

Rio+20 Summit kicks off with calls for action

Rio de Janeiro, 21 June (Meena Raman) – More than 100 Heads of State and government gathered in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for the start of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) which kicked off on Wednesday, 20 June.

After intensive and protracted informal negotiations on how to accelerate the implementation of sustainable development, 191 countries reached agreement on Tuesday, 19 June on the Conference's outcome document. The text will now be put forward for adoption by Heads of State at the conclusion of Rio+20 on Friday.

The first day of the 3-day Summit of the Rio+20 Conference began with an official opening in the morning of Wednesday to conduct the official business (which included the adoption of the rules of procedure, agenda and election of officers of the Conference) and a ceremonial opening in the afternoon, which was presided over by President, Dilma Rousseff, of Brazil.

The ceremonial opening saw addresses by President Rousseff, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, the President of the General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser and the Rio+20 Secretary-General, Sha Zukang.

President Rousseff referred to the draft text approved by pre-conference by countries, which she said was the result of a major effort to establish compromise solutions as we strive to the future we all wish.

The President added that the decision was not to go back on the principles agreed to (in Rio 1992) and on previous commitments agreed to. It was not enough to have just gains of the past but it is important to build on that legacy.

Rousseff then highlighted the important gains (from the outcome document) which included: the adoption of sustainable development goals (SDGs) that she said provides focus and guidance for our

collective efforts; the establishment of the high level political forum to follow on the implementation of the SDGs; strengthening the environment pillar with the United Nations Environment Programme endowed with a better mandate; expanded role of civil society regarding sustainable development; the adoption of a 10-year programme for sustainable production and consumption which had not been adopted before; recognition that GDP is not a sufficient measure to quantify development and working towards an alternative formula; and calls upon the private sector to incorporate sustainable development information into their balance sheets. She further stressed that oceans required increased attention as developing countries depended on them and called for action with a sense of urgency to protect marine resources and fish stocks in high seas. Rousseff said that it was incumbent on world leaders and governments to lead and to act.

The Brazilian President said leaders have gathered to take bold steps and the world required changes. In 1992, it was acknowledged that in efforts to achieve sustainable development, the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR) was key and it was also acknowledged that we needed to do away with unsustainable production systems and consumption patterns. Those (Rio) principles are here to stay but have yet to be effectively incorporated, she added.

Rousseff said that the promise for of funding from the developed world for mitigation and adaptation (in climate change) had not materialised. The commitments to reduce (greenhouse gas) emissions, which are part of the Kyoto Protocol, had not been fulfilled. The fundamental principle of CBDR has often been rejected in practice, and without (this principle), there could be no viable consensus for a fair and inclusive world. The gains of 1992 remain on paper and leaders have responsibility to act.

The world faces a serious international economic and financial crisis which has significance for the Rio +20 Conference, said Rouseff further. The crisis has shown that the development models have exhausted the ability to respond to contemporary challenges. She recalled that the experiences of the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America have led to pro-growth and pro-employment policies, which are important for economic recovery and provide a safe pathway.

In this moment of uncertainty, there is a strong temptation for focusing priority on domestic interests, said Rouseff. The political willingness for binding agreements tends to be weaker and this cannot be allowed to happen, added the Brazilian President further.

She said that the new vision of future is the SDGs, which parties have committed to negotiate in areas of interest.

UN Secretary-General Ban said that the old model for economic development and social advancement is broken. Rio+20 has given us a unique chance to set it right, to create a new model, to set a new course that truly balances the imperatives of robust growth and economic development with the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable prosperity and human well-being. We are running out of time and no longer have the luxury to defer difficult decisions and have a common responsibility to act in common cause, to set aside

narrow national interests in the name of the global public good and the betterment of all.

Ban said that the outcome document could guide efforts for sustainable development. He said the negotiations were hard and difficult but significant progress was made. The SDGs will build on advances made under the MDGs and are an integral part of the post 2015 development agenda. There were clear decisions on jobs, foods security, transport and cities. There was clear emphasis on gender empowerment. It was time to make Rio +20 our legacy, he added further.

Mr. Al-Nasser, the President of the General Assembly said that draft outcome document has agreed to launch a process for defining the SDGs. In this regard, the General Assembly is the most legitimate body to play a central role and to make the decisions for their implementation.

Sha Zukang, the Secretary-General of the Conference said that we are living in yet another historic moment. The green economy can be tool for sustainable development and we have agreed to strengthen the institutions for sustainable development. He called for the implementation of the decisions in the outcome document.

The first day of the Summit also heard statements from world leaders.

More than 40,000 people, including parliamentarians, mayors, and civil society leaders are attending Rio+20 Conference.