

Summary Report on the Nineteenth Session of the
United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)
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The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was established in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Its purpose is to monitor and guide the UN's comprehensive vision for the environment and sustainable development known as "Agenda 21." The CSD meets yearly at the UN headquarters in New York City. Topics for discussion, evaluation, and review generally change from year to year. In 2011, the focus of the CSD included five interrelated areas: chemicals, mining, sustainable consumption and production (SCP), transport, and waste management. Work in these areas was done by delegates of all countries and members of Civil Society, which were represented by nine Major Groups: Indigenous Peoples, Women, Children, and Youth, Farmers, NGOs, Local Governments, Science and Technology, Business and Industry, and Unions.

I'll first offer some observations on the nature of the deliberative process, followed by a comment on the overall context of the work. The role of Civil Society has changed over the years within the structure of the deliberations. In recent years, its contribution has been decreased to a few brief interventions permitted at the end of each working session. In these interventions -- whether they are two or three minute statements -- effort is put into their wording, meaning, implications, and primary concerns of the Major Group making the intervention. Often, references to previous agreements along similar lines are made.

This year, sessions were structured around the five areas, each one focusing on the text for that area. Delegates and the Chair moved, paragraph by paragraph, through the entire text. Any delegate could insert deletions and additions that were then recorded on a prominent

screen in brackets, with the name of the country making the change noted. Members of Civil Society could give input online, while not interacting in the process live. By the end of the first week, additional evening sessions were added to the schedule. This allowed more time for the completion of all the work. By Tuesday of the second week, evening sessions were going into the night.

There is much to learn and process at each CSD meeting – through Plenary Sessions, Round Tables, Side Events, Major Group Meetings, High-Level Segments, and informal interactions with participants. As I review the fullness of events in 2011, the most important message may be that of Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University's Earth Institute, who said this:

We have passed the tipping point! The warnings have been ignored. As I look out and see all of you here, I know that every country is dealing with this reality. There is not one of you whose country has not already been affected in some way by global warming.

His message spoke to the urgency of our planetary situation. He went on to state that we can act to prevent further catastrophe. Will the seriousness of our situation prompt us to overcome our differences, come to an agreement, move from words to action, and put into effect the best knowledge we have to save our planet? This is a vital question. If history gives any indication of the answer, then we know the tremendous resistance we have to overcome to achieve this success. Is it necessary to do so? Absolutely! Can we achieve success? In my humble opinion, if the intensity, wisdom, and will of the peoples prevail, then we will do so. Yes – we can succeed.