Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1449 (2005)[1]

The environment and the Millennium Development Goals

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In September 2000 the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are part of the road map to implement the Millennium Declaration in addressing the world's most important development challenges. A Millennium Review Summit will take place in September 2005 to assess progress and give directions to meet the MDGs. Sustainable development is at the heart of the MDGs and this should be reflected in the decisions to be taken at the UN meeting in September 2005.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its Resolution 1318 (2003) on globalisation and sustainable development, highlighting the links between globalisation, planet-wide risks and shared responsibilities that create a need for concerted action by the international community, as well as its Resolution 1319 (2003) on the follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development: a common challenge, where the Assembly stressed the opportunities that parliamentary action can provide as a useful contribution to sustainable development at the global level.

3. The Assembly welcomes the commitment of the heads of state and government of member states of the Council of Europe to achieve the MDGs expressed in the Warsaw Summit Declaration and Action Plan of 17 May 2005 and in particular the reference to "everyone's entitlement to live in a balanced, healthy environment" (Action Plan, IV-3) and to "promoting sustainable development" (Action Plan, II-7).

4. The goal of ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG 7) includes specific targets to integrate sustainable development principles into country policies and programmes, reverse the loss of environmental resources; reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015; and achieve significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.

5. The targets included in MDG 7 are far from being met and more needs to be done to take environmental concerns into account. Besides the great importance of ensuring global sustainability, the state of the environment is also crucial for achieving other Millennium Development Goals: a clean and safe environment is indeed a necessary condition to achieve the MDGs related to improving human health and eradicating poverty and hunger.

6. National sectoral policies, such as those relating to the environment, agriculture, fisheries, energy and education, can have a major influence on aid and development policies of industrialised countries and therefore have an impact on meeting the MDGs. A number of countries, including those of the European Union, are working on ways in which non-aid policies can assist to accelerate progress to meet the MDGs.

7. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, published in March 2005, has shown that 60% of ecosystem elements supporting life on earth, such as fresh water, clean air or a relatively stable climate, are being degraded or used unsustainably. We can decrease the human pressure on the services that nature provides but this requires radical changes in the way nature is treated at every level of decision making, as well as new forms of co-operation between government, business and civil society.

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1. Assembly debate on 20 June 2005 (17th Sitting) (see Doc. 10566, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Dupraz). Text adopted by the Assembly on 20 June 2005 (17th Sitting).

8. The MDGs are a very ambitious set of objectives but they can still be achieved by 2015 with intensive efforts by all parties to improve governance, actively engage civil society, mobilise domestic resources, substantially increase aid and make suitable policy reforms at the global level, such as in the field of trade.

9. The Assembly recognises the high impact that personal choices and decisions in Europe have in other parts of the world. It also recognises that it is a challenge for Europe to address the impact of its own production and consumption patterns on the global environment and stresses the need to de-couple economic growth from environmental degradation.

10. The Assembly affirms the importance of taking account of the cost of inaction and weighing it against increased future costs of action. The Assembly recalls its Recommendation 1653 (2004) on environmental accounting as a sustainable development tool, where it underlined that the adoption of such an accounting system at all levels of government would enable political decision makers to know the environmental outcomes of the policies implemented, as well as integrate the "environment variable" into decision-making processes, and therefore make the environmental effects of government policy more perceptible.

11. The Assembly fully supports European Union plans to "do more" about achieving the MDGs by focusing on increasing official aid, speeding up reforms to improve the quality of aid, rethinking the way that the EU influences the conditions for development and ensuring that Africa is the main beneficiary of these new approaches, while seizing new opportunities for partnership between the two continents.

12. The Assembly considers unacceptable that 1.2 billion people in the world lack access to safe drinking water and 2.6 billion lack access to basic sanitation. It recognises that EU governments provide €1.4 billion annually to water and sanitation in developing countries, as well as the additional resources provided by civil society organisations.

13. It welcomes World Water Day on 22 March 2005, marking the start of the UN International Decade for Action "Water for Life", (2005-2015). It further welcomes the organisation of a European Solidarity Week on water issues from 17 to 21 October 2005, in Strasbourg, with the participation of the Council of Europe and the organisation of a joint colloquy by the Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. This event will make a contribution to the 4th World Water Forum on "Local Actions for a Global Challenge" which will take place in Mexico in March 2006.

14. Council of Europe member countries have a good situation regarding access to improved water sources but the quality of drinking water often does not meet basic standards, constituting a major health risk. The level of access to basic sanitation in Europe is high but the maintenance of sewage systems is a problem in many countries. The target to integrate sustainable development principles into national policies and programmes is an area in need of improvement in all countries and Council of Europe member states need to intensify their efforts to make progress in "greening" their sectoral policies.

15. In the light of these elements, the Assembly recommends that member states:

ensure access to water and sanitation for all, which should be considered as a fundamental human right;

address the burden placed on local authorities regarding the provision of water and sanitation and the importance of improving local and regional capacity (technical, technological and financial) to achieve this goal;

improve water governance and facilitate decentralisation of decision making on water and sanitation matters;

develop integrated water resource management and water efficiency plans, including the establishment of the necessary legal and institutional frameworks;

support and fully engage on the EU Water Initiative, designed to contribute to achieving global targets for drinking water and sanitation by mobilising a wide range of partners to increase co-ordination and co-operation on water issues at all levels, under the overarching policy framework of integrated water resources management based on a river basin approach;

step up efforts to curb unsustainable consumption and production patterns through regulations, economic incentives, ecological tax reform, public information and education;

integrate environmental issues in the dialogue with partner countries and support them to meet their obligations under environmental agreements;

incorporate the sustainable management of natural resources, including biodiversity, in development co-operation programmes;

co-operate and work further to develop a global framework to address climate change post-2012 by promoting the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, based on countries' common but differentiated responsibilities and capabilities;

endeavour to achieve the objective to earmark 0.7% of their GDP for official development aid and, for those that have not already done so, adopt a timetable to meet this target, which was set in 1970 but has only been met by five member states so far: Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. Six further member states (Belgium, France, Finland, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom) have adopted timetables to achieve this target before 2015;

work with UN agencies to develop effective follow-up and monitoring systems to assess progress in meeting the MDGs and the actions needed;

join efforts with international donors to tackle the main challenges identified by member states, such as:

a. strengthen institutions and law enforcement;

b. develop adequate legal frameworks;

c. develop sectoral strategies, particularly in water and air quality;

d. increase financial resources;

e. improve public awareness and public participation;

f. build capacity to collect and analyse data;

g. develop local capacities;

h. integrate ecological and social priorities in the reforms that central and eastern European countries are currently undertaking;

establish multifunctional agricultural policies so as to preserve life's essential elements: water, air and soil;

set up international trade rules, in the context of the World Trade Organization Doha Round, which take significant account of the non-economic effects of agriculture on the environment with the aim of preserving water, air and soil.

16. The Assembly calls on national parliaments to contribute to keeping the political momentum on the MDGs beyond the UN Summit in September 2005. It further calls on national parliaments to lead the way in ensuring that the governments of member states take action to honour their commitments regarding the MDGs.

17. It recommends that national, regional and local authorities fully engage, within their area of jurisdiction and competence, in activities to meet the MDGs so that Europe meets its share of global responsibility towards other countries and regions, and to present and future generations.

18. The Assembly urges global leaders, and particularly the five member states of the Council of Europe that belong to the G8, to show their commitment towards achieving the MDGs, including through urgent action against climate change, at the G8 Summit in Scotland from 6 to 8 July 2005.