

Rio+20: Summit adopts text, ends with positive speeches

Rio de Janeiro, 25 June (Meena Raman) – The Rio+20 Summit ended on Friday, 22 June late evening with the adoption, to loud applause, of the outcome document entitled “The Future We Want”. This was followed by closing speeches by several delegations, some of which lodged reservations and interpretations.

There were then closing speeches by Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, the President of the UN General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser and the Rio+20 Conference Secretary-General, Sha Zukang. They described the Conference as “historic” for implementing sustainable development.

Brazilian President, Dilma Rousseff said that the outcome document was a landmark for sustainable development and was a historic step. She said it was a “starting point” and not a “threshold or ceiling” for implementing the path to sustainable development that had to be ambitious and should serve as a legacy for future generations.

Ban Ki Moon said that Rio+20 has affirmed fundamental principles, renewed essential commitments, and given us new direction, naming a few other achievements.

Sha Zukang said the outcome document should now be used to guide actions for the next 20 years. He listed the important outcomes as including sustainable development goals (SDGs), green economy, strengthening the environment pillar (of the institutional framework for sustainable development), setting up a high level political forum (on sustainable development), progress on sustainable consumption and production, marine biodiversity, and strengthening social protection floors.

In a session chaired by Brazilian Foreign Ministry senior official Luiz Machado, the outcome document was put before the delegates and

adopted, with loud applause. In the closing speeches, some countries then expressed their reservations on various paragraphs and this, including Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and the United States.

In the final two days (21-22 June), there had been corridor talk of a possible attempt to re-open the outcome document during the Summit. The document had been earlier finalised and adopted by negotiators on 19 June at the end of the “informal consultations” conducted by Brazil.

The corridor talk was sparked off by remarks by heads of states from Kenya, Niger and France who had in their statements to the Summit on the first day (20 June) indicated that they wanted the transformation of the United Nations Environment Organisation (UNEP) into a full United Nations Environment Organisation (UNEO) with equal status with other UN agencies.

This proposal had been strongly advocated by the European Union (EU) and some African countries, but had been opposed by other countries. The final document agreed on strengthening and upgrading UNEP through various measures but did not accept that it become a specialised agency.

However there was no attempt to re-open the text in the final Summit plenary and the adoption of the outcome document proceeded smoothly.

Algeria, speaking for the G77 and China welcomed the adoption of the outcome document. It said that although some proposals by the Group were not kept in outcome document, nonetheless, the balance characterised by the document paves a new path for reaching agreement on different areas that will start with the implementation phase. The G77 paid a tribute to Brazil for playing a leading role (in making consensus possible on the document).

The results achieved at the Summit provided the greatest chance for reaching ambition that all wish

for in the future in multilateral diplomacy, said the G77 and China chairman.

Denmark, speaking for the EU, while supporting the adoption of the document, said that there were a number of areas where it would have hoped for more ambition, as for example, timelines and goals in priority areas covered by the outcome document. It welcomed the document's acknowledgment of the important role of the green economy in achieving sustainable development and poverty reduction; the recognition of broader measures of progress to complement GDP; and the importance of corporate sustainability reporting.

The EU said it will remain fully engaged in operationalizing the SDGs and welcomed the decision on the institutional framework on sustainable development (IFSD) in particular, the strengthening of UNEP with universal membership and for a common global environmental agenda. The EU said it will continue to work for a full-fledged UNEO to be on equal footing with other UN organisations.

Bolivia said it joined the consensus but expressed its reservations on and interpretation of the outcome document. On the "green economy" Bolivia rejected it as a new model and tool for the privatization of nature and society pretending to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication. It said that countries have the sovereign right to choose their own approaches, visions, models and tools for sustainable development. It had chosen the vision of "Living Well" through a comprehensive model of integral development in harmony and balance with Mother Earth while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and its citizens.

On energy subsidies in paragraph 225 of the document, Bolivia reserved its position on the rationalization of inefficient subsidies of fossil sources of energy, as this implied a restructuring of its tax system and royalties, and is contrary to its constitution. It could not accept any kind of assessment, monitoring, reporting and reviewing of its national energy policies and measures that affected its sovereignty. On "innovative financing mechanisms", Bolivia had reservations that they could imply or be interpreted as sources from carbon markets, water markets and rights, payment for environmental services, and schemes for the commodification of the functions and cycles of nature.

Ecuador also expressed reservations in relation to

paragraph 225 in relation to "energy subsidies" and said it could not act in any way that was against its constitution. It said there was need for a new social contract as regards the rights of nature, requiring a change in the system and values of people.

Venezuela also said that in the interest of consensus, it agreed to the outcome document but it had reservations on certain paragraphs which were contrary to its sovereignty and constitution, which it would submit in writing.

Peru said that one of the most important achievements of the conference was the reaffirmation of the Rio principles and called for urgent and swift implementation of the outcomes. It wanted to see more ambition but the outcome document provided a road to follow.

Canada said that the outcome document was a balanced forward looking document. It said Brazil had shown leadership in shaping a balanced overall result. On the reaffirmation of the human right to water in paragraph 121 of the outcome document, its understanding was that this was essential to the right of everyone to adequate standard of living under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The human right to safe drinking water to be progressively realised does not encompass transboundary water issues including bulk water trade and mandatory allocation of international assistance, it added.

The United States joined the consensus on the outcome document to mark real advance on sustainable development. It was pleased that the document endorsed sexual and reproductive health and there was need to ensure women's reproductive rights. The US conveyed its intention to provide a statement for the record on several elements of the outcome document.

Kenya said that the process of the negotiations was open, transparent, balanced, intense and difficult and compromises were made. It called for practical actions.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo considered Rio+20 as a crucial step forward to lead to sustainable development. The strengthening of UNEP should lead to an institution that reflects its true functions.

Nicaragua said that the main issues of the Rio 1992 summit on sustainable development and poverty eradication must continue and efforts should not be diluted.

Switzerland said that progress was made but (the

conference) missed an historic opportunity. The outcome was a compromise and did not have the vision and strong commitment needed. It avoided a major setback and there were some progress in specific areas. The green economy was not a threat to sustainable development but was an opportunity, it added.

Iceland regretted the lack to reference to reproductive rights in the outcome document.

Brazil's Luiz Machado, who chaired the official closing session, stated that the statements of reservation and interpretations would be included in the report of the Summit.

For the Summit's closing ceremony, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff took over as Chair. In her own closing speech, Rousseff said that the outcome document was a landmark for sustainable development and was a historic step. She said it was a "starting point" and not a "threshold or ceiling" for implementing the path to sustainable development that had to be ambitious and should serve as a legacy for future generations.

The document was a consensus for collective ambition and that same spirit was needed for the solutions, said Rousseff. Saying that the document did not set back the gains of the 1992 Rio, Johannesburg or other summits, she said it was a great step forward.

She highlighted some of the key decisions which included: recognition of the need to eradicate poverty and hunger and respect for human rights; the SDGs provided focus and guidance for the future we want; the high level political forum will now coordinate sustainable development and ensure implementation of the SDGs; UNEP is to be further strengthened, even from a budget perspective; recognition of the need to have an indicator that will be more than GDP; adoption of a 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable production and consumption; recognition of the status of marine biodiversity and a decision on the development of a treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity (beyond national jurisdiction).

(Paragraph 162 of the outcome document reads: "We recognize the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. We note the ongoing work under the General Assembly of an ad hoc open-ended informal working group to study issues

relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction. Building on the work of the ad hoc working group and before the end of the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly we commit to address, on an urgent basis, the issue of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, including by taking a decision on the development of an international instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.)

The Brazilian President was convinced that this Conference would bring sweeping changes for current and future generations with economic growth which was inclusive, enabled the distribution of income and respects environmental sustainability.

She said that multilateralism is a global expression of democracy and is the legitimate pathway to find solutions.

Rousseff pledged US\$ 6 million to UNEP and US \$10 million for the most vulnerable countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

(On the first day of the Summit, China's Premier Wen Jiabao also announced that China will contribute US\$ 6 million to UNEP and US \$31.7 million for a three-year international project to help SIDS, underdeveloped countries and African countries tackle climate change.)

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said the conference was successful and the leaders of the world have renewed their commitment to sustainable development. The outcome document which was adopted by consensus provides a firm foundation for social, economic and environmental well-being. It will guide all of us towards a sustainable path and it is now our responsibility to build on it, said Ban.

He added that Rio+20 has affirmed fundamental principles, renewed essential commitments, and given us new direction. Agreement was reached to establish universal SDGs to create a stronger international architecture to support sustainable development. A 10-year framework on sustainable consumption and production has been adopted and there is acknowledgment of the potential for greening economies. The road ahead is long and hard, he said, with too many people remaining poor, hungry and vulnerable to easily preventable disease, and the environmental base that will

improve their opportunities for prosperity is under unprecedented threat. No longer can we afford to recklessly consume scarce resources. No longer can we carelessly pollute fragile ecosystems. No longer can we mortgage our future for our short-term needs. Rio+20 had given us a solid platform to build on and has given us the tools to build with. The work starts now concluded Ban. Top of Form

Sha Zukang, the Secretary-General of the Conference said the Conference was historic and the next stage of the work was to take the outcome document and use it to guide actions for the next 20 years. He said the process to launch the SDGs provided an expression of commitment for the future we want. Other important ground-breaking outcomes were: the application of green economy policies as a useful tool for sustainable development; agreement to strengthen the environment pillar; decision to have a high level

political forum for sustainable development to integrate the three pillars; progress on sustainable consumption and production; sustainable use of marine biodiversity; addressing marine pollution and ocean acidification; more liveable cities and communities; strengthening social protection floors and tackling youth unemployment; decision on a strategy for mobilisation of financing and technology transfer. Sustainable development is the only option for the common future, he added further.

The President of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser said that member states had come a long way and the conference was historic. He said the UNGA has played a central role and the outcome document provided critical guidance for implementation and the right decisions needed to be made in the UNGA.