



European Economic and Social Committee
The President

Brussels, 10 May 2012, room JDE 60, 9.30 am – 1 pm

**Meeting EESC Rio+20 delegation with
civil society representatives from Brazil, Russia, China**

Staffan Nilsson's welcome speech

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Check Against Delivery

I would very much like to welcome our guests come from so far as China, Brazil and – less far away - Russia.

Thank you for accepting my invitation to **follow up on our work on sustainable development issues** that we have done with each of you individually during the last year.

My motto for my presidency at the EESC is *engaging people for sustainable development*, therefore I have made the preparations for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development **(Rio+20) this year one of my key priorities.**

Right from the outset of these preparations I have decided that we should restrict this dialogue not to Europe alone but that we should **use our existing structured dialogues with civil society representatives from other parts of the world** to foster dialogue on these issues.

We had invited as well representatives from civil society in India and in South Africa but unfortunately none of them could join us today.



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Rio+20 is a United Nations Conference on development- on sustainable development. One of the projected objectives for the Conference is to **renew our commitment to sustainable development.**

It is since Rio 1992 that **civil society** has been acknowledged as one of the **actors of sustainable development.** Civil society has initiated uncountable projects contributing to sustainable development, last but not least fostered by Agenda 21.

We are convinced that the transition to sustainable development relies upon **continuous engagement with civil society**, and that concerns all levels of governance.

We as representatives from civil society from Brazil, from China, from Russia, from the EU, we have to show our commitment to sustainable development, we have to **send our negotiators now in New York and later in Rio clear messages** concerning what we want them to decide upon.

I know from my colleague Hans-Joachim Wilms, Chair of our Sustainable Development Observatory and our rapporteur on Rio, that informal **negotiations** at the UN headquarters in New York **are advancing only very slowly.**

So now, what negotiators need in these crucial weeks, is the message that they are not allowed to give up, that they have to continue striving for an **ambitious outcome of the Rio+20 Conference.**

I think it sends out a very **strong political signal**, if we, representatives from civil society in Brazil, China, Russia and the EU, deliver a strong message: **Rio+20 is an unique opportunity to commit to concrete actions for the just transition to sustainable societies.**

We do not need to hassle over words, we do not need to re-invent the wheel. What we do need is a **common understanding about the sense of urgency and that we need to take concrete actions to foster sustainable development in the context of poverty eradication.**

Our negotiators have to commit to a concrete action plan – but they will only do so if they know that we, civil society representatives, demand it and that we are able and willing to contribute to the implementation of these decisions.



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I so much wish our meeting success in formulating this strong message.

And I look forward to continue working with you, in the run-up to Rio+20 and further-on in the follow-up.

In particular, I am very thankful to our Brazilian hosts in Rio that they have agreed to organise our next meeting just before the UN Conference, the 19th of June. This will give us the opportunity to present our joint efforts to foster dialogue and action towards sustainable development.

For further details:

Coralia Catana | EESC President's Spokesperson | +32 (0)25469963 |
+32 (0)498984613

E-mail: coralia.catana@eesc.europa.eu | president.eesc@eesc.europa.eu
Internet: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.staffan-nilsson-speeches>