

## **Briefing Session on Youth**

### **Youth and Environment**

#### **Summary Report**

The Programme on Youth of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs held a Briefing Session on Youth and Environment on 9 March 2011 in UN Headquarters, New York. The lunchtime Briefing forms part of a series of 12 briefings convened in the context of the International Year of Youth (2010-2011). The UN Programme on Youth organized this session to focus the spotlight on the many ways in which young people contribute to sustainable living and environmental awareness through involvement in advocacy, national adaptation and mitigation actions as well as international negotiations. The Briefing Session was open to Member States, UN staff and civil society NGOs with ECOSOC status.

Moderated by Mr. David O'Connor of the UN Division for Sustainable Development, the Briefing brought together three panellists:

- Ms Catalina Santamaria, Forest Affairs Officer, UN Forum on Forests;
- Ms Nandhini Iyer-Krishna, Liaison Officer, Convention on Biological Diversity;
- Mr Nicolò Wojewoda, Director, Road to Rio+20, Peace Child International.

Mr O'Connor introduced the panellists, providing a brief bio of each (see p. 3). Taking a question and answer format, the panellists were asked two rounds of questions, with audience participants also given the opportunity to pose their own questions. During the first round of questions, the panel examined the impact of environmental damage on young people and emphasized the concrete actions being undertaken by youth to promote environmental causes. The second round focused on mobilizing and involving youth in the lead-up to the Rio+20 Earth Summit from 4 to 6 June 2012. Audience member asked questions regarding ways to reach out to those without internet access and the influence of youth in environmental discussions, particularly indigenous youth.

Ms Santamaria detailed the significant impact of deforestation and forest degradation on young people. She identified direct and indirect ways in which biodiversity decline consequent to deforestation affects youth well-being. Indeed, young people suffer from the impacts of deforestation on environmental, health, economic and social levels. Direct impacts on environment and health include pollution and proliferation of diseases. Among the social impacts are restricted education, migration and an increased likelihood of conflict resulting from competition for viable land. On an economic level, deforestation limits opportunities for employment and can provoke an increase in food prices, which carries a range of effects.

Ms. Santamaria also highlighted the need for youth to be involved in sustainable development as key stakeholders. She highlighted the reasons for which the UN Forest Forum was working closely with youth Focal Points and junior professionals:

young people are socially conscious and active agents of change, responsible and idealist, as well as well-versed in technology -- they are great role models for society. The International Year of Forests provides a platform to showcase initiatives and celebrate “Forest Heroes”. Ms Santamaria further discussed the important links between the International Year of Forests and the International Year of Youth, and explained how the joining of the two Years was providing a platform for youth to showcase their initiatives.

Mr Wohewoda provided tangible examples of youth-driven environmental initiatives using innovative means such as campaigning, advocacy, campus communication or NGO work. He stressed the importance of integrating the “business side” in order to meet environment challenges. Governments can enhance the impact of such initiatives through dialogue with involved youth, establishing fair partnerships of which youth could take leadership, and serving as a convenor and platform.

On the subject of youth inclusion in the lead-up to -- and in -- the Rio+20 Summit, Mr Wohewoda explained how widespread awareness about sustainable development and the goals of Rio+20 could help create an open space and a proactive environment for youth. He defended a compelling argument for enabling youth to arrive at the Summit not with demands, but ideas. Mr Wohewoda demonstrated the ambition to come with a global youth statement.

Ms Iyer-Krishna explained the magnitude of environmental degradation and its impact on the most disadvantaged people, including youth, who rely on bio-resources. She emphasized the need to raise awareness in order to compensate for the information deficit on environmental topics. The Convention on Biological Diversity is greatly concerned with reaching out to youth through creative social and web-based media.

Ms Iyer-Krishna concluded the event with several examples of CBD’s innovative strategies to bridge the information gap, such as the “Green Wave” initiative and the “1000 Days for the Planet” initiative. She highlighted the importance of engaging youth through schools, community organizations, the internet and social media. It was recognized that in the developing world, access to technology is limited and that there is great need for effective outreach strategies. Potential was identified in creative approaches, such as internet volunteers who engage in community meetings by telephone and respond to questions by accessing internet resources and posting information.

The Briefing Session provided an engaging overview of youth involvement in environmental causes and highlighted the particular role that youth can play in the lead-up to Rio+20.

## **Further information on this topic**

---

International Year of Forests: <http://www.un.org/en/events/iyof2011/>

International Year of Youth: <http://social.un.org/youthyear/>

The Green Wave: <http://greenwave.cbd.int/en/home>

Road to Rio+20: <http://www.roadtorioplus20.org/>

For more information on this issue, consult the International Year of Youth Fact Sheet: Youth and Climate Change: <http://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/Fact%20Sheet-%20Youth%20and%20Climate%20Change.pdf>

## **Panellist biographies**

---

### **Jeanne Catalina Santamaria:**

Ms Santamaria's professional focus has been on environment and sustainable development issues since 1999. In her current position, she serves as a Forest Policy Affairs Officer for the Secretariat of the United Nations Forum on Forests, based at UN headquarters in New York, in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). She is responsible for interagency coordination among fourteen forest-related organizations, institutions and secretariats and serves as the focal point on forest biodiversity issues. Ms Santamaria has also been the lead on strategic policy issues related to natural resources and conflict, post-disaster and post-conflict development and recovery, crime and drug control as well as MDG-related activities.

### **Nandhini Iyer Krishna:**

Ms Iyer Krishna is the CBD/UNCCD liaison officer in New York. She is a joint staff of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. She has worked on multilateral sustainable development and environment issues for over twenty years. Prior to joining the UN, she was a career diplomat for the Government of India. Her academic credentials include a PhD and several publications.

### **Nicolò Wojewoda:**

Mr Wojewoda is the Director of "Road to Rio+20", a coalition of organizations coordinated by Peace Child International developing global youth mobilization towards the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012. He is also a member of the Youth Caucus at the UN Commission for Sustainable Development and has spoken on behalf of the Major Group Children & Youth in both CSD sessions and Rio+20 preparatory meetings. In addition to his UN activities, Mr Wojewoda is a co-founder of the first global organization of engineering students (SPEED) and the founder of Yparticipate, a global youth-led community advocating and actively working to get young people involved in decisions that affect them. He also recently became a member of the Sandbox Network, a global community of hand-selected young achievers and innovators under 30.