

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**OPENING STATEMENT**

**BY**

**MR. SHA ZUKANG**

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE 2012 UN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20)**

**High-Level Symposium on the United Nations Conference on Sustainable  
Development**

**Beijing, 8 September 2011**

Excellencies,  
Minister Yang Jiechi,  
Chairman Zhang Ping,  
Executive Secretary-General, Wu Hailong,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this High-Level Symposium focusing on the objective and two themes of Rio+20.

It is my pleasure to be here.

Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said Rio+20 is one of the most important conferences in the history of the United Nations.

I agree with him. But why does he say this?

We all know our world is facing unprecedented changes and challenges.

Let me mention a few key words: volatility... uncertainty... unemployment... erosion of the natural resource base... extreme shocks...

These words have become associated with our lives and times.

Our current approach lacks cohesion. The closely linked issues – social, economic and environmental – continue to be addressed in isolation.

Our hope is that Rio+20 will show us a better way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

What do I most want to see at Rio+20? A renewed sense of political commitment.

The proof of this commitment will be the creation of an action-oriented and forward looking outcome document. As well as its follow-up!

Let me remind you that the Rio principles, the conventions agreed at Rio 1992 and Agenda 21 remain as pertinent today as 20 years ago.

But it is the vision of these documents that has yet to be achieved.

Therefore, we should not be distracted at Rio+20 by new principles or additional conventions.

Our focus should be on bridging critical implementation gaps. Ensuring that what we agree *actually* gets implemented.

Let Rio+20 be known as a Conference of “implementation”.

Rio+20 also gives us an opportunity to look at where we have succeeded and where we have failed.

Unfortunately, progress over the past two decades has been uneven.

Globalization has been marked by greater wealth concentration and growing inequalities.

Fortunately, there have also been successes.

School enrolments have increased. Child health has improved. And there is more access to clean water.

But these limited successes need to be broadened and deepened.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the Rio+20 preparatory process, Member States highlighted several emerging challenges for priority attention:

- green jobs and social inclusion;
- energy access, efficiency and sustainability;
- food security and sustainable agriculture;
- sound water management;
- sustainable cities;
- management of the oceans; and
- improved resilience and disaster preparedness.

Climate change cuts across all of these areas.

Means of implementation is another cross-cutting priority.

Rio+20 must address all these issues directly. Let me touch on some of them briefly.

Job creation and opportunities for youth employment tops most national agendas. Rio needs to define how the green economy can create the most jobs and address inequalities.

Energy access is another important priority.

One Rio proposal is to launch a global initiative for universal energy access by 2030.

Another major issue is food security.

We need a major breakthrough in agriculture to meet the growing global food demand, while at the same time safeguarding soils, water and biodiversity.

Next is water scarcity, an increasing threat to the world's population.

Water demand remains on the rise, but sources are limited. Closer international cooperation will be needed to deal with water shortages and avoid conflict.

Forceful actions will also be needed to avoid over-exploitation of the oceans.

Next is the issue of increasing urbanization. Ambitious goals are needed to cope with growing populations and to create sustainable cities.

The participation of mayors and local authorities from all corners of the world is key.

And let us not forget the institutions charged with sustainable development.

They should be able to adapt to a continuously evolving world.

Effective monitoring systems, as well as quick response systems must be in place to deal with new and emerging challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now let me address the first theme of Rio+20: a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

We know that a green economy is not an alternative to sustainable development.

It is an avenue for new opportunities.

Yet the concept has generated skepticism.

Developing countries have specific concerns: will they face new market barriers... new technology gaps... new and additional investment costs... new aid conditionalities?

These questions need to be answered collectively.

We should also be looking towards reducing technological gaps between developed and developing countries.

Developing countries need investments in their green sectors.

They need support in fulfilling standards that are green enough to compete in international markets.

Finance will be needed to acquire and implement technologies to build greener infrastructures and industries.

Countries must be prepared to mobilize financing by themselves. Yet international support will also be needed to support poorer countries.

At Rio+20, perhaps a new public and private financing initiative, like a global green economy fund, could be considered.

Additionally, we cannot forget social issues.

For instance, as the demand slows for fossil fuels, jobs may be lost.

How can we transfer skills?

While broad precepts are important, a green economy is also about local realities.

Enough space should be left for countries to adapt their policies and technologies to national circumstances.

In Rio, we can decide on a broad menu of policy options and toolkits.

I believe one outcome can be a green economy roadmap... or guidelines which can help countries in the transition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now let me move to our second theme: institutional framework for sustainable development or IFSD.

I am very pleased that our views on the IFSD have not only been evolving, but also *converging*.

There are several possible options.

They include:

- reviewing the functioning of CSD;
- enhancing ECOSOC;
- and establishing a Sustainable Development Council.

Several options have also been suggested for strengthening UNEP.

These include:

- universal membership and creation of an implementation arm;
- and establishing a UN Environment Organization or a World Environment Organization.

The transition to green economy will require a major technological change.

Therefore, the institutional architecture will play a fundamental role in coordinating international cooperation.

In moving forward, there needs to be real engagement and substantive deliberations on various IFSD options.

Pros and cons needs to be outlined.

Furthermore, creating new institutions may have a longer horizon. But we must be mindful of arrangements needed in the short-run.

The Secretariat stands ready to provide support and analysis.

Distinguished representatives,

This week's Symposium provides an opportunity to have an open and productive discussion on the objective and themes of Rio+20.

Let's make the most of it.

Let us use this time for in-depth and enriching discussions that will lead to the best possible outcome at Rio +20. For all of us.

Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*