

Promoting Inter-Local Relations:

A Report from the Sustainable Societies Caucus

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for *Northern Lights*, July 9, 1997

The Caucus at CSD

This year at the CSD Intersessional, the CSD Fifth Session, and the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS), ANPED participated in several NGO caucuses. One caucus in which ANPED played a key role was the Sustainable Societies Caucus.

The aim of the Sustainable Societies Caucus, through its operation at the CSD, the follow-up to the Habitat 2/Human Settlements Conference, and other international meetings, is to promote linkages and collaboration among NGOs around the world that are actively engaged in building the international sustainable communities movement. Underlying this aim are the notions that:

- (1) instead of concentrating on "achieving sustainable development" we need to focus on building sustainable communities and societies;
- (2) sustainable communities are the foundation of sustainable societies;
- (3) just as local and global problems are interdependent, local communities require inter-local strategies to solve them; and
- (4) one of the challenges of this movement is to provide viable alternatives to economic globalization.

The Sustainable Societies Caucus informally began about 1995, during the time of the UN Social Summit, when a number of NGOs from Asia, North America, Africa, Europe and other regions who had been working together decided to create an NGO caucus that would promote dialogue and collaboration on these ideas at different United Nations gatherings. This NGO initiative led to the creation of Sustainable Societies Caucuses at both the CSD and Habitat II, as well as having a presence in other international endeavors. Co-chairs for the Caucus at CSD this year are Wendi Momen of Baha'is International and S. Ananthakrishnan from Norwegian Forum for Environment and Development.

Last April in New York, Sustainable Societies Caucus participants from the US, Kenya, UK, Poland, South Africa, and other countries helped organize the first International Sustainable Communities Forum (a collaboration involving ANPED, the US Citizens Network for Sustainable Development, and the Environmental Liaison Centre International). Many Sustainable Societies Caucus members are also involved in follow-up to the recent UN Human Settlements Conference in Istanbul, where the Caucus hosted daily strategy meetings and workshops, organized both the beginning plenary on Sustainable Human Settlements as well as the ending plenary meeting on



NGO Follow-up, and collaborated with almost 20 other NGO caucuses to produce the statement *NGO Agenda on Sustainable Communities and Societies*. At past CSD sessions, the Sustainable Societies Caucus organized strategy meetings and roundtables on the linkages between Habitat 2 and Local Agenda 21 and on globalization. In response to the UN Special Session, the Caucus is currently preparing a paper on "Building Sustainable Communities in a Globalizing World."

Strategy for Upcoming Year

At the last week of the UNGASS meeting, the Sustainable Societies Caucus agreed to its priorities and strategy for the upcoming year. We decided that over the next 12 months, in our respective countries, over the internet, and at various international events we would work on the following themes:

- (a) **LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD** (i.e., the threats posed by economic globalization and the efforts of local communities and NGOs to neutralize this threat). In particular, we will continue interviewing and reporting on various NGOs involved in sustainable community and Local Agenda 21 initiatives around the world, with special attention as to their strategies in dealing with globalization.

Action: The results of this research will be a paper *Building Sustainable Communities in a Globalizing World*, which will highlight these initiatives, the "inter-local" linkages they have with each other, and examine the outlines of the larger global movement of these community initiatives.

- (b) **THE INTERNATIONAL SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES MOVEMENT.** Under this theme we will work to highlight the interlinkages among grassroots-based sustainable community initiatives around the world, Local Agenda 21 municipal initiatives, and the various Habitat 2 "sustainable human settlement" followup and efforts to implement the Habitat Agenda, etc. The point here is that these initiatives are not isolated events but represent a larger global historical phenomena.

Action: With this in mind, the Sustainable Societies Caucus will act as a liaison among different NGOs and networks (such as ANPED, CitNet, ELCI and others) to help organize future events such as the International Sustainable Communities Forum.

- (c) **CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY.** The point here is that corporate accountability and responsibility are critical elements of sustainable communities and societies. Each community has to deal with the behavior of local businesses as well as TNCs. Each communities needs to find a way to cultivate a local economy which contributes to the well-being of the population rather their exploitation.

Action: In future sessions of CSD, the Sustainable Societies Caucus will act as a focal point to link with the NGO Taskforce on Business and Industry (ToBI) and the campaign for a Subcommittee on Corporate Accountability at the CSD. The Caucus will also lobby government delegates, when and where appropriate, and help organize public dialogues on



corporate accountability between NGOs, governments, the UN, and business & industry groups.

Action: Focus on the MAI. Caucus members agreed to return to their respective nations and systematically raise the question of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) at every public meeting with national and local government representatives. The basic question to be raised at these meetings is: "What are you doing to ensure that this Agreement includes the proper mechanisms that will protect our local communities from harm, that will protect our environment and the health of our people? What are you doing to make sure that corporations are not given a higher priority than people and communities?" This issue is a sensitive one for most politicians (many of whom will be embarrassed to admit that they don't really know very much about the MAI or its impacts -- which in itself is an important fact to be aired in public). The task for NGOs is to keep the pressure on this, to not let the issue slide to the side but to put it in the forefront to our public representatives. The public and many politicians need to be educated about the extreme importance and urgency of these secret negotiations now taking place and a global campaign needs to quickly empower itself to raise the issue to the center of public attention. This agreement must be either radically modified through appropriate legal text or simply trashed. This campaign will be one way the Sustainable Societies Caucus will draw attention to the dynamic between local communities and economic globalization.

(d) SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION & POVERTY

ERADICATION. The important aspect of this theme on which we will concentrate is the role of these activities in building sustainable communities and societies. While there are individual NGO caucuses focusing on each of these areas, the Sustainable Societies Caucus will narrow its focus to how sustainability in these areas can best be realized **AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**, in communities (in contrast to the national and global focus).

Action: The Sustainable Societies Caucus will actively collaborate with the SPAC Caucus and the Poverty Caucus in future CSD events, through lobbying, articles, panels, and public dialogues, to draw attention to the local aspects of these issues.

(e) NGO COMMON AGENDA, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING.

At Habitat 2, the Caucus coordinated a collaborative process of dialogue and text crafting among a wide range of NGO caucuses which resulted in the inspired document *NGO Agenda on Sustainable Communities and Societies*. This was the beginning of an inter-caucus partnership committed to being mutually supportive and building a sense of the community of NGOs, working towards individual as well as larger common goals. In many ways, the Sustainable Societies Caucus itself represents an effort to promote that sense of mutual support and capacity building within the NGO community.

Action: During the next 12 months, the Sustainable Societies Caucus will build its communications capacity and endeavor to develop mechanisms for sharing information and working together on mutual support strategies. In 1998, at CSD-6, the Caucus will use the CSD's focus on capacity building to sharpen its own position and strategy as to how best to

build the capacity of the global NGO community. One aspect of this work is to formalize stronger relationships with NGO networks, such as ANPED, CitNet and ELCI, among others. One example of this is the development within the US Citizens Network of a Sustainable Societies Working Group, organized to serve as a liaison between US NGOs and NGOs in other countries working with the Sustainable Societies Caucuses.

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