



COMMONWEALTH INFORMATION

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MEETING OF COMMONWEALTH ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS

CHAIR'S SUMMARY STATEMENT

**United Nations, New York
Tuesday 24 June 1997**

Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House,
London SW1Y 5HX.

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UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

CHAIR'S SUMMARY STATEMENT

Commonwealth Environment Ministers met on 24 June in New York during the 19th Special Session of the UN General Assembly, to review progress in the implementation of the Rio agreements and discuss priorities for further action. The meeting was chaired by Senator the Hon Robert Hill, Minister for the Environment, Australia. Ministers addressed issues in three major areas: implementation of conventions/agreements; integration of economic and environmental policies; and financing environmentally sustainable development. Ministers underscored the need to accelerate the transition to environmentally sustainable development worldwide, within the framework of the Rio agreements, through, inter alia:

- full and effective implementation of existing conventions/agreements, including their strengthening where needed;
- the integration of economic and environmental policies; and
- promoting greater resource flows from all sources to assist the implementation of Agenda 21 in poorer countries.

Ministers urged greater support for the efforts of developing countries to address poverty issues which had a direct impact on environmental sustainability. They supported the objective of reducing by half, by the year 2015, the proportion of people living in absolute poverty.

Ministers agreed that climate change and sea-level rise were critical issues requiring urgent global response. They emphasised the need for an effective outcome at the Kyoto Conference of Parties to the Convention on Climate Change. They noted that different approaches had been proposed, with some emphasising the adoption of legally binding targets for uniform reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases of industrial countries, while others emphasised the need for an agreement to be achievable, fair and realistic. The importance of ensuring that the outcome of the Kyoto meeting did not impose constraints on the growth prospects of developing countries was also emphasised. Ministers believed that Commonwealth consultations and the sharing of information on the implications of different approaches to mitigate climate change could contribute to consensus in the run-up to Kyoto. They also believed that exchange of experience in integrating environmental considerations in transport and energy sector policies would be useful.

On forests, Ministers recognised the urgency of further action to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. They

noted that many countries had made voluntary commitments on conservation and sustainable forest management, and urged the international community to assist developing countries to implement such commitments. While differing views were expressed on the value of a convention on forests, Ministers stressed the importance of implementing the recommendations of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, and the need for continuing dialogue with a view to identifying possible elements for arrangements and mechanisms or a legally binding instrument on forests.

Recognising the particular vulnerabilities and special problems of small island developing states, Ministers expressed disappointment that little progress had been made in the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action on the sustainable development of these countries. They called on the international community to give greater recognition to the concerns of small island developing states. They agreed that the Commonwealth, more than half of whose members were small states, was well placed to give a high priority to the needs of these countries.

Ministers welcomed the role of the Commonwealth in promoting sustainable development through practical programmes and projects. They believed that Commonwealth co-operation could be particularly useful in areas such as raising awareness of the importance of the Convention on Desertification; the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and related know-how; assisting countries to implement international conventions on environment; management of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and the possibility of a Commonwealth fisheries protection agreement; and coastal zone management.

Ministers welcomed the Commonwealth's role in supporting the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana, which represented a major contribution towards the implementation of the Rio agreements on forests, biodiversity and climate change. They considered that the Programme's unique approach of combining conservation with sustainable use of forest resources generously contributed by Guyana, could serve as a model for other countries. Ministers agreed to use their best endeavours to provide tangible support for the Programme, and hoped that at the forthcoming meeting of Iwokrama's Donor Support Group, the donor community would pledge adequate resources to enable the Programme to realise its rich potential for global benefit.

Ministers looked forward to constructive dialogue at the UN Special Session, and hoped that this would result in determined action by the international community to fulfill the Rio agreements and commitments. They agreed that meetings of Commonwealth Environment Ministers provided a valuable forum to contribute to this process.