

Report on Prepcom 3 of the World Summit on Sustainable Development
(Rio+10), a.k.a. Johannesburg Summit 2002,
held on March 25 to April 5, 2002 at the UN in New York

Rio +10 PrepCom 3 Report

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to the WSSD Preparatory Committee 3

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What it hoped to achieve?

TO FINISH NEGOTIATION ON AT LEAST ONE MAJOR outcome document (Chairman's paper) to be passed up for ministerial-level consideration and consensus during Prepcom 4 on 27 May to 7 June 2002 in Bali. Also to seek and consider (without necessarily debating) inputs to the other major outcome document—the Johannesburg political declaration. These two outcome documents together form what's dubbed as 'Type 1 outcomes'.

To consider inputs on so-called 'Type 2 outcomes' (partnerships/initiatives in implementing Agenda 21 projects). Delegates, especially from G77 and China, are not too keen on considering these before they are through with 'Type 1 outcomes' which to them is the main agenda anyway. More, they are bothered by the possibility that 'Type 2 outcomes' would be used as substitute for 'Type 1 outcomes', considering limited resources.

What's come out?

A voluminous compilation of texts to be consolidated into a new Chairman's paper and subjected to a new round of negotiation in Bali in time for the ministerial meeting. The final plenary session on 5 April agreed to work/negotiate for three additional days in Bali from May 24 to 27. Majority were not in the mood for an inter-sessional, whether in New York or in Bali. Besides, the UN has no budget for one. Indonesia has in fact offered to shoulder the costs of additional three days of negotiation in Bali.

A collection of inputs (from both official and non-governmental sources) to the Chair's second draft of a Political Declaration. The draft, as of 26 March, contained 17 articles. Various other inputs range from those coming out of the multisectoral dialogs (MSD), the *Jo'burg Memo*, to the South African non-paper, among many other sources.

A bundle of information, critiques, analyses and suggestions have been introduced into and debated in many parallel events, caucuses, and informal exchanges among and between official delegations and other Prepcom 3 participants from different stakeholder groups.

What to make of Prepcom 3?

One, two weeks of negotiations was not worth the results. What began as a simple, straightforward and more or less action-oriented Chairman's paper ended up as a clutter of compilation text. With a complication text like that, you cannot do an honest negotiation and make satisfactory progress without first having done with the clutter.

Two, the state of documents badly needs leadership. A new Chairman's paper should be able to provide that in the interim period prior to Prepcom 4. Should negotiations turn complicated again in Bali, the Chair and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), acting as WSSD secretariat must at some point say 'this is it', as for example, how Ambassador Tommy Koh did it in 1992 Prepcom 4 in drafting the Rio Declaration.

Three, leadership may be faulted but negotiators must show more responsibility. The starting draft was good enough for what most people want to see coming out of this process. And that is, not more words but action—a basic lesson from the past ten years. The buzzword has been "deliverables", repeated every so often during the process, with Chairman Emil Salim reminding everyone that what is being negotiated is 'a



program of deliverables' and not a repetition of what's already in Agenda 21 or other documents, like the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the Doha Declaration or the Monterrey Consensus, among many others. And yet the process just seemed to get stuck in recycling old debates on *must be's*, on principles, on beaten paths, as it were.

Could it be that the differences are coming back down precisely on those very same principles thought to have already been settled but in reality only superficially understood and half-heartedly committed to?

It's about 'fairness in a fragile world'

Tired, old fashioned but it's mostly about justice in this distressed planet. As others would say, it's all about equity, stupid. As the *Jo'burg Memo* puts it, 'fairness in a fragile world'.

No matter the seemingly unending debate, the concept of sustainable development, from when it first popped up as a catch-all theme in the 1987 Brundtland Report (*Our Common Future*), has been at bottom about fairness. It's about fairness between and within nations and societies, and fairness to our environment now severely threatened by human action. This was the idea at the core of the 1992 Earth Summit, it remains the unfulfilled dream ten years after.

The agonizing process of negotiation characterizing Prepcom 3 mirrors the difficulty of negotiating fairness in our fragile world. It shows across the board, whether the issue is about trade, environment, human rights or financing for development.

Despite their inherent weaknesses the 1992 agreements in Rio (Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, the two framework conventions on biodiversity and climate change, and statement of forest principles) somehow reflected what's possible at the time, that is, by way of a compromise in bringing about more fairness in today's world. And how has it been ten years from Rio?

Only a stubborn few would contest the judgments and the wild facts supporting them. We see a more unequal world in 2002 than we had in 1992. Actions at all levels considered, the world community has failed overall to arrest the decline of the world's biodiversity and the destabilization of the global climate system.

Let's trace our assessment back to a 1992 baseline, for illustration. Around the 1992 Earth Summit, an interagency panel of scientists



suggested that if we were to succeed in stabilizing the global climate system each individual then living would be entitled to a CO2 emission level of only 1,500 kilograms a year. That time an American was already doing over 20,000 kilograms while a poor guy from Afghanistan or Zaire only about 100 kilograms. But more, the 1,500 kg/person norm (you could call it a human right to shit the environment, if you like) had two assumptions: [1] no more deforestation, meaning, the then existing forest stands or carbon sinks stay as is, at least; and [2] zero growth of then around 5.3 billion world population.

Take this illustration as a metaphor of carrying capacity and global inequalities. At once you'd realize how much it would require to build a much fairer world. An American would have to give up so much to enable an Afghan or Zairean to live a better life.

And yet Agenda 21 which was intended to address social and environmental problems was itself already a global compromise of sorts as much as it was considered a positive global deal. The so-called 'global deal' meant cutting down on emissions (read consumption or lifestyle) and transfers or sharing (ODA, debt relief, technology, and so on) from the rich north-side and taking care of biodiversity and carbon sink restoration from the poor south-side. A cross-cutting theme of this agenda was reduction of poverty worldwide.

From the illustration overall conclusion about progress ten years down the road from Rio should be obvious. The two assumptions did not materialize, to begin with. The carbon sink continues to sink and biodiversity loss goes on despite efforts to arrest, if not reverse, the trend. World population hit 6 billion by October 1999. The world economy has now rolled into recession even as very little progress, if anything at all, has been made in closing the rich-poor divide. The US, for example, remains a nation accounting for only 4 percent of the world's people but consuming 44 percent of the world's resources. And more. In 2001 up to 1.3 billion people still live on \$1 dollar a day.

Why are things not working as intended and planned? An easy explanation is most intentions produce consequences not intentioned. And that most plans are often proven wrong anyway. Beyond this, there are any number of contradictory explanations.

The US had one explanation. In one preparatory committee (PrepCom) session of the 2002 UN Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) the US official statement suggested to discard so-called boring outcome documents and instead to just go for a one-pager or two-pager political declaration of allegiance to capitalism. Patterned after the post-



September 11 line of "*you are either with us or against us*" by President Bush, this proposed new capitalist manifesto claims that countries suffering from the many ills and deprivations of today's world (social instability, lawlessness, poverty, corruption and so on) have only themselves to blame for failing to bring themselves up a bit closer to the level of prosperity and stability of countries like the USA. The reason: they did not take the capitalist road or did not embrace capitalism religiously enough.

In the Rio+10 process US President Bush seems just as adamant as his father was in 1992: the American lifestyle is not up for negotiation. To give up on high living means deep cuts in emissions. The US would rather buy the rights of 'under-emitters' (Philippines, for example) through carbon trading arrangements, hoping to spread the shit around till the limit of the earth's carrying capacity is exhausted. That's mainly why the US rejected the Kyoto Protocol. That's why US negotiators are so predisposed to blocking any language in every UN document that hints at putting American lifestyle on the chopping block.

In many ways the attitude and position of the US symbolize those of the rich generally. In Prepcom 3, Greenpeace pointed to the US allies Canada and Australia, and occasionally Japan, as the 'axis of evil' who won't budge on the energy issue. A similar stubbornness shows, for example, in how the OPEC member-countries within G-77 would resist the language 'sustainable energy systems' because this implies moving away from fossil-based fuels toward new and renewable energy regimes. In the case of many OECD countries, representing the rich industrial societies, the symbolism expresses as resistance to debt relief, committing additional resources and ODA, and transfer of technology in soft terms which should be settled issues way back the 1992 Earth Summit. Likewise, this symbolism also applies to the lifestyle of the rich in poor and developing countries who cheat on their taxes and would not contribute to raising local resources for poverty programs and sustainable national development.

Fairness is once again on the negotiating table in the Rio+10 process. It shows in section after section of the outcome documents of the Johannesburg Summit. And yet, from the way negotiations are going, you would readily sense that the process would be as difficult, if not harder, now as ten years ago in Rio.





About the author

Isagani R. Serrano is Senior Vice President and Board Member of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM). He's written for CIVICUS the following: *Civil Society in the Asia-Pacific*, 1994; *Humanity In Trouble But Hopeful* in CITIZENS, 1995; *Profile: Philippines* for CIVIC INDEX, 1997; *Coming Apart, Coming Together* in Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium, 1999; *A Global Citizens' Commitment*, 1999. A community organizer, educator, writer, guitarist, 'farmer', and political prisoner for seven years during martial law in the Philippines. Trained in education and literature, community organization and development management. Holds a Master of Science in Environment & Development Education (MSc in EE/DE) from the South Bank University-London.

