A View of the UN Open Working Group

By Patricia Chernoff, QEW Representative to the UN

At the beginning of each day’s meetings of Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, several keynote speakers make an effort to educate the diplomats from various countries on the theme of the day. On the day I am reporting, the theme was Science and Technology, considered keys to the future by those in these fields.

Eric Solheim is the Chair of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Development Assistance Committee. He said Official Development Assistance (ODA) needs reform to account for the role of middle-income countries and needs and better direct an "abundance of money." To this end, he said OECD is considering reforming the concept of ODA, which currently "disincentivizes success"; widening the concept of financial flows for development; and measuring impact, not only effort. Solheim called for increasing development spending for less developed countries and supporting the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change process.

The second speaker was Rolf-Dieter Heuer, Director-General of European Organization for Nuclear Research, who said that sharing scientific knowledge bridges cultures and promotes peace. He described a virtuous cycle "that should never be broken" as consisting of basic education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics as well as research and development. Heuer proposed sustainable development targets for global and national investment in science, research and development, technology, and mathematics to ensure that these areas are publicly funded.

The third speaker was Martin Khor, Executive Director of South Centre, who recommended that means of implementation be included in each sustainable goal as a separate goal. On technology transfer, he said high economic growth with minimal carbon emissions requires access to financing and technology. He noted that technology patents create barriers to health, food production, and climate change mitigation. He suggested capacity building on using flexibilities within the WTO Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. He further suggested creating a "pool" of environmentally sound technologies, assessing their suitability before development and transferring them. He said, "It is better not to transfer technology than to transfer bad technology." He recommends an Open Working Group to establish a technology facilitation mechanism.

Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing Co-Chair Pertti Majanen reviewed the Committee’s work thus far and said the Open Working Group and Committee are "sister processes." He outlined the following areas of growing consensus among the Committee’s experts: desire to form a comprehensive and integrated financing strategy; commitment to guaranteeing financing the Millenium Development Goals; and the need to look into financing of large environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity and desertification, the
environmental sector, and the need for qualitative policy responses.

Following the presentations, country delegates are encouraged to ask questions and to interact with the speakers. This format has been quite a success, often leading to a rich dialogue among countries.

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The quarterly journal of Quaker Earthcare Witness.

Quaker Earthcare Witness
P.O. Box 6787
Albany, CA 94706
info@quakerearthcare.org
tel:510-542-9606

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