffirmed and it must be made clear that the objectives, principles, and provisions of such agreements must be protected from, and not be subordinated to, trade rules.

4. Require mandatory compliance of transnational corporations with principles of corporate, social and environmental responsibility.

Over the past decade, corporations have increased their power, but have often not been held accountable for their activities. As significant actors within the world community, they have immeasurable, and in some cases irreversible social, economic and environmental impacts. Accordingly, an international, legally binding framework must be established to ensure responsible corporate behaviour with respect to environmental and human rights activities. Such a

framework must provide for access to information and disclosure of corporate activities and records of compliance in areas of concern for all stakeholders. Measures, indicators, and benchmarks must be developed against which corporations are assessed and held accountable. Independent mechanisms for monitoring progress, measuring compliance and ensuring enforcement must be established.

5. Give priority to local participation and national responsibility in fostering sustainable communities, rather than leaving such serious matters to the self-interest of the global free market.

Much of the world's citizenry live in rural communities and derive their subsistence from their local territories. The global free market is blind to the plight and needs of local communities. Accordingly, local communities must be strengthened and provided with the tools to care for their natural and social environments. An emphasis must be placed on fair trade, not merely free trade.

6. De-escalate the climate of violence and war around the world through reinvigorated peace building measures

A sustainable future is not possible in the absence of peace and peace building measures such as overseas development assistance, participatory, democratic governance and disarmament across the broad array of small arms, conventional weapons, nuclear weapons and space. Members of the Commission believe that ultimately, we are more likely to reduce conflict in the world if governments together reverse current priorities and commit to the poor, repair the Earth and meet Agenda 21 commitments.

Progress on each of the above six identified areas will significantly shift the global community from its currently unsustainable path. Concerted, cooperative effort is required and the World Summit on Sustainable Development provides a prime opportunity for mapping out how such efforts will be made. The Canadian Council of Churches and KAIROS look forward to continuing dialogue with you and members of the government delegation, both during the Summit and afterward.