

# **WFEO MEETING REPORT**

## **UNITED NATIONS CSD-16**

The meeting was held at the United Nations Headquarters from 5<sup>th</sup> May to 16<sup>th</sup> May 2008

### **DELEGATION**

The WFEO delegation comprised the President, Barry Grear, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Capacity Building Dan Clinton, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Environment Darrel Danyluk, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Energy Jorge Spitalnik and Mike Sanyo ASCE.

We were teamed with ICSU (International Council for Science) as a major advisory group under the title “Science and Technology”.

The other major groups are women, non-government organizations, business and industry, children and youth, local authorities, indigenous people, workers and trade unions, and farmers.

### **ATTENDEES**

The meeting involved approximately 1300 people including Ministers of Environment, Ministers of Infrastructure, Ministers of Agriculture from about 25 countries, the other countries had their executives of similar departments. A total of about 100 countries were represented.

### **THEME**

The main theme for 2008/9 is Agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification and Africa. The Commission operates with the first year being devoted to understanding the issue and the second year in discussing and agreeing to solutions.

### **REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS**

The Commission reports to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and through it to the General Assembly.

There were prepared inputs from invited speakers as well as many statements by individual country and major group representatives.

The Scientific and Technological Community Major group made 17 statements of which 11 can be sourced on the web at [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/mgroups/about\\_mgroups.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/mgroups/about_mgroups.htm)

The process in the lead up to UNCS-17 which will be held on 4 to 15 May 2009 will involve regular conference calls attended by Jorge Spitalnik and an intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting scheduled on 23 to 28 February. Our appointee to that meeting will be decided when the location is determined.

### **RESPONSES**

Climate change (although I now prefer to use the phrase “changing climate” as it is not steady state) and adaptation to climate change in relation to agriculture were mentioned by many speakers. Climate change is expected to affect water resources and to have a strong impact on drought and desertification. Climate change was for some speakers the most urgent challenge faced by African countries, the Small Island Developing States and other countries whose economies depend on activities affected by climate.

The key points being made by attendees at UNCS-16 was to gain a broad understanding of the issues surrounding the topic being addressed. The UNCS-17 in 2009 will challenge the attendees to propose solutions to these problems.

The role of engineers, through WFEO, is to help developing countries devise adaptation strategies through financial assistance, technology transfer and capacity building.

## WFEO RESPONSE

Key outcomes and statements reported by the attendees that are related to topics that the engineering organizations can consider with a view to preparing responses are as follows:

1. To achieve sustainable development in these key areas there will need to be an enabling environment, good governance, and institutional structure that encourage and assist, as well as capacity building. There is a strong need for strengthening science research and education focused on solutions. There must be mechanisms for facilitating dialogue between scientists and technologists, decision makers and farmers. WFEO will work with these groups to improve extension services so that information and solutions get into the hands of farmers, particularly small-scale farmers. An example of the problem is that half of the food grown is wasted before it can get to the consumer through poor harvesting techniques and incorrect storage allowing vermin to attack and product rotting to occur.
2. Productivity and competitiveness in most sectors is low, inhibiting the potential of Africa to move into higher value-added activities beyond bulk commodities. Low levels of private sector investment, weak domestic financial markets, lack of technological capacities and limited transfer of technologies are among the obstacles to economic diversification and industrial upgrading.
3. Efficient water resources development and management as well as reusing safe wastewater can be a key factor in increasing resilience to climate changes and ensuring food security. Also, improved irrigation efficiencies and on-farm management practices could contribute towards overcoming water shortages and enhancing food security.
4. The use of food crops for producing biofuels has been a source of concern for many countries. However, biofuels can help overcome fossil fuel dependency and provide employment opportunities if their production meets sustainability criteria. Focusing efforts on those biofuels which do not compete with food production can offer promising results to mitigate climate change and to stimulate economic and rural development.
5. Increased interaction among scientists, policy makers and local communities can accelerate the dissemination and adaptation of new and emerging technologies and corresponding knowledge from laboratories to field application in developing countries, with assistance from development partners.
6. Investments in research and development particularly in innovative and sustainable agricultural technologies and infrastructure are urgently required. The international community should step up support to investments in agriculture and substantially increase official development assistance in support of international research and on-the-ground outreach, training and extension services in agriculture.
7. Capacity building, transfer of technologies in accordance with the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity building, technical cooperation and partnership are needed.
8. Scientific solutions are critical to increasing agricultural productivity. Investment in science and technology, training, capacity building and information sharing are important for addressing long-term constraints.
9. Climate change was identified as a major challenge for many countries in terms of its potential impact on water and food security, contributing in particular to an increase in extreme hydrological events such as floods and drought.
10. The absence of water treatment facilities in certain areas poses an obstacle for environmental management and for providing safe drinking water. This obstacle could be overcome by developing and implementing sustainable water and sanitation plans which takes into account wastewater management. In this regard, it is important to use technologies that are suitable to local conditions.
11. Response to the current food crisis requires an increase in agricultural productivity, while ensuring that natural resources are managed in a suitable manner, and ecosystems are preserved. Reducing pre- and post – harvest

losses, which average around 50% globally and are highest in developing countries, demands transfer and dissemination of existing technologies and management practices, including risk management tools, and provision of good science to small-scale farmers in rural areas. The response to the food crisis should look at both causes and symptoms, but disaggregated statistics of natural, human, social and physical capital are often missing. Further studies should help to increase understanding of the impacts of biotechnology and biofuels in relation to food security with a view to developing a balance between biofuels and production.

## **THE WFEO CHALLENGE**

The challenge for WFEO and the world engineering community will be to propose solutions for tabling in 2009 and then arguing for their acceptance. All national and international members are being asked to consider the 11 points above and submit ideas and solutions which have been successful in their own areas that the delegates can propose at UNCSD-17.

If further information is required please contact [WWW.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/review.htm](http://WWW.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/review.htm) and the WFEO attendees who can offer other comments and may have other supporting material.

31 May 2008

*Barry Grear*  
*President WFEO*