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U.S. Officials Seek Real Development Results at Johannesburg Summit

World Summit on Sustainable Development gets under way August 26

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Washington – U.S. officials believe that the true test of the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development will lie not in the negotiation of new goals or the creation of new bureaucracies, but in concrete actions taken to enhance human productivity, reduce poverty, foster economic growth and improve conditions worldwide.

A U.S. delegation, led by Secretary of State Colin Powell, will join those from over 170 countries participating in the environment and development summit to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, August 26 to September 4. The delegations, many led by heads of government, are set to finalize a new global implementation plan to accelerate sustainable development and launch a series of innovative partnership activities at the regional, national and international level.

A new report released by the United Nations on the eve of the summit highlights the disturbing impact of current patterns of development on living standards and the Earth's natural resources. The report finds, for example, that at present 40 percent of the world's population faces water shortages; global sea levels are rising; 2.4 percent of the world's forests were destroyed during the 1990s; more than 3 million people die every year from the effects of air pollution; and many plant and animal species are at risk of extinction, including half of the large primates, man's closest animal relatives.

In a speech March 14 to the Inter-American Development Bank, President Bush said that poverty is broad and seemingly inescapable in many nations and regions, "leaving a dark shadow across the world." Bush said that for thousands of millions of people, especially in Africa and the Islamic world, poverty is spreading and per capita income is falling.

"This growing divide between wealth and poverty, between opportunity and misery, is both a challenge to our compassion and a source of instability," he said. "We must confront it. We must include every African, every Asian, every Latin American, every Muslim in an expanding circle of development. The advance of development is a central commitment of American foreign policy."

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell repeated this message in a July 12 speech in Washington, saying that the most important message that the United States will bring to the Johannesburg Summit is that "we are totally committed to supporting sustainable development."

Powell said sustainable development is a compelling moral and humanitarian issue for the United States, and a security imperative. "Poverty, destruction of the environment and despair are destroyers of people, of societies, of nations – a cause of instability as an unholy trinity that can destabilize countries and destabilize entire regions."

U.S. officials also emphasize that mobilizing resources for sustainable development will

require concrete actions that produce compelling results, not merely high-sounding rhetoric. U.S. Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky noted in a recent speech that the world community has already agreed on Agenda 21 – the blueprint for sustainable development signed by 176 nations at the Rio Summit 10 years ago – and on the U.N. Millennium Development Goals, which consist of eight major goals, including an effort to reduce by half, by 2015, the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day.

"The world community does not need to negotiate new goals or create new global bureaucracies," she said. "If we are serious, Johannesburg must be about actual implementation."

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan echoed this sentiment recently, saying that the summit "aims to move from commitments, of which we have had plenty ... to action."

Powell said that another important message that the United States will take to the summit is that sustainable development must begin at home, with sound policies and good governance. Good governance encompasses the creation and support of effective democratic institutions, an independent judiciary, and domestic policies that promote investment, economic growth, advances in social development and environmental protection.

"Both official assistance and private capital are most effective when they go to governments that rule justly, invest in their people and encourage economic freedom," Powell said.

This was the principle guiding President Bush on March 22 at the U.N. International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, when he announced that he will seek Congressional approval to increase U.S. core development assistance by 50 percent over the next three years, resulting in a \$5,000 million annual increase over current levels. These additional funds will go to a new Millennium Challenge Account that will fund initiatives to help developing nations that are committed to good governance and the health and education of their people.

Bush said in an August 19 statement that the U.S. delegation will offer plans at the summit that "advance the new approach to development" that he and other national leaders embraced at the Monterrey conference. "This new approach is based on shared accountability among developed and developing nations," Bush said.

At a meeting in Washington on August 7, the United States also agreed to boost its contribution to the Global Environment Facility (GEF), pledging to spend \$500 million over the next four years to help developing countries mitigate environmental problems. The money from the United States, the largest contributor to the GEF, joins that of 31 other governments who have agreed on a total \$2, 920 million replenishment of the fund. The GEF was created in 1991 to help poorer nations with everything from coping with the impacts of global warming to conserving wildlife, improving the health of international waters and overcoming land degradation.

Klaus Toepfer, executive director of the United Nations Environment Program, said after the meeting that the new pledges for the GEF replenishment were a positive signal for the summit, showing that "in one critical area we are starting to move from words to implementation."

Finally, U.S. officials emphasize that governments, civil society and the private sector must work in partnership to mobilize development resources. Jonathan Margolis, director of the State Department Office of Political Coordination, said at a recent briefing that no summit declaration or plan of action will give people access to drinking

water, halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, or ensure access to primary education.

"We believe that effective partnerships among governments at all levels, businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders are the means to deliver concrete results," he said.

Margolis added that this type of work is not easy, and requires governments, major stakeholder groups and the U.N. system to modify the way they are accustomed to doing business. "For example, governments need to add new types of experts to our delegations, people who can talk about substantive projects in addition to those who negotiate texts," he said. "We need to create new types of processes in our capitals to build and develop these partnerships."

U.S. officials emphasize that partnerships are already being deployed. For example, the United States and South Africa have initiated the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, an innovative program where NGOs, industry and governments are working together to create national parks where none before existed – helping to slow and even reverse deforestation in the Congo Basin. In West Africa, the Water for the Poor Alliance marries the resources and leadership of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation with civil society and USAID to provide water to 400,000 people in rural areas.

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