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## **World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD): Background and Summary**

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## Summary

Marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary year after the 1992 “Earth Summit” held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) convened heads of state from around the world, charged by the United Nations to consider progress since the 1992 conference and map out a plan for future development that would be sustainable in social, environmental, and economic terms. The WSSD, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, August 26-September 4, 2002, was preceded by preparatory meetings that engaged in lengthy and contentious negotiations on possible decisions and documents. The final preparatory meeting was held in Bali, Indonesia, May 27-June 7, but left several controversial elements of the negotiations unresolved. Many observers questioned whether the final negotiations in the days just preceding the August 26 beginning of the Summit could resolve the remaining differences, but by the end of the meeting, agreement had been reached on both a “Plan of Implementation” covering the wide spectrum of issues related to sustainable development and a “Political Declaration” approved by the 100 heads of state attending the meeting. President Bush declined to attend; Secretary of State Colin Powell led the U.S. delegation.

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# World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD): Background and Summary

## Issues

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held August 26-September 4, 2002, was charged by the United Nations General Assembly with assessing progress and charting a future course regarding implementation of "Agenda 21," the action plan for sustainable development agreed upon 10 years before at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Four preparatory meetings (PrepComs) to formulate and negotiate possible outcomes of the WSSD were held and final discussions were conducted at the Summit itself. Several of the most difficult issues, including additional financial resources for developing countries, "good governance," and capacity building, reached somewhat of a stalemate between developing and developed countries in the preparatory period. As a result, although agreement was reached among the world's nations—most of which sent delegations to the PrepComs—on some 73% of the text for a draft plan of implementation for sustainable development before the WSSD, the press and many observers described the status of negotiations at the conclusion of the 4<sup>th</sup> PrepCom in Bali, Indonesia, as "failed" or "collapsed."

In addition to the draft implementation plan, a political declaration and a series of "Type 2" outcomes were agreed upon during the WSSD. The latter will outline partnerships for sustainable development for on-the-ground action undertaken cooperatively by a variety of stakeholders such as governments, businesses, public interest groups, and others. The over-arching issue for the WSSD is now whether greater success will result from the draft implementation plan than appeared to follow from the completion of Agenda 21 in 1992. The process in 2002 produced a sense of "deja vu" in many observers, who saw a replay of many of the issues and concerns that were present in the 1992 UNCED process. There was a sense among many participants that the WSSD negotiations had a goal of being more integrative of the "three pillars" of sustainable development: the economic, social, and environmental elements.

## Background

The predecessor to the WSSD, the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (known popularly as the Rio Earth Summit), was held June 3-14, 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. That date was chosen to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, which was the first global environmental conference held by the United Nations. The 1992 conference was a product of growing international concern over the global environment. It provided an opportunity for national leaders to reach consensus on how to promote

“sustainable development”—integrating the linkages between environmental, economic, social and development priorities. The broader focus reflected a realization that environmental goals would be optimally achieved in the context of appropriate social and economic development.

UNCED was the largest summit of national leaders ever held, attracting well over 100 heads of state or government. In addition, more than 20,000 people from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and various professional groups attended the constellation of events surrounding the conference, including the very large “Global Forum” organized by NGOs, with daily parallel events during the course of the UNCED. The Conference produced wide agreement on the goal of environmentally sustainable development, but there were few specifics or definitions attached to the term in the statements and objectives in UNCED documents. Defining sustainable development in operational terms has remained one of the major challenges of UNCED follow-up activities.

The Rio Earth Summit produced three documents intended to provide recommendations and guidance for sustainable development. They were not legally binding, although they were negotiated word-for-word and adopted by a consensus resolution:

- ! The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, a relatively short statement of 27 guiding principles that represent consensus on the basis for sustainable development;
- ! A statement of forest principles, titled, “Authoritative, Non-legally Binding Statement on the Sustainable Management of the World’s Forests.” This non-binding statement of principles was agreed on in place of the treaty on global forest management originally sought (but later opposed) by the United States.
- ! Agenda 21, the extensive “action plan” that provides guidance on actions needed to bring about environmentally sustainable development into the 21st century. The 40 chapters of Agenda 21 include recommended actions across nearly the entire spectrum of environment and development issues: technology transfer; science objectives; capacity building for management and administration; integration of environment into decision making; consumption and production patterns; population and demographic patterns; roles of major groups such as non-governmental organizations, women, farmers and others; trade and international economy; biodiversity; biotechnology; oceans and seas; land resources, including desertification, soil loss, and sustainable agriculture; freshwater resources; wastes, including hazardous and solid wastes; education and training; health; atmosphere, including ozone depletion and energy efficiency; legal instruments, and others.

It was agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit that a U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) would be established, and this body has met annually since then to review progress on specific issues identified in Agenda 21. One product of the deliberations of the CSD has been the establishment of an on-going U.N. Forum on Forests that continues to negotiate forest-related issues.

Nations have been reporting their activities on specific issues to the CSD. For the WSSD, nations have submitted special reports that more broadly summarize their sustainable development activities.<sup>1</sup>

**Treaties Signed at UNCED: Climate Change and Biodiversity.** In addition, two legally binding treaties were opened for signature at UNCED, dealing with two of the major issues that were driving much of the concern over the global environment: the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These treaties were negotiated in processes that were separate from but parallel to UNCED preparations, and they are currently being implemented by countries through continuous meetings of the “conference of the parties” (COPs). While the completion of these treaties was viewed by many as a keystone for the success of UNCED, they were—and they remain—on parallel tracks that are not directly part of the Earth Summit/UNCED/WSSD processes. The issues addressed by these treaties are widely regarded as critical components in “sustainable development,” and are likely to be addressed as part of the WSSD agenda, but the treaties themselves and their requirements were not on the agenda per se (although the precise wording of how nations were to be encouraged to ratify the Kyoto Protocol proved highly controversial, ending with agreement on this language: “...States that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol strongly urge States that have not already done so to ratify.”

The United States has signed and ratified the Climate Change Framework Convention and is thus a party to it; the United States has signed but not ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and as a consequence is not a party. The major environmental treaty in the spotlight since 1997 has been the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC, which provides for legally binding reductions by developed countries of greenhouse gas emissions related to global warming concerns (see CRS Report RL30692, *Global Climate Change: The Kyoto Protocol*). President Clinton signed the Protocol in 1998, but did not submit it to the Senate for advice and consent; President Bush has rejected the Protocol, but the other 37 nations with obligations under the Protocol have declared it their goal to ratify the treaty, with enough ratifications to bring it into force, even without U.S. participation.

**Earth Summit + 5: a Review of Issues.** At the five-year point after UNCED, in mid-June, 1997, the United Nations General Assembly held a Special Session on Environment and Development in New York, to review progress on follow-up to the 1992 Earth Summit. Over 50 heads of state, including U.S. President Clinton, attended and spoke at this session. A major underlying concern at that meeting was assuring success in the parallel process of negotiations on the protocol to the UNFCCC, which culminated in the December 1997 completion of the Kyoto Protocol in Japan.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the “Earth Summit+5 Round-up Press Release” from the United Nations noted that “...the final document adopted by delegates from over 165 countries—while taking small steps forward on a number of

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<sup>1</sup>The U.S. report and reports of other nations can be viewed at [<http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/cp2002.htm>].

issues, including preventing climate change, forest loss and freshwater scarcity—disappointed many in that it contained few new concrete commitments on action needed.”<sup>2</sup> Delegates had wrestled with a number of agenda items, but found that agreement was difficult, especially on longstanding points of North-South contention, such as “new and additional financing” for developing countries to fund the costs of implementing the recommendations in Agenda 21. The complexity and difficulty of reaching consensus on concrete steps to achieve sustainable development was very evident at this Earth Summit follow-up session.

## **WSSD: Key Issues**

In December 2000, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution A/RES/55/199, “Ten-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development,” in which it issued its decision to organize the WSSD and welcomed the opportunity to hold the conference in South Africa in 2002. The decision, which has a lengthy set of findings and statements welcoming the work of various organizations, also states,

“...that the Summit, including its preparatory process, should ensure a balance between economic development, social development and environmental protection, as these are interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development.”<sup>3</sup> The decision further states, “...the review should focus on the identification of accomplishments and areas where further efforts are needed to implement Agenda 21 and other outcomes of [UNCED] and should focus on action-oriented decisions in areas where further efforts are needed....new challenges and opportunities, and result in renewed political commitment and support for sustainable development consistent, inter alia, with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities;”

The negotiations preceding the WSSD proved to be problematic, which was not unexpected for a major conference on such a broad array of issues. The second of four preparatory “committee” meetings (PrepComs) was held January 28-February 8, 2002,<sup>4</sup> followed by the third March 25-April 5, and the final Prepcom was held in Bali, Indonesia, May 25-June 7. (In essence, all nations are invited to participate in the preparatory committee meetings, and most send delegations). Despite extensive discussion at these PrepComs, final agreement was not reached, as had been hoped, by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> PrepCom on text for a declaration or future action on sustainable development. Many observers feared a “failure” in Johannesburg, but the negotiations in the days just before the WSSD and during its course succeeded in resolving the major issues and finalizing the two documents emerging from the Summit. Discussions and issues covered at the three substantive PrepComs are summarized below, providing an overview of the organization of negotiations and the run-up to the Johannesburg Summit.

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<sup>2</sup> [<http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/sustdev/es5final.htm>]

<sup>3</sup>[<http://www.johannesburgsummit.org>]

<sup>4</sup>The first PrepCom was held in New York, April 30-May 2, 2001, and was primarily a procedural and process-oriented session.

**PrepCom 2.** Reports were given at the second PrepCom in Jan.-Feb. 2002, on a variety of meetings that had been held in different locations around the world, including five major regional preparatory meetings for the WSSD held in 2001.<sup>5</sup> The WSSD secretariat prepared a summary and compilation which identified a number of common issues raised and priorities identified at these meetings. Nearly all identified these five concerns: first, the WSSD represents a solution-finding phase, not problem identification; second, integration of the “three pillars” of sustainable development—social, economic and environmental— is key; third, new realities like globalization must be addressed in order to promote equity and inclusion; fourth, the WSSD should focus on key areas and deliverables that can “accelerate progress towards the realization of the goals of sustainable development;” and fifth, there is a need to strengthen international institutional arrangements for sustainable development.

In addition, some 16 issue areas were identified in the summary of the regional meetings, many of which have been longstanding issues—often the subject of North-South contention, not only during the Rio process, but ever since. These include poverty eradication, sustainable consumption and production, financing of sustainable development, transfer of technology and capacity building, improving governance/institutional structures for sustainable development, trade and market access, and human development generally. Less contentious but long-standing issues include fresh water and sanitation, health, agriculture and food security, energy, and management of natural resources. The first item on this list is “Implementation of the Rio Principles: Reaffirmation of all the principles, particular emphasis on the implementation of the polluter-pays principle, precautionary principle, and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.” The latter refers to the different responsibilities for dealing with development needs, especially regarding financing and financial assistance, between developed/industrialized countries and less developed/developing countries.

At the second PrepCom time was set aside for presentations by “major groups” identified in Agenda 21. A “multi-stakeholder dialog” included presentations by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and “major groups” such as farmers, women, workers, local governments, and others. This session, and similar sessions at the subsequent PrepComs, continued the process begun at the 1992 Earth Summit to open the U.N. process to participation by non-governmental parties and “stakeholders.”

At other sessions, governments and U.N. agencies made presentations and identified issues that needed attention in a sustainable development context. These proposals were wide-ranging, from narrow and specific concerns such as a lead-free fuels initiative to broad issues such as ecological debt. The United States has raised as a priority concerns about governance issues, including building capacity and strengthening democracy and transparency, throughout the PrepComs. Poverty eradication has remained a key priority, with broad support, but with few specifics on how to attain it. Health concerns and energy proposals constituted other clusters of

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<sup>5</sup> European meeting in September, Geneva; African meeting in October, Nairobi; Latin American in October, Rio de Janeiro; West Asia in October, Cairo; and Asia-Pacific, Phnom Penh, in November. Full reports of these meetings are available at [www.johannesburgsummit.org]



issues. Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and natural resource management are major clusters of issues, as well.

*Chairman's Paper.* At the conclusion of PrepCom 2, the Chairman of the meeting, Emil Salim of Indonesia, presented the "Chairman's Paper," which was accepted as the basis for negotiations at PrepCom 3. This paper was drawn from outcomes of the regional preparatory meetings noted above, plus the multi-stakeholder input and other discussions during PrepCom 2.<sup>6</sup> The nine sections and issue clusters in this paper provided organization for negotiations at PrepCom 3: Introduction; Poverty eradication; Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; Sustainable development and globalization; Health and sustainable development; Sustainable development of small island developing states (SIDS); Sustainable development initiatives for Africa; Means of implementation (including trade and financing issues); and Strengthening governance for sustainable development at the national, regional and international levels (including issues relating to the functions and processes of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)). This outline of issue areas constituted the structure of negotiations and of the final Plan of Implementation.

**PrepCom 3.** A word used often to describe the situation during PrepCom 3 (held March-April 2002 in New York City) and at its conclusion was "disarray." As it became obvious that there were serious obstacles to obtaining agreement on negotiated text, hope for success in Johannesburg began to focus on a division of goals into Type 1 outcomes, which would be the more conventional negotiated declarations and action plans, and Type 2 outcomes, which would be the launching of a variety of partnerships between governments and private sector parties, between private sector entities, between NGOs and business, and other possible partnerships.

*Type 1 Outcomes.* While it had been expected that Prepcom 3 negotiations would formulate agreed-upon text in decision documents that would go forward to the Ministerial-level meeting in Bali at PrepCom 4, instead there was virtually no negotiated text at the end of the meeting. The Chairman's paper was discussed, and then a very extensive "compilation" text was put together on the basis of commentary in the first week. During the second week, discussions were held on the very lengthy compilation text, but the result was additional commentary; for the most part, agreement on specific language was not attained. It was widely noted that U.N. budgetary restrictions contributed to the problems in reaching any agreement; these restricted full negotiations to standard daytime hours, permitting just 6 hours of discussion per day and limiting night-time negotiations.

The negotiations at PrepCom 3 took place in three "working groups" which divided the issues of the Chairman's paper among them. However, Working Group 3 had responsibility for just one issue, for which no text had been developed in the Chairman's paper – governance. This working group only met once for about two hours in the second week of the PrepCom, and simply responded to a paper circulated

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<sup>6</sup>For a summary of PrepCom 2 and the Chairman's paper, see:  
<http://www.iisd.ca/linkages/vol22/enb2219e.html>

that week by the Chairman on governance – text was not agreed to, but reactions were presented.

One frequently voiced concern during the 3<sup>rd</sup> PrepCom was that issues that had been agreed upon in earlier forums such as Agenda 21, the Forum on Forests, and the Commission on Sustainable Development were being re-negotiated, with many old ideas once again being deliberated, often ending in new stalemates.

*Type 2 Outcomes.* Attention at PrepCom 3 began to focus with increasing interest on hopes that the formulation and launching of partnerships that would carry out on-the-ground sustainable development projects and activities would create a form of progress that would enliven the Johannesburg conference and be a key to its success. A first step in formulating expectations for what would constitute appropriate such partnerships was taken by a guidance paper prepared at PrepCom 3.<sup>7</sup> Two concerns were raised by some NGOs: that governments will abdicate their responsibilities, and that many of the partnerships will be in reality “greenwash” that repackages old, on-going activities as Type 2 partnerships. The guidance paper notes that:

‘Type 2’ partnerships/initiatives are complementary to the globally agreed ‘type 1’ outcomes: they are not intended to substitute commitments by government in the ‘type 1’ documents, rather they should contribute to translating those political commitments into action.... ‘Type 2’ partnerships/initiatives are of a voluntary, ‘self-organizing’ nature: unlike ‘type 1’ outcomes, they are not subject to negotiations within the Preparatory Committee for the Summit.

*Links to other conferences and institutions.* During 2002 a number of regional and issues-focused meetings were held that were of importance to the WSSD process and agenda. Policymakers gave particular attention to the March conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey, Mexico. The announcement at that meeting of additional financial assistance from the United States and other countries for development was hailed as an outcome that would bode well for the success of WSSD. Once again, as at UNCED and the Earth Summit + 5 conferences, the issues surrounding developing countries’ attempts to secure commitments for financing their development were a focus of discussion prior to and during the WSSD. The scope of this discussion has broadened in the years since 1992 to encompass not only official development assistance (ODA) but also trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), and funding from the multilateral development banks (MDBs) and other international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The United States had identified a wide range of WSSD priorities prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> PrepCom, with a continuing focus on improving governance, which it indicated “contribute to economic growth, higher living standards, and social equality.” The six factors it identified are: capacity building, which includes “a favorable, enabling climate for investment”; institution building, which includes strengthening governmental institutions and laws; public access to environmental and other information that supports sustainable development; informed and science-based

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<sup>7</sup>This document and others related to the WSSD can be viewed at:  
[<http://www.johannesburgsummit.org>] (To find recent documents, click on “what’s new.”)

decision-making; public participation, coordination and partnerships; and access to justice in environmental matters and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations.

**PrepCom 4.** Delegations met in Bali, Indonesia, May 25 - June 7, for an intensive two weeks of negotiations at which they attempted to agree on specific language in a chairman's compilation text for implementation of sustainable development that reflected commentary during PrepCom 3. In addition, discussion continued on possible guidelines or criteria for Type 2 outcomes—partnerships for sustainable development activities that could be launched at the WSSD and subsequently.

Press reports on the Bali meeting reflected a predominant sense that the meeting had been “a failure” and that the talks had “stalled.” However, the situation was more complex than that. Delegates worked hard, often long into the night-time hours, to wrestle with the usual problems in reaching agreement on the text of the “Type 1” document that is to express the actions needed to improve implementation of the Rio decisions. They succeeded in reaching agreement on some 73% of the text in the Chairman's compilation.

However, the remaining 27% of the text dealt with such polarizing issues as financing from developed countries to assist developing countries; “good governance”; capacity building; whether there should be specified targets and timetables for achievement of the specific sustainable development goals; and other issues such as the precautionary principle (whether action should be taken on difficult issues even in the absence of definitive scientific evidence). In particular, there was dissatisfaction among the G-77 (the general term used for the loose collaborative group of the developing countries) with the trade and financing issues. Some developed country delegations reported that there was a wish to “reopen” the discussions on trade that were concluded in the most recent World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar, and the discussions on finance concluded in Monterrey, Mexico, in March of this year. Better access to developed country markets and more financial assistance with fewer conditions were the goals that developing countries reportedly would like to establish.

Many of these issues were resolved at the Rio Earth Summit with highly nuanced language, but the operational follow-through has remained problematic. The result is that these issues have resurfaced during the WSSD preparations, with resulting gridlock, primarily between developed and developing country delegations.

## **Summary of the WSSD Outcomes**

Some 100 heads of state, including most of those from Europe, attended the WSSD. President Bush declined to attend; the U.S. delegation was headed by Secretary of State Colin Powell during the highest level segments of the conference. The decisions of the participating nations largely reaffirmed the approaches and decisions reflected in Agenda 21 of the 1992 Earth Summit, as well as those articulated in recent decisions in other arenas such as the Doha Ministerial Trade meeting in 2001 and the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development in March 2002.

As was the case with the 1992 Agenda 21 of the Rio Earth Summit, neither the WSSD Plan of Implementation nor the Political Declaration are legally binding or mandatory; they are a collection of decisions that essentially outline desirable actions that participants agree to encourage and promote. Thus, the goals and timetables announced at the Summit are described as “commitments,” but in fact are not legally obligatory.

The key outcomes of the Summit, as described by the official website of the WSSD,<sup>8</sup> included reaffirming sustainable development as a central element of the international agenda, and new impetus to global action to fight poverty and protect the environment. The linkage between poverty, the environment, and good management of natural resources was highlighted in the WSSD Plan of Implementation, and governments “agreed to and reaffirmed a wide range of concrete commitments and targets for action to achieve more effective implementation of sustainable development objectives.” Energy, water, and sanitation concerns were highlighted, as well.

Specifically, the Plan of Implementation outlines the goal of halving by 2015 the proportion of the world’s people whose incomes are below \$1 a day and who suffer from hunger, reaffirming the Millennium Development goals agreed by the U.N. General Assembly. Another of these goals is to halve by the year 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. On energy, renewable energy was a focus, with encouragement to nations to diversify energy supply and increase the global share of renewable energy; to improve access to reliable, affordable, and environmentally sound energy services and resources; to encourage energy efficiency through domestic programs supported by the international community; and to remove market distortions together with providing better functioning and more transparent energy markets.

Other important areas in which initiatives and commitments were identified were chemical management and safety; management of the natural resource base, including a large number of goals for water, oceans and fisheries, the atmosphere, biodiversity, and forests; health, including reduction of mortality rates for infants and children and reducing HIV prevalence and other diseases; sustainable development for Africa and for small island developing states; means of implementation, including reaffirming the Doha agreement for trade and an emphasis on education; and the institutional framework for sustainable development.

In addition, the concept of “Type 2” outcomes in the form of partnerships between governments, business, and civil society was a major focus of attention at the Summit. Over 220 partnerships (representing some \$235 million in resources) were identified in advance of the Summit, with an additional 60 partnerships announced during the Summit by a number of countries. The U.S. State Department announced 5 initiatives at Johannesburg to be undertaken in the form of partnerships with other governments and/or the private sector:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup><http://www.johannesburgsummit.org> (these outcomes are found under “What’s New” on this website).

<sup>9</sup>Statement of Paula J. Dobriansky, Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, at the World

- ! A “Water for the Poor” initiative to expand access to clean water and sanitation, to which the United States will commit \$970 million over 3 years, hoping to leverage \$1.6 billion in private resources.
- ! A “Clean Energy Initiative” to provide new access to energy services and increase energy efficiency, to which the United States proposes to invest up to \$43 million in 2003, hoping to leverage another \$400 million in investments from other governments, the private sector, and development organizations.
- ! An “Initiative to Cut Hunger in Africa” to spur technology-sharing for small farmers, fund education and strengthen agricultural policy development. The United States plans to invest \$90 million in 2003.
- ! A “Congo Basin Forest Partnership” to promote economic development, alleviate poverty, improve governance, and conserve natural resources in six central African countries, in which the United States will invest “up to \$53 million over 4 years to support sustainable forest management and protected areas, to be matched by contributions from other nations and entities plus the private sector.
- ! A reaffirmation of the commitment to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, with a budget request of \$1.2 billion in 2003 to combat these diseases.

In the run-up to the WSSD and in Johannesburg, the United States was the subject of criticism in the press and among some participants for objecting to targets and timetables in several issue areas, for emphasizing “good governance” which seemed to some to be an infringement on sovereignty, and for failing to make general commitments on financing and trade in addition to those involved in the Doha Trade meeting and the Monterrey Financing for Development meeting. On the other hand, the United States fielded a large delegation of experts in a number of the environmental and economic issues under discussion, and this delegation worked with other participants—both governmental and non-governmental—to successfully fashion initiatives and reach agreement on the more controversial issues.

In the end, despite fears that the Johannesburg meeting would be a “failure,” agreement was reached, and success was declared. It is unclear to what extent the follow-through for this meeting will differ or be more effective than that following the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. The extremely broad range of issues in itself poses major challenges to meaningful outcomes that go beyond rhetoric. However, as was repeatedly pointed out, the concept of sustainable development has become widely accepted, and though still poorly defined, clearly now includes extensive consideration of how the many elements of economic activity interact and how they could avoid some of the social and environmental problems of the past.

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<sup>9</sup>(...continued)

Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, August 29, 2002. See State Department website: <http://www.state.org>

## Conclusions

As follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development begins, the WSSD Plan of Implementation represents the outcome of another major effort in the on-going process of trying to find ways in which economic activity and development in all countries – industrialized as well as less developed nations – can be made more environmentally and socially sustainable. The underlying concept of sustainability holds that economic growth and progress need to take into account the social, environmental, financial and other factors that may produce side-effects that can undermine the long-term viability of that growth and progress.

If the economic development process can successfully integrate the many – and sometimes conflicting – goals of society without undermining, often unintentionally, one or more of them, then that would result in “sustainable development.” The experience of the past ten years has shown that attaining such a result is fraught with complexities that so far have proven extremely difficult to resolve. These are the challenges that, once again, the nations of the world will face in obtaining concrete results from the decisions at the WSSD.