

Open Letter to the Secretary General for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), Co-Chairs of the Bureau for Rio+20 and Member-States of the United Nations

RIGHTS AT RISK AT THE UNITED NATIONS

We – the civil society organizations and social movements who have responded to the call of the United Nations General Assembly to participate in the Rio+20 process – feel that it is our duty to call the attention of relevant authorities and citizens of the world to a situation that severely threatens the rights of all people and undermines the relevance of the United Nations.

Remarkably, we are witnessing an attempt by certain countries to weaken, or “bracket” or outright eliminate nearly all references to human rights obligations and equity principles in the text, “The Future We Want”, for the outcome of Rio+20.

This includes references to the right to food and proper nutrition, the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation, the right to development and others. The right to a clean and healthy environment, which is essential to the realization of fundamental human rights, remains weak in the text. Even principles previously agreed upon in Rio in 1992 are being bracketed – the Polluter Pays Principle, Precautionary Principle, Common But Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR).

Many member states are opposing prescriptive language that commits governments to actually do what they claim to support in principle and act as duty bearers of human rights, including the provision of finance, technology and other means of implementation to support sustainable development effort in developing countries. On the other hand, there is a strong push for private sector investments and initiatives to fill in the gap left by the public sector. This risks privatizing and commoditizing common goods – such as water – which in turn endangers access and affordability, which are fundamental to such rights.

Although economic tools are essential to implement the decisions aiming for sustainability, social justice and peace, a private economy rationale should not prevail over the fulfillment of human needs and the respect of planetary boundaries. Therefore a strong institutional framework and regulation is needed. Weakly regulated markets have already proven to be a threat not only to people and nature, but to economies and nation states themselves. Markets must work for people, people should not work for markets.

From the ashes of World War II humanity gathered to build institutions aiming to build peace and prosperity for all, avoiding further suffering and destruction. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights spells out this collective will, and the United Nations organization was created to make it a reality. Alarming, this very institution is now being used as a platform to attack the very rights it should safeguard, leaving people without defense and putting the very relevance of the UN at stake.

We urge member states to bring the Rio+20 negotiations back on track to deliver the people’s legitimate agenda and the realization of rights, democracy and sustainability, as well as respect for transparency, accountability and non-regression on progress made.

We call on the UN Secretary General to stand up for the legacy of the United Nations by ensuring that Rio+20 builds on the multi-generational effort to strengthen rights as the foundation of peace and prosperity.

We urge our fellow citizens of the world to stand up for the future we want, and let their voices be heard. To that end the Rio+20 process should be improved by adopting the proposals we submit below.

On Greater participation for MGs

We are concerned by the continuing exclusion of Major Groups from the formal negotiating process of the Rio+20 zero draft. Unlike in the Preparatory Committee Meetings and the Intersessional Meetings, Major Groups and other Stakeholders have not been allowed to present revisions or make statements on the floor of the meeting. Nor, we suspect will we be allowed to make submissions or participate fully in the working negotiation group meetings that are likely to follow. Despite the UN DESA having compiled a text that shows all the revisions suggested by Major Groups, these revisions to the zero draft have so far not been included in the official negotiating text.

We request that the Major Groups be given the opportunity to submit suggestions and wording which would then be added to the official text for consideration, indication of support or deletion, and potential inclusion by governments.

We appeal to the UNCSO Secretary General to urgently reverse this state of affairs and to ensure that Major Groups have a seat at the table and a voice in the room where the negotiations are taking place. Please ensure that at the very least, Major Groups are allowed a formal statement at the commencement of the next negotiating session and at every session where a new draft text is introduced.#

SIGNED:

Ibon International

Vitae Civilis

The Access Initiative

Stakeholder Forum

Council of Canadians

Consumers International

Sustain Labour

International Trade Union Confederation

CIVICUS

Women in Europe for a Common Future