

President's Report

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As many of you already know, the last Regional Consultation Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in November, 2008. During that meeting, my colleagues appointed me to be the President of the Forum. This is, therefore, the report on what was done from that moment up to today.

At the moment of the Consultation, we had to deal with a wide-ranging and diverse agenda with an eye kept on the 10th Global Civil Society Forum (GCSF) and the 25th Session of the UNEP Governing Council and the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/GMEF). We had a Medium Term Strategy (MTS) 2010-2013 which was already approved and a draft document of the Program of Work (hereinafter referred to as "PoW") 2010- 2011. Other documents were also available to be discussed by the governments and a series of guidelines regarding the themes for the Ministerial Consultation.

In this context, most of our last year work and, therefore, our regional agreements were about the Program of Work 2010-2011. At that time, we split into three workgroups that simultaneously discussed about strategic orientations, specific challenges and the role of the major groups as to UNEP priority areas: 1) Climate Change/ Environmental Governance; 2) Harmful substances and hazardous waste/ Resource efficiency, production and sustainable consumption; and 3) Ecosystem management/ Disasters and conflicts.

There was an introduction to the themes of GC/ GMEF. There were also presentations on Gender and Environment; Environment and Human Rights; and the UNEP Poverty and Environment Initiative. These presentations did not have a huge influence on discussions and, therefore, were not included in the Regional Declaration. Finally, proposals related to the Draft on the Long Term Strategy for the involvement of youth in Environment Issues were shortly discussed. This was the only specific document to be discussed by the GC25/GMEF as to participation of the major groups.

A first Declaration draft containing key messages for each of the six priority areas as well as considerations as to the Tunza Programme was prepared. As agreed, the writing group and I, in my capacity as President, went on working until we reached a Final Declaration for Latin America and the Caribbean. This Declaration was our main commitment and mandate for this past year.

During the months following until the Global Civil Society Forum was held, there was an important review of documents. At the same time, with regard to the Tunza Programme, during the Regional Consultation Meeting we discussed our perspectives with Laetitia Zobel, from the MGSB, and the former UNEP Regional Director. As a result, we were committed to make a first period evaluation and to present recommendations for the second period. We prepared the report together with a group of organizations of the region and submitted it to the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC), MGSB and DCPI.

UNEP 10th Global Civil Society Forum was held in Nairobi, Kenya on 14th - 15th February 2009. The four representatives for Latin America and the Caribbean were Gordon Bispham (Barbados), Carlos Gómez (Mexico), Jenny Gruenberger (Bolivia) and Cecilia Iglesias (Argentina). Also present, as representatives for the youth from our region, were Paulina Monforte (Mexico), Handy Acosta (Cuba) and Yaiguili Alvarado

(Panama). There were around 230 representatives for the nine major groups at the Forum.

During the opening session, Angela Cropper, UNEP Deputy Executive Director, reminded the representatives that governmental discussions would focus on "Globalization and Environment", and particularly on 1) Global Crisis: National chaos?, and 2) International Environmental Governance: help or hindrance?

The first session, titled Involvement of Major Groups in the GC25/GMEF, was devoted to present the issues to be thought about during the Ministerial Consultations, the Council/ Forum structure and the opportunities for the participation of civil society. There were several presentations during the second session, titled Alliances with the major groups and stakeholders for the implementation of the 2010-2011 Program of Work, being the Stakeholders Forum for Our Common Future one of the most relevant ones.

The third session was devoted to the open dialogue with UNEP's Executive Director, Mr. Achim Steiner, who highlighted five success indicators that should be taken into account for the Council/ Forum: 1) Achieve a common position in order to face problems related to mercury; 2) Set a Platform similar to the IPCC for Biodiversity that links the political and scientific arenas; 3) Approve the Program of Work 2010- 2011; 4) Environmental Ministers are able to agree as to key messages on how to face the crisis through a green economy; and 5) A sincere discussion on International Environmental Governance should be held so that changes can continue.

During the fourth session, which was titled Globalization and Environment, the issues for the Ministerial Consultations were more deeply discussed. The importance of analyzing the challenges of serious and interrelated crises faced by humanity and the existing potential of the Green Economy to respond to them were highlighted. During the fifth session, the Chemical Agenda was revised, which is one of the GC25/ GMEF priorities. The sixth and last session finished with the speech of MGSB. The MGSB stated that as from next year, international meetings will have a specific focus and will address major groups. Furthermore, they stated that "each region will handle regional issues".

I have already mentioned that the Stakeholders Forum participated in the second session. Well, the organization presented the results of a research study carried out at the request of the UNEP on the current types of involvement of the major groups in its work, as well as the opportunities to improve set practices and procedures. In this regard, taking into account our experience working with different UNEP offices and divisions, and taking also into account the years that we have been involved in the decision making process of the Governing Council, we, Red Ambiental, decided to submit a Contributions paper to the MGSB. This paper reflected the following items: internal consistency, major groups' focus, integration of implementing partners in policy discussions, partners and projects registry, role of accredited organizations in the Program of Work, and regional consultations.

As to this last point, we present three remarks that were later included in the new Guidelines for the involvement of major groups: 1) Regional meetings give not only the chance to know the major groups visions on UNEP policies and strategies, but are also key to establish and strenghten links with the civil society towards the implementation of the PoW and other relevant initiatives; 2) priorities and regional agendas cannot be left aside but have to complement and strenghten global consultations; 3) the decision on who shall be invited to Regional Consultation Meetings has to be made by the regions as they are the ones that know about the organizations experience and legitimacy.

After the Global Civil Society Forum, we took part in the 25^o Session of the UNEP Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC/ GMEF), which was held between February 16th and 20th, 2009, also in Nairobi, Kenya. About 1,000 people from 147 different countries attended the Council/ Forum, among which there were ministers, representatives for intergovernmental organizations and members of the nine major groups.

The GMEF was created with the purpose of setting a revision process for relevant and emerging political questions in the environment arena. As I have already mentioned, Ministerial Consultations, at this time, were focused on "Globalization and Environment". Also, the Committee of the Whole (CoW) revised and discussed reports and decisions on the global environment situation; the strengthening of the UNEP scientific and financial basis; the environment law as to the participation and access to information; South-South cooperation; the creation of an intergovernmental scientific-political platform on biodiversity; small island developing states; management of chemicals; Tunza Programme and the budget and program of work 2010-2011.

The very much expected speech by Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director was delivered during the opening ceremony. Overall, the message was that the moment has come to promote a green economy, as the most likely way to face the economic and environmental crisis, but also as a way to adapt to a financial crisis context in which the environmental question bears the risk of not being taken into account as a priority.

During the afternoon of the first day, the Ministerial Consultations were started and a Committee of the Whole (hereinafter referred to as "CoW") was set. The CoW started to discuss the Program of Work. In this respect, a Working Group for its negotiation and a Chemicals Group to arrive to a decision on Mercury were established.

As to Coordination and cooperation with the major groups, the CoW had to evaluate the approval of the Tunza Strategy. In relation to this, it is important to note that the Argentine Government gave us the flour to present the proposals that came up during the Regional Consultation Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean. Other governments also took part by supporting the considerations submitted by civil society and following a prosperous discussion, the strategy was approved.

Between Thursday and Friday, several decisions (17, in total) were approved by the CoW, including the PoW. Undoubtedly, another relevant decision was one related to the creation of a legally binding instrument on mercury, aimed at reducing its impact on human health and environment risks.

In the Report of the President of the GC25/GMEF, submitted during the closure of the Council/ Forum, it was stated that the transition to a green economy is a main challenge in order to achieve a balance between environment protection, poverty reduction and economic growth. In this respect, it is stated that the Ministers have identified the need to improve the national and international governance in order to offer quick and coherent responses to many challenges. In this context, the importance of involving all stakeholders in this transition is mentioned.

With regard to Environmental Governance, ministers have broadly supported the idea that the Rio+20 Summit will give a unique chance to discuss and to agree on changes to be implemented. As to the United Nations system, the President says that ministers agreed on the need to implement the Bali Strategic Plan, strengthen UNEP and increase its regional presence.

As regards the representatives of the Latin America and the Caribbean civil society, in particular, our participation had different expressions. Although the Ministerial

Consultations, the Working Groups and the Committee of the Whole met at the same time, the attempt was to be present in different areas of interest for the regional agenda. We mainly observed the COW negotiations and we had discussions with the government delegates for Latin America and the Caribbean. We also attended Press Conferences and launch of projects and initiatives; we talked to some media and arranged meetings with officers from different UNEP Divisions (DEWA, DCPI, DRC, among others).

Just to give an example, the successful negotiation of the Tunza Strategy caused a postponed meeting to be held with the Children and Youth Unit during which several agreements were reached as to several items included in our regional mandate. Among these agreements, we definitely made a step forward as to the incorporation of representatives for indigenous peoples in the Advisory Council. Yaiguili Alvarado is present here as she was voted by her fellows because of her experience and commitment, but also because our region strongly fought to guarantee this space for indigenous youth.

With regard to the articulation between the major groups within the different regions, this was performed daily in planning meetings (in the morning) and analysis of results (in the afternoon). This moment helped to have some updates on the negotiations as a whole, comment on the improvements made by each group and region and agree on the issues to be included in a joint Statement.

Throughout the year, we continued deepening our collaboration with UNEP as implementing partner in GEO with DEWA, Tunza with DCPI, YouthXchange and Ozzy Ozone with DTIE. We also continued getting and distributing information to other organizations in the region through the different networks we are part of. Some drafts that we received were analyzed and we responded to MGSB or whomever it concerned pursuant to the consultation.

Furthermore, considering that sharing the process and explaining the procedures for the participation of other stakeholders are the responsibility of those who are part of the UNEP decision making cycle, I tried to help some organizations that are present here and that attended the Regional Consultation Meeting for the first time, as well as others by delivering short presentations in workshops, seminars and web conferences.

On the other hand, The Guidelines for the involvement of the major groups, which were approved in Monaco (2008), this year went through a revision and approval stage. Therefore, we are trying to closely follow the effects of these new guidelines on the regions in practice, the major groups and the accredited organizations. As an example, during the last weeks, there was a need to insist a lot on the proper implementation of the representatives' election for the Major Groups Facilitating Committee.

Finally, as this is one of my responsibilities as President, I fully supported this Meeting and offered perspectives on the agenda for the event, work documents and some logistic aspects.

As a conclusion, I just need to say that this has been an intense year, we have achieved many things but there have also been backward steps as to regional participation. I hope we can renew our commitments to our region in order to assure support to this area. Thank you very much for trusting me. I hope my performance has met your expectations.