

Chairman's Statement of the ASEM Environment Ministers' Meeting, Beijing, China 17 January, 2002

1. The ASEM Environment Ministers' Meeting was held in Beijing, China on 17 January, 2002. The Environment Ministers or their representatives from 10 Asian and 15 European nations, with the Spanish Minister of Environment, H.E. Mr. Jaume Matas, acting also as President of the Council of the European Union, and the representative of the European Commissioner for Environment attended the meeting. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Xie Zhenhua, Minister of State Environmental Protection Administration of China.
2. The meeting was co-initiated by China and Germany and it was unanimously endorsed by ASEM leaders at ASEM III held in Seoul in 2000. Subsequently, Thailand also became a co-partner.
3. The Chinese Premier H.E. Zhu Rongji sent a congratulatory message to the ASEM Environment Ministers' Meeting, in which His Excellency noted the important position held by Asia and Europe in the world economic development and environmental protection and expressed the hope that all nations join their hands to enhance cooperation and thus create a promising future for the world.
4. The Chinese Vice Premier H.E. Wen Jiabao addressed the meeting at its opening ceremony, in which he stressed that it is a vital approach to addressing the global environmental issues of conducting cooperation based on fairness, justice and reasonableness and that, while the two regions share common economic and environmental interests, the prospects for future cooperation is very promising. His Excellency urged the ASEM Environment Ministers' Meeting to be a good example for translating the ASEM spirits into practice and achieving its goals.
5. During the meeting, the Ministers conducted an in-depth and constructive exchange on issues ranging from the promotion of environmental partnership among ASEM, international environmental issues, preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), to options for future dialogue on environmental matters within ASEM.
6. The Ministers recognized the challenges posed to all ASEM Partners by the deterioration of natural resources and environmental status, and they emphasized that global environmental issues could not be well tackled by an individual nation or within a given area, and that international environmental cooperation must be strengthened.
7. The Ministers recognized that ASEM Partners are facing common challenges with regard to environment and development issues and that the cooperation between the two regions will be conducive to addressing global environmental issues. The potential and opportunity for environmental cooperation between Asia and Europe are very huge since the two regions have each different capability despite their common commitments.
8. The Ministers believed that both Asia and Europe are undergoing a process of economic restructuring and are thus engaged in rejuvenating the regional economies. Environmental cooperation which could promote environmentally friendly industry and the development of new industries inclusive of environmental industry will boost efforts for economic rejuvenation.
9. The Ministers stressed that the environmental cooperation should be based on equality and full partnership. Each nation should enjoy equal treatment and conduct long-term dialogue, exchanges and cooperation. Business sector and civil society among all ASEM nations could also establish multi-level cooperative partnerships.
10. The Ministers noted that environmental cooperation among ASEM Partners could focus on key areas and emphasis for cooperation could be laid upon fields such as poverty eradication, energy and environment, water, combating desertification, forest degradation including land and forest fire and illegal logging, release of chemicals into the environment, urban environment, bio-safety, coastal and marine protection, cleaner production technologies, and ecological conservation, climate change, and environmental policies and legislation, and promoting sustainable livelihood.

11. Ministers called for an early ratification and entry into force of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the POPs Convention.

12. The Ministers recalled that climate change is one of the most serious problems facing the world today. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol provide the framework for international cooperation on this issue. It is important that all countries effectively participate in this framework. Ministers welcomed the successful agreements in Bonn and Marrakech which paved the way for ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. Ministers stressed the importance of its early ratification and of seeking its entry into force in 2002 as well as of strengthening domestic efforts to tackle climate change.

13. The Ministers noted with appreciation the efforts made so far by the Asia-Europe Environmental Technology Centre over the last 3 years in promoting cooperation in the environmental field and addressing related issues and looked forward to a decision on this Centre on the basis of an appraisal of the outcome of the pilot phase.

14. The Ministers expressed a strong interest in the WSSD to be held in South Africa in 2002 and believed that it will be an important opportunity since 1992 UNCED for political dialogue, reaching consensus, building new partnerships and making the highest political commitments in the framework of global partnerships for sustainable development and the WSSD will be an extremely important occasion. The EU side suggested that the idea of creating a global deal or pact could be considered. The Ministers underscored the need to speed up the preparation of the WSSD, in particular the setting of the agenda. The Ministers also welcomed the common elements of the outcome of preparatory meetings in both regions.

15. The Ministers believed that the WSSD should renew the political will and partnership, and thus reach agreement on implementing the policies and measures set out in Agenda 21, based on a full review of the implementation progress of Agenda 21, and in this context, WSSD should also address new paradigm and emerging issues for sustainable development. The Ministers will discuss the UN Secretary General's report "Implementing Agenda 21", in particular its proposals for priorities, in the framework of the preparatory processes of the WSSD.

16. The Ministers noted that the UNCED has identified fundamental principles for promoting global sustainable development. These principles should be reaffirmed at the 2002 WSSD and be reflected in various implementation programmes. In addition, new innovative systems, policy measures and technologies including Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) should be fully utilised by all countries with a view to pursuing sustainable development through transparent and participatory processes.

17. The Ministers believed that all governments should play a key and leading role in implementing sustainable development at the local, national as well as regional levels and on a global scale, notably also with respect to the implementation of and compliance with international legal instruments and the promotion of international cooperation. Furthermore the Ministers will support efforts for reaching consensus in strengthening international governance in the field of environment and sustainable development. The WSSD should mobilise the political will of various governments, reinforce the consensus that has so far been reached, and advance the cooperation in sustainable development by all nations.

18. The Ministers agreed that business sectors, civil society, mass media and the major groups are important forces to promote sustainable development to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 21. The WSSD should therefore accord them more attention and support, and encourage their commitment and participation in environmental protection towards sustainable development. In this connection, the Ministers agreed that exchange of experiences concerning good practices for public involvement should be promoted.

19. The Ministers looked forward to continuing this dialogue, further exchanging views and developing common understanding to promote commitment to partnership and strengthening future cooperation.