A report on the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)
a.k.a Joburg Summit, Earth Summit 2002 or Rio+10
25 August-4 September 2002
Johannesburg, South Africa

Joburg Summit

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Mood @ closing

THOUGH VARIED, AS IN OTHER SUMMITS, THE MOOD here was one of disappointment generally, with some dose of optimism thrown in.

Remarks collected by media tell a lot. Here's a cross-section from different sources, but mostly from *The Star*, the South African newspaper which, together with *Earth Times*, published the *Summit Star* for an 11-day dedicated coverage of the Joburg Summit.

"Nothing for the poor, nothing for the climate," said a joint statement of WWF, Oxfam and Greenpeace. Instead of World Summit on Sustainable Development, the WWF said WSSD really meant "World Summit of Shameful Deals."

Oxfam: "The WSSD is an opportunity wasted...a triumph for greed and self-interest, a tragedy for the poor and the environment."

Dr. Vandana Shiva, Indian author, physicist and activist: “What happened in Joburg amounts to a privatization of the Earth...an auction house in which the rights of the poor were given away.”

Muriel Saragoussi, Brazilian Forum of Social Movements: “”Our governments have shamed us.”

Liz Hosken, The Gaia Foundation, London: “What should have been an Earth Summit has been infiltrated and taken over by trade. The Johannesburg Plan is an incredibly weak agreement.”

Axel Naersted, Norwegian Forum for Environment and Development: “The Norwegian government and a few others did an excellent job but the only victory was to prevent the WTO taking over completely.”

Friends of the Earth International: “A failure. Only two new and specific targets: on sanitation and establishing marine protected reserves. Otherwise existing commitments reaffirmed...a clear step backwards from the Convention on Biological Diversity.”

Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa: “A failure as regard any significant advances on the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, but...a few successes mixed in.”

National Wildlife Federation, US: “We are deeply disappointed in the Bush administration’s approach to the plan...the same colluding industries who are favored in Washington were favored in Joburg.”

NGO Energy and Climate Caucus: “The agreement on energy is an outright disaster with the dropping of all targets and timetables.”

WWF: “Overall disappointed, but progress in some areas, notably water and sanitation, and in fisheries.”

European Trade Union Confederation: “An imbalance between the importance given to trade and the lack of recognition given to the social and environmental dimension.”

The Business Council for Sustainable Energy: “Disappointed at the lack of substantial direction provided by the world leaders.”

Senator Bob Brown, Australian Greens: “Like ostriches, the wealthy nations have stuck their heads into the sand and have let down the next generation in an appalling way.”

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President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, head of G77 and China: "We go from summit to summit but our peoples go from abyss to abyss."

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General: "This summit has instigated global action among a wide range of actors and makes sustainable development a reality. The summit will put us on a path that reduces poverty while protecting the environment. Governments have agreed on an impressive range of concrete commitments and actions that will make a real difference to people around the world. Conferences like this cannot produce miracles...Johannesburg is a beginning, and if we keep the momentum and pressure on the stakeholders, I believe the conference will have made a major contribution."

Nelson Mandela: "It had been a pleasure to exchange views with world decision makers...There were highly developed countries whose wealth has been achieved through the exploitation of colonial countries. It is time now that they use that money to assist those countries."

President Thabo Mbeki, South Africa, president of the WSSD: "Now let's make things happen together."

What Joburg handed us

A blueprint to save our planet? Call it any which way you like but the Joburg Summit has left some legacy for the present and future generations.

The Joburg Summit did what it was called to do. It gave us (a) a political declaration and a plan of implementation, or so-called 'Type 1 outcomes'; and (b) a bundle of partnership initiatives, or so-called complementary 'Type 2 outcomes'.

Imperfect as they are, the products are there to take home and carry forward. The next step is to translate these into national plans or national strategy for sustainable development (NSSD), hopefully to be in place in every country by 2005.

Johannesburg Commitment

On President Mbeki's advice the Johannesburg Commitment to Sustainable Development should be read together with the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. So it's like a mother *chapeaux* (preamble or introduction) to the main thing. The Commitment

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reaffirmed the Rio Declaration and other agreed sets of UN principles and called to put words into action in areas that would truly enable humanity to move toward the path of sustainability.

Many wanted to see a much stronger political declaration but this was not to be. In fact, the document, based on the South Africa draft, nearly missed adoption at the closing plenary as there was no deliberation on this in a real sense. Prior agreement was to do this only after completion of the Plan of Implementation which stretched till the wee hours of the closing day.

Partly in deference to the host and out of sheer fatigue, the summit closing plenary adopted the Joburg Commitment although not without qualification and reservations coming from disparate quarters. NGOs protested that reference to human rights and indigenous peoples were missing in the revision. Others insisted to see their own "babies" reflected somewhere. President Mbeki explained what happened and assured the plenary that the final version would consider all these in the final declaration.

Johannesburg Plan

The Joburg Plan of Implementation was the main outcome of the Summit. The Plan comprised ten chapters, beginning with the overall introduction followed by different themes, like poverty, production and consumption, natural resource management, African development, and so on then ending with means of implementation and governance.

It's like the old Agenda 21 restructured along what world leaders had agreed as the most outstanding challenges of our times. The 128 paragraphs fleshing out each chapter were a bounty of *must do* statements, agonizing to be action-oriented rather than visionary, as agreed from the start. Goals were hardly cast in clear targets and timetables, though the 2015 timeline of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was assumed as future reckoning point.

For all its limitations and weaknesses, the Plan might serve as some kind of road map for designing country-specific National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD). This follow-through process could be an opportunity either for strengthening or further weakening of the Joburg Plan.

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Partnership initiatives

These so-called 'Type 2s' were a controversial lot from early on. Despite repeated caveats that they were not a substitute to 'Type 1s' the view that they were a competitor for scarce resources persisted to the end.

As of 16 August, over 170 proposals for partnership initiatives have been received and listed by the WSSD secretariat. These cover a broad range of themes, clustered around the Joburg Plan's concerns and the WEHAB (water and sanitation; energy; health; agriculture; and biodiversity).

All the proposals could potentially fit in more than one cluster, for example, most of them contribute to poverty eradication and nearly all involve capacity building. Some are already fairly detailed, with set goals, partners, and a clear funding strategy. Others are as yet conceptual, needing further work-outs. Some aim to benefit a few, others nearly half of humanity.

Some examples. One is the Bicycle Refurbishing Initiative. Proposed by a Dutch, this proposal seeks to collect bicycles in Europe and the US (100,000/year over 5 years) and set up systems of transporting, refurbishing and selling these second-hand bikes in Africa. Another is Water , Sanitation and Hygiene for All or WASH Initiative, proposed by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) of Geneva. This project aims to deliver by 2015 safe, affordable, and reliable water and sanitation services to over 1.1 billion people (living on US$1/day or less) currently without access and to over 2.4 billion people (living on US$2/day or less) currently with inadequate sanitation.

Resources: real additionality?

What resources are we talking about here?

The EU has committed to increase ODA by 22 billion Euros up to 2006, to increase to 9 billion Euros annually from 2006 onwards. US State Secretary Colin Powell said that President Bush was seeking to allocate about US$ 5 billion over 20 years to development aid. UK Environment Minister Michael Meacher wanted world business to come in to top the so-called extra 11 billion dollars committed by developed countries in Monterrey.

According to US Assistant Secretary of State John F. Turner, 9 in every 10 dollars available would be added by the private sector.

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Are these net resources? Maybe, whatever everything is still on the drawing board. Wait till you meet the devil in the details. Already, US commitment is set with a string of conditions—focus on its favorite health and education, macroeconomic (read privatization) and governance reforms—all of which could be rationalized under "anti-terrorism." The EU commitment might be more benign and Joburg-dedicated.

What to make of it

Coming home from this eventful global event, I was asked the usual but fair question: what did you get out of it? Come to think of it, what did we really get out of the Joburg Summit?

Was it worth all the trouble? Maybe.

Where I stand on this one I already indicated in my response to a 6-point questionnaire waiting on my desk. This was a follow-up to a pre-Joburg Summit survey where I was also chosen as one of the respondents. It was done by Prof. Adil Najam of the Boston University Department of International Relations and Center for Energy and Environmental Studies. To the last question of the survey—a concluding comment on the Summit's most important achievements and/or disappointments—my reply: *a very minimalist response to a monumental problem.* You can guess the rest of my answers to the rating scales.

I can't help feeling tentative about the Joburg Summit. The reasons are many, and some of them may not be fair. It's easy to join the chorus of disappointed and hard to be positive if you yourself are struggling to be optimistic.

The Joburg Summit was a huge learning experience about how hard (or 'hopeless') to negotiate fairness in this fragile world.

The devil is still in the perimeter. Before we could even talk about details the rich and powerful put a basic principle back on the block. Already enshrined in the Rio Declaration (principle 7), the principle of *common but differentiated responsibility* is for me what runs through all the contentious issues of the Joburg Summit process. It is the cornerstone principle of sustainability in a highly unequal world.

If it's a shot in the arm, China, Russia and Canada commited to ratifying the Kyoto Protocol before the year is over. That left the US and Australia

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even more isolated. Likewise for the call of Denmark, on behalf of EU, to form an alliance among those already willing to strive for the 10 percent target in new and renewable energy (NRE), exclusive of hydro, in the total energy mix.

But the Kyoto Protocol is at bottom about mitigation of emissions and scarcely about deep cuts. And the biggest emitter of all, the US, continues to reject even that minimalist response.

Trade, finance and debt were likewise a big summit headache. There's hardly any indication in the summit outcomes that developing and poor countries will get more fair terms of trade, less burdensome financing of development and substantial debt relief.

The world's poor and the environment would have to settle for the crumbs. The Joburg Summit seemed so helpless to make the lifestyle of the rich subject to negotiation.

If every little helps...

If you have learned to scale down your expectations and believe that every little helps, the Joburg Summit offers enough to chew on and translate in your own little corner or "defensible spaces", as it were. Of course major UN events are not about little things and little corners, though these are also important concerns. What's a global summit for if not about big questions and big actions?

The deliberations prior to and during the Joburg Summit and its final outcomes would seem to agree with those who envisioned the Joburg Summit to be a "poverty summit", a "development summit", an "environment for development summit", or even a world summit for African development, if you like. Much of the agenda in question revolved around poverty and redress of imbalances. Environment and management of natural resources have been tackled from this point. And so have other issues, like human rights, institutional arrangements, and so on.

In a sense, the Joburg Summit was a follow-up to the 2000 Millennium Summit, incorporating the March 2002 Monterrey Conference (financing for development/poverty) and Doha Development Agenda of the 2001 WTO Ministerial Meeting (especially trade access for poor countries). Each new one builds on the previous others. Did Joburg?

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Joburg divide

Reacting to President Mbeki's reference to the historic end of apartheid in South Africa Indian activist-scientist Vandana Shiva spoke of a new 'global apartheid' between the rich and the poor of this world. She asserted that this was very much felt during the summit and warned about hijacking of the summit by the WTO and global corporations.

In both physical and symbolic terms, a certain divide did exist during the Joburg Summit and it expressed in different ways. Outside of the official process were a motley of events with no real or merely tenuous connection to the negotiations or hardly any influence on the outcomes.

Multisectoral Dialogue

The Multisectoral Dialogue (MSD) was a WSSD Secretariat-mandated process and platform of engaging different sectors around the WSSD issues. What value it might have had stands to question, as can be gleaned from the September 4 editorial of the Stakeholder Forum's *Outreach 2002.*

"Although the active involvement of stakeholders in this process has been held out to be the most advanced in any UN processes it has been a joke. There is no evidence to say that the Stakeholder Dialogues have been fed into the formal negotiations at all. This could have been so different. In fact one outcome of the Dialogues has been disastrous for many stakeholders have focused on these and not on the formal negotiating processes."

This is an even less sparing comment than the observation I wrote on MSD in my Bali Prepcom 4 report. And that is, that there's a disjoint between the MSD process and the official WSSD negotiations. But MSD did serve as one platform for education on the WSSD issues.

Events galore

There's a huge bazaar of side and parallel events addressing one or other issues concerning sustainable development. The IUCN Environment Center at Sandton, the Ubuntu Village and other venues teemed with activities, from academic debates to cultural and arts exhibitions and musical concerts. The opening of WaterDome, featuring Mandela, Prince Willem of Netherlands, and Africa's water ambassador Salim Ahmed Salim highlighted the centrality of the water agenda.

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On the other end of the Joburg Summit, the Global People's Forum at Nasrec organized many events.The People's Earth Summit at the St. Stithian College ran the so-called 'World Sustainability Hearings', some sort of people's tribunals to hold governments and global corporations to account for the mess we are in today. Here people found another platform for different analyses and alternative solutions.

Several protest events also took place during the summit, around Sandton and elsewhere. The Global People's March got the most press mileage. Spearheaded by the landless people and the organizers of Global Peoples Forum the massive activity mobilized between 15,000 and 20,000 protestors for a nine-kilometer march from Alexandra to the summit site at Sandton. Amid the sea of red would stick out anti-globalization slogans, like "Our world is not for sale! No to W$$D!" and demands for "Lands. Food. Jobs."

On this side of the Joburg divide, people were saying 'another (a sustainable) world is possible'. They obviously were not counting on the negotiations at Sandton.

Remembering Joburg

Many waxed nostalgic about the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, saying the Earth Summit 2002 fell short by far. But Rio in 1992 obviously was a different story from a different time. The issue was fresh, NGOs were the new darling of the development set as many were still NGO illiterate, and energy level then was at its highest. Today, some kind of summit fatigue seemed to have seized summiteers and conference jetsetters. The headband slogan "No more [shameful] summits!" said a lot.

The unusual floods in Europe didn't seem enough to scare some world leaders who came to Joburg. The US and UK were so obsessed with bombing Iraq, trying vainly to drag the Joburg Summit around their war agenda. Nelson Mandela, perhaps the most admired and respected among the world leaders present, warned that such warmongering was not helping any and only adding more insecurity in today's world.

The final day of the Joburg Summit was an eventful one, perhaps a first in a UN summit of its kind. Protesters and delegates jeered and booed the US Secretary of State Colin Powell with cries of "Shame on you, shame on Bush!" This would be followed by another round of booing after the closing speech of another representative of President Bush. All these seemed to be a welcome disruption to many who were

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already exasperated and bored with speeches but could only express quiet solidarity with the protesting voices.

President Mugabe's speech was also one for remembering. In his address to more than 100 heads of state he blasted UK Prime Minister Blair for meddling in Zimbabwe when in contrast Africans have not even colonized a square inch of soil in Europe or England. His hard-hitting one-liner, "Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe" resonated in the huge ballroom for a while.

Where I stayed, where I went and spent most of my twelve days in this summit left me with memorable images. I was booked in a cheap hotel downtown, what used to be central business district (CBD) now minus the B, so to speak. It's one of the most scary parts of town abandoned by the rich in favor Sandton where the Joburg Summit would feel more secure. If I believed and followed what I was told I would have lived like a virtual hotel prisoner. Instead I heeded the advice of my Bangladeshi friends and hotel mates. And true enough Johannesburg was just like Manila, New York or any big city where you find the "goods" and the "bads" of this world.

Whatever, to me South Africa is rich, South Africa is poor, South Africa is beautiful.

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