



SUMMIT IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW GROUP (SIRG)
First Regular Meeting of 2009
January 12-16, 2009 (Working Group Sessions)
January 14-16, 2009 (Plenary Sessions)
Padilha Vidal Room– 1889 F Street NW, DC 20006
Washington, D.C

OEA/Ser.E
GRIC/O.1/doc.9/09
14 January 2009
Original: English

OPENING REMARKS OF JOSE MIGUEL INSULZA, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Washington, DC - January 14, 2009

I would like to extend my warmest welcome to this new meeting of the Summit Implementation Review Group. Since this is the first meeting of the year, I would like to wish each of you and your families a prosperous New Year and, to us all, that we may have a successful Summit of the Americas, one in which we may continue to pave the paths of progress and democracy in our region.

This first meeting of the year also gives me the opportunity to reiterate the OAS General Secretariat's commitment to this process and, in particular, to the next Summit in Trinidad and Tobago. Once again, I extend my appreciation to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for its significant efforts to ensure the success of the Summit, as well as to all of you for your contributions in making decisions and reaching mutual agreements. I regret I was unable to join you for the previous meeting of this Group in El Salvador. Nevertheless, you can be assured that the OAS, in all its capacity, will continue its cooperation with the process and that my personal efforts will be geared towards the success of the upcoming Summit, the most important in our hemisphere.

The subject of this meeting is environmental sustainability, a topic of enormous importance, as all the topics that will be taken under consideration in the Summit, not only for our countries but for our people. This importance is reflected well in the fact that during the next three days, as we try to set out a common vision of cooperative action on the matter, nearly 200 million families will be struggling with less than \$2 a day for food, health and other needs. In the next three days, 75 million people will be denied access to clean drinking water. Nearly 140 million people will lack access to adequate sanitation and many more lack access to electricity and telecommunication connections.

During the next three days, 185 thousand tons of sulfur dioxide, over 200 tons of nitrous oxide, and 42 thousand tons of greenhouse gas emissions will be released in this hemisphere. In the next 48 hours, as much as 10,000 hectares of standing forests will be cleared, millions of tons of productive top-soils lost, and more hectares of coral reefs will be entered the already-crowded

pantheon of “at risk” that describes a growing proportion of the hemisphere’s ecological endowment.

We in the Americas have not been idle in addressing these issues. In fact the Americas was the first region in the world to convene a Summit on Sustainable Development. This took place in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in December 1996. Following on this pioneering work the priorities outlined in the Draft Declaration of Commitment of Port of Spain pledge to implement improved institutional arrangements, financing, science and technology transfer, and public participation on issues related to climate change, natural disasters, poverty alleviation through safe human settlements and access to secure land tenure and finance.

The OAS has continued its pioneering role by implementing in collaboration others institutions, several activities and disseminating best practices on sustainable development. Regarding sustainable cities and communities, we can highlight the planning efforts made by cities such as Quito with its Neighborhood Recycling Program, Curitiba with its Public Transportation System, Toronto with its of eco-friendly practice for business and industry, and Portland where energy efficient and transit-oriented development has lead to multiple benefits.

Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Brazil, and Chile have also made commitments to clean air. The city governments of those capital cities are implementing measures to reverse the deterioration of urban air quality that results from rapid urbanization, increased vehicular transport, and industrial production. This is important since air pollution has been shown to cause thousands of premature deaths and billions of dollars in medical costs and lost productivity each year across the hemisphere.

We have to recognize the substantial progress that has been made on the industrial voluntary performance and compliance. A select group of companies are demonstrating a new "corporate ethic" that anticipates potential future regulation by meeting the ISO standards or UN Convention standards in their economic activities. Meetings such as the OAS Workshop on “Trends in the Implementation of Payments for Environmental Services in the Americas” held last year in Sao Paulo furthered this dialogue.

It is also important to mention efforts related to sustainable agriculture and forests. In this field there is increased appreciation that the best way to conserve biodiversity is to convert it into an instrument for sustainable human development. Examples are biodiversity prospecting, ecotourism, tradeable carbon offsets, and paying farmers to practice agro-forestry and reforestation. Governments such as Bolivia and Costa Rica encourage these activities through incentives such as tax credits, direct payments, and subsidized loans. Some countries also instituted national systems to certify good forest management practices.

The use of monetary valuations of the benefits of ecosystem services (such as coral reefs to protect beaches from storms) is becoming more sophisticated and respected in environmental and social assessment. Activities such as the Inter American Biodiversity Information Network Caribbean Meeting on marine issues, held last year in Jamaica, furthered this dialogue. OAS projects such as the Payment for Ecosystem Services and Sustainable Agriculture carried out in Paraguay also highlight activities in this field.

Regarding water resources and coastal areas, it is important to acknowledge that consumers are responding to a corporation’s environmental image. Tourism may provide the best example, where state-sponsored or NGO certifications, such as Green Globe, are labeling hotels

that are environmentally and socially responsible, thereby encouraging the consumer to book into these eco-friendly hotels.

Voluntary agreements play an important role in climate change initiatives. Unilateral commitments, public voluntary schemes and negotiated agreements have all been increasingly implemented, covering a wide variety of sectors and areas. Meetings of the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation create action plans for implementation.

Several countries are raising funds for environmental conservation through voluntary conservation taxes on tourists, establishing special funds for the development of protected areas, levying petrol taxes for sustainable forest management, introducing water conservation funds from potable water user fees to protect watersheds, and raising funds through debt-for-nature swaps.

Energy efficiency measures implemented by municipal governments have resulted in annual savings as well CO2 reductions. Municipalities are assisting local businesses by providing technical assistance resulting in substantial savings in energy and water, increased recycling, transit modernization, and alternative fuels, thereby reducing CO2 emissions.

However there is a need for subsidy reform that cancels costly, wasteful and ecologically destructive practices. Inequitable tax breaks have diminished, but under pricing of biocides and fossil fuels remain persistent. Meetings such as the Inter-American Meeting of National Authorities and Experts on Energy for Sustainable Development have provided a venue for the discussion of this matter.

Finally, we have also done our homework at the OAS. Just to give an example, our Green Week highlighted the need for each and every one of us to adopt the role of stewards of the environment through our Ten Steps to Commit Program. In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that currently the OAS facilities are subject to policies to reduce energy consumption in a significant way.

I hope that the spirit of consensus will prevail so that the hemispheric goal of common vision and concerted action could be achieved through the Summit Process.

Thank You.