

JOINT CHAIR'S STATEMENT
OF THE
ASEM DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE – TOWARDS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Manila, 20-21 April 2009

At the Seventh Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM 7) in Beijing on 24-25 October 2008, Heads of State and Government adopted the Beijing Declaration on Sustainable Development. The Declaration encouraged ASEM partners to conduct follow-up activities on its implementation and to complement efforts at the global level to enhance the global partnership for development. As a contribution to this objective the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the European Commission organised a conference under the title "ASEM Development Conference – Towards Sustainable Development" which took place in Manila on 20-21 April 2009. The conference brought together high-level officials and experts for a debate on the three major themes of the Beijing Declaration – namely the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), climate change, and social cohesion. Opening statements were made on behalf of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, the Czech Presidency of the European Union, the European Commission and the Asian Development Bank. Participants from 13 Asian countries, 16 European countries, the European Commission, eight international organisations, and 10 civil society organisations took part in the conference.

Cognizant of the important measures agreed at the G20 Summit in London on 2 April 2009 and efforts at the inter-regional, regional, and country levels, the conference supported the emerging global consensus that a swift recovery must be underpinned by far-reaching systemic reforms of the global economic system, particularly to ensure increased equity, which would lay the foundation for a fair and sustainable world economy.

The Conference acknowledged that the current crisis will have profound and fundamental effects not only on the development prospects of developing countries, but also in terms of how the

international community approaches development, including examining new models of development. ASEM partners noted the importance of the June 2009 United Nations conference on the global economic crisis and its impact on development, and agreed that the ASEM process must be harnessed to complement actions at the global level.

Millennium Development Goals

The Beijing Declaration reaffirmed that the MDGs underpin international cooperation for sustainable development, but recognised the grave challenges in achieving the MDGs as scheduled. This view was substantiated in discussions between participants.

Participants acknowledged the progress in Asia in achieving the poverty reduction MDG target, while at the same time noting progress was not the same for all MDGs, nor for all countries. Participants also noted the inter-related nature of different MDGs, suggesting that they should be seen as part of a broad initiative to reduce poverty in all its dimensions. Participants discussed the way in which the current economic crisis could jeopardise the MDG objectives, bringing into focus the need to protect social budgets, including an emphasis on governance and improving efficiency and effectiveness.

It was emphasised that it is the primary responsibility of each country to achieve its own development, complemented by an enabling international environment for development. It was emphasised that international cooperation plays a key role in meeting the MDG targets of developing countries. At the same time country-level programmes for achieving the MDGs, which take into account country-specific circumstances, have a critical role to play.

Climate Change

The Beijing Declaration reaffirmed that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol are the main channels for international negotiations and cooperation on climate change, and recognised the urgency to act on climate change and the need to work along the Bali roadmap towards an ambitious, effective and comprehensive agreed outcome up to and beyond the climate change conference to be held in Copenhagen,

Denmark at the end of 2009. This view was substantiated in discussions between participants.

Participants discussed the impact of climate change on sustainable development and the achievement of the MDGs and the manner in which climate change is a development challenge. The main themes of mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer, and financing were discussed, as well as the main issues related to negotiations now taking place in international fora, in particular on the size of emission reductions and how they could affect developed and developing countries. The current economic crisis was mentioned as a reminder of the importance of good risk management and that delays could cause major problems in the future. The current economic crisis was also an opportunity to invest in a green economy with its potential for job creation.

Participants reconfirmed that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities underpins the negotiations on climate change. The common threat of climate change only highlighted the importance of acting with resolve and urgency in the preparation of the Copenhagen climate change conference at the end of 2009. The conference emphasised that an ambitious agreement at COP 15 in Copenhagen in December 2009 will be of major importance for securing sustainable development.

Participants also recognised that climate change is an urgent issue that needs a coordinated response along with other pressing development priorities, notably poverty and income inequality. Both developed and developing countries have to fulfil their commitments in this respect.

Social Cohesion

The Beijing Declaration stressed that sustainable development and social cohesion are mutually supportive. It recognised the challenges faced by ASEM partners in achieving sustainable development in the areas of the social dimension of globalisation, social justice, the promotion of full and productive employment, international migration, population aging, eco-cities and corporate social responsibility. This view was substantiated in discussions between participants which confirmed that in situations of economic growth, specific policies are

needed to reduce inequalities.

Participants discussed the impact that development could have on society, which called for attention to social cohesion if development is to be resilient. Responding to these challenges would require innovation, participatory policies, and raising capacity through mutual exchange.

Participants discussed the manner in which issues related to social cohesion had been placed on the international agenda by the economic crisis. This crisis has unsettled economies, hampered development efforts, and in certain cases caused political turbulence. Further secondary effects of the crisis, including shocks to remittances, may thus threaten social cohesion in some developing and indeed developed countries. Therefore a long-term approach to development must also include a special focus on mitigating these factors.

Indeed the way the crisis was being addressed in some countries was proving to be an opportunity to enhance discussion about social cohesion, in particular drawing attention to the potential for social protection schemes – an area where the mutual exchange of information and experience between ASEM partners would be useful.

Aid Effectiveness

The Beijing Declaration on Sustainable Development calls for increased financial assistance to developing countries, notably within the context of increased aid to enable countries to meet the MDGs, and in providing financial support in the area of climate change. This view was substantiated in discussions between participants.

It was noted that the European Union has confirmed its resolve to pursue its Official Development Assistance target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015, with an intermediate collective target of 0.56% of GNI in 2010. Participants discussed the importance of accompanying increases in aid with enhanced aid efficiency and effectiveness and the delivery of results. The participants stressed the importance of South-South cooperation in mobilising more development resources.

In this context participants maintained their commitment to the

principles on aid effectiveness in the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action, and encouraged all ASEM partners to fully engage in this process, which will in due course lead to the next international High Level Meeting on Aid Effectiveness in South Korea in 2011.

Next steps

Participants proposed to further analyse, debate, and discuss the issues raised in the Beijing Declaration on Sustainable Development within future ASEM discussions in fields such as climate change, the role of finance in economic and rural development, sustainable consumption and production, and capacity building for the efficient and effective management of the sustainable development process, including regarding disaster response.

Participants acknowledged the need for strong political will to achieve the Beijing Declaration objectives. Participants proposed that the ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam on 25-26 May 2009 address the issues raised in the Beijing Declaration, and discussed in Manila, with a view to identifying specific follow-up initiatives within the ASEM framework, including a possible high-level meeting on development to take place before the ASEM 8 Summit in Brussels, October 2010.
