

23 January 2014

Format and organizational aspects of the high level political forum on sustainable development and other important developments

Division for Sustainable Development/UNDESA

Meeting of the Parties of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

A key outcome of the Rio+20 Conference was the decision to establish a universal high-level political forum (HLPF) “to follow-up on implementation of sustainable development, with the aim of convening the first forum at the beginning of the 68th session of the General Assembly”.

The President of the Assembly appointed the Permanent Representatives of Italy and Brazil as co-facilitators to guide the negotiations on the format and organizational aspects of the forum. Several rounds of informal consultations have been held based on a draft prepared by the co-facilitators between late January and the adoption of the resolution on 9 July 2013 (67/290).

Organization of the meetings of the forum:

The resolution stipulates that the forum is a process consisting of two sets of meetings: first, meetings of Heads of State/Government every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly and+, second, annual meetings under the auspices of ECOSOC comprising of seven days including a three day ministerial segment.

The negotiations on the forum were closely related to the negotiations on the strengthening of ECOSOC which were done in parallel under the leadership of the Ambassadors of Guyana and Belgium. The resolution was adopted on 20 September 2013 (68/1) and has changed the way ECOSOC works, namely one substantive session in July will no longer take place, but ECOSOC will meet throughout the year starting with an operational segment in February.

That resolution stipulates that the three day HLPF ministerial segment will be part of the high-level segment of ECOSOC. The forum will replace ECOSOC’s Annual Ministerial Review in 2016.

Participation in the forum:

As provided in the resolution, the forum will have full and effective participation of all States Members of the United Nations and States members of specialized agencies. This means that Cook Island, Holy See, Niue and State of Palestine are full and equal members of the forum.

Major Groups and relevant stakeholders are referred to in 8 paragraphs in the HLPF resolution. Major groups and other stakeholders worked closely with the HLPF co-facilitators to ensure that the resolution enhance their engagement with the forum, in the spirit of broad public participation that was articulated in Agenda 21 and reaffirmed in the Future We Want.

Decision-making and outcomes:

The outcomes of the meetings of the forum will be a ministerial declaration from the ministerial segment under the auspices of ECOSOC and a declaration of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly. The forum can make recommendations on various issues under its mandate.

Member States are currently discussing whether there should be one or two outcomes from the ECOSOC high-level segment week during the two transitional years (2014 and 2015) while both HLPF and AMR co-exist.

Substantive issues

The resolution states that the forum will provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments, enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels and have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.

The GA also decided that the forum, under the auspices of ECOSOC will conduct regular reviews, starting in 2016, on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, including those related to the means of implementation, within the context of the post-2015 development agenda. It stipulates that those reviews will be voluntary, State-led, provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders and will replace the national voluntary presentations held in the context of the annual ministerial-level substantive reviews of ECOSOC.

The first forum

The first meeting of the forum under the auspices of the General Assembly was held on 24 September 2013 and as stipulated in the resolution on the exceptional basis the outcome was a President's summary since it was an inaugural meeting. The meeting was attended by Presidents, Prime Ministers and various ministers. The format of leadership dialogues was very interactive and attracted a lot of attention. This meeting was preceded by a TEDx meeting on 16 September which gathered a wide audience of both government and non-government actors. The two organizers of the TEDx event reported to the forum. More information including the webcasts can be found at the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform at <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1649>

The second meeting of the forum

The second meeting of the forum will take place at the end of June and beginning of July 2014. A 3-day ministerial segment will be part of the high-level segment week of ECOSOC. Negotiations are on-going on the exact dates, theme and outcome of this meeting. They are discussing how to make ECOSOC and HLPF mutually reinforcing while keeping the distinct identity of the forum, especially during the two transition years. Once the post-2015 development agenda is adopted with SDGs at its core, it will be easier since resolution 67/290 points to the forum as the platform to review SDGs and post-2015 development agenda -- as this agenda will have sustainable development as its basis as broadly agreed by all actors.

Involvement of major groups

The resolution 67/290 is the first resolution that clearly spells out in such details the engagement of major groups and other stakeholders (MGoSs) in the work of a UN body. It decided that major groups and other stakeholders will be allowed to attend all official meetings of the forum; have access to all official information and documents; intervene in official meetings; submit documents and present written and oral contributions; make recommendations; and organize side events and round tables, in cooperation with Member States and the Secretariat. The enhanced involvement of MGoS is also called for in regional meetings organized by the regional commissions to bring the regional dimensions in the HLPF.

Building on the experience of the Committee on World Food Security, it also encourages major groups and other stakeholders to autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the high-level political forum. Discussions and consultations are now ongoing to establish whether this has implications to the structure and composition of the Major Groups.

The resolution also gives major groups and other relevant stakeholders an agenda setting role by calling for the activities of the forum to benefit from their inputs and advice as well as those of the United Nations system..

Other proposals to translate the resolution language into participation and engagement modalities in the second and subsequent meetings of the forum are being developed by the nine major groups sectors in close consultation with other relevant stakeholders and the secretariat. These proposals draw from two working papers commissioned by DESA on [lessons learned from the major groups over the last 20 years of CSD](#) and best practices within the UN system (soon to be published).

Support to the forum

Resolution 67/290 decided that the forum will be supported by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN Secretariat in close cooperation with all relevant entities of the United Nations system, including funds and programmes, multilateral financial and trade institutions, the secretariats of the three Rio conventions and other relevant treaty bodies and international organizations within their respective mandates.

Third International Conference on small island developing States (SIDS)

The resolution on modalities of the preparatory process and the Conference was adopted last December. The conference will take place from 2 – 4 September 2014 in Apia, Independent State of Samoa.

It has been decided that the theme of the Conference will be “The sustainable development of small island developing States through genuine and durable partnerships. The objectives are to assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy; seek a renewed political commitment by all countries to address effectively the special needs and vulnerabilities of SIDS by focusing on practical and pragmatic actions for the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy; identify new and emerging challenges and opportunities for the sustainable development of SIDS and ways and means to address them, including through the strengthening of collaborative partnerships between small island developing States and the international community; and identify priorities for the sustainable development of SIDS for consideration, as appropriate, in the elaboration of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.

The preparatory process will start in February with the first Preparatory Committee from 24-26. The second one will be from 24 - 27 June 2014 to finalize the outcome of the Conference. There will also be an intersessional meeting from 21 - 25 April as well as possible informal meetings to be convened by the co-chairs of the Bureau. The bureau will be elected from all five regional groups (two from each regional group) with Samoa as ex-officio member.

The zero draft of the outcome document needs to be prepared and circulated by 14 March 2014 based on inputs from the interregional SIDS meeting in Barbados and contributions from Member States, UN system and major groups and other stakeholders.

The resolution also underlined the need for the effective participation of civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations and other major groups, and invites voluntary contributions to the trust fund to support the participation of major groups of developing countries, in particular small island developing States, in the meetings of the Preparatory Committee and in the Conference itself.
