

Strengthening International Governance for Sustainable Development: Expectations for the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit

Ulrich Beyerlin

SUMMARY

During the broad preparatory process for the Johannesburg World Summit there was hope that Johannesburg would become the starting point for establishing a more effective "international environmental governance". However, there is still controversial debate on how to achieve the aim of better governance. As the idea of establishing a Global Environment Organisation (GEO) with which the existing UNEP could merge can, at best be realised in the long run, UNEP should continue to play its leading role in the field of international environmental action. However, it will undoubtedly be unable to do so unless its internal structure and financial base are considerably strengthened. It was certainly a serious handicap that, until recently, the UNEP Governing Council has hampered effective ministerial participation and continuity in governance. Now it is supposed to share its governance role with the newly established Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF), functioning as an additional UNEP policy organ that is expected to provide broad overarching policy advice. The GMEF is determined to meet annually at ministerial level. But there is still controversial debate on the question whether the GMEF, as opposed to the Governing Council, is to be organised as a body with universal membership. In the author's view, UNEP should continue to function as a non-plenary organ with clear-cut decision-making powers. It should meet at the ministerial level. Considering its broad range of tasks, it should function on a permanent basis in the future. And, finally, it should be assisted by a high-level intergovernmental body for providing broad overarching environmental policy advice; the GMEF might function as such a body. Both UNEP and the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) must foster environmental protection and development as a uniform endeavour which urgently requires integrated solutions. This can be done by effecting a pragmatic division of work at functional and operational levels.

In addition, three other strategies of strengthening international environmental governance should be pursued: First, the various international environmental treaty-making and treaty-implementation processes should be better harmonised or, at least, co-ordinated; in this context, UNEP is called upon to continue and intensify its efforts to enhance the synergies and linkages between multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) with comparable areas of focus, by prompting the respective MEA secretariats to enter into appropriate co-ordination arrangements and giving them full logistic support in this respect. Second, as many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have considerable knowledge and expertise in environmental and developmental matters, States should consider intensifying the partnership with them. States

should, however, be empowered to make a selective choice among the mass of NGOs operating at international level. They should accept as partners only those NGOs which meet certain qualitative requirements. Third, as local governments are key components of national sustainable development strategies if such plans are to succeed, the existing local Agenda 21 processes should be expanded and intensified. In particular, supporting the direct engagement of local and sub-national institutions from around the world in international activities and partnerships is an important component of good international environmental governance