

Five more days to negotiate the Outcome Document: 29 May to 2 June

Representatives from governments who were negotiating the Rio+20 outcome document agreed to add five additional days to their deliberations in order to bridge differences that have hampered progress to date. The move came on 4 May as the latest round of negotiations concluded with some progress made, but much work left outstanding. The five added negotiating days are set for 29 May to 2 June. The additional negotiations will take place in New York before moving to Rio de Janeiro on 13 June for the third and final preparatory meeting for the Conference. The Rio+20 Conference will take place from 20 to 22 June.

Rio+20 Secretary-General Sha Zukang emphasized the need to proceed with a sense of genuine urgency. "The present negotiation approach has run its course," he stated. "Our objective should be to arrive in Rio with at least 90% of the text ready. The most difficult 10% should then be negotiated in Rio with the highest political support."

Mr. Sha specified his expectations as follows: "We can have an outcome document:

- that renews political commitment, reaffirms Rio principles and builds upon earlier agreements;
- that is action-oriented in spelling out the Future We Want;
- that contains inspiring agreements for future generations on a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and on the institutional framework for sustainable development;
- that contains ambitious universal goals - the Sustainable Development Goals;
- that contains concrete deliverables in priority areas; and
- that creates or strengthens the institutions and body we need for the post-Rio+20 period."

Countries still need to come together on key issues, including one of the two main themes for the Conference—the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Some developed countries have embraced the green economy as a new roadmap for sustainable development, while many developing countries are more cautious, asserting that each country should choose its own path to a sustainable future and that a green economy approach should not lead to green protectionism or limit growth and poverty eradication. Other countries and stakeholders have voiced concerns about implementation and accountability, pointing out that some commitments made at previous global meetings, such as for official development assistance, have yet to be fully realized.

Nonetheless, countries appear willing to agree on a number of issues, including the overall need to recognize and act to meet pressing global and national challenges. It has been widely acknowledged that action is needed to provide for the needs of a growing global population that continues to consume and produce unsustainably, resulting in rising carbon emissions, degraded natural ecosystems and growing income inequality. The need to find a better measurement of progress than GDP has also been widely acknowledged.

Countries have also been examining the concept of new Sustainable Development Goals, a set of benchmarks to guide countries in achieving targeted outcomes within a specific time period, such as on access to sustainable energy and clean water for all. Countries have differing views on what should or should not be included in the goals, as well as the formal process for how and when the goals may be defined, finalized and agreed to. Some countries would like to see the goals approved in Rio, while others see Rio+20 as a starting point for deciding on the goals. Some have concerns that the goals could bind them to commitments they feel are unrealistic, such as on climate change, while others want to ensure that countries are held accountable to achieve whatever goals are set.

17/05/2012