

# What Happened at Rio in 2012?

In June of this year a major UN conference, Rio+ 20 , was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The agenda for this conference was designed to follow up the landmark Earth Summit of 1992, In 1992 the most pressing issue was how to raise world consciousness regarding the global stresses we face. Specifically, the development of affordable and sustainable methodologies designed to meet current needs without endangering the needs of future generations.

The 2012-Rio conference brought together 50,000 participants and 100 heads of state. It should be noted that US President Obama, Prime Minister David Cameron of Great Britain and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany did **not** attend. It is 'assumed' that these heads of state were preoccupied with domestic politics and financial turmoil in Europe.

## **What has been the outcome in twenty years?**

Disappointingly but not surprisingly, agreements were not kept. The rich countries neither financed nor transferred technologies to poorer countries as promised. Thus affecting sustainable growth. The ecological and environmental hazards have become **more** devastating in the past twenty years The outcome of the central main meeting was disappointing because delegates could not agree on enforceable commitments on climate change or any other global challenge.

International representatives at the meeting attempted to tackle questions such as protecting forests and fisheries as well as bringing electricity to more than one billion people. Furthermore. Specific Issues were discussed for weaning the world off fossil fuels and encouraging farming and economic growth that does not destroy the natural environment. Such projections are daunting and expectations are discouragingly low. The final

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outcome of these issues was a very watered down document with few agreements. Most observers thought the conference a failure.

In spite of disappointment the formal conference did agree to set up a task force to replace the Millenium Development Goals (MDG's) which ends in 2015 with a set of sustainable development goals (SDS). These are realistic targets that can be achieved and their success measured. Similar to the MDG's, it is hoped, and even expected, that goals targeted at energy, water, oceans, resource efficiency, land and ecosystems will energize concerned (NGO) groups and perhaps even countries.

At the Millenium Summit in 2000 targets to be achieved by 2015 included eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating malaria.and other diseases.

## **How well are we doing?**

World wide attention has helped. The extreme poverty rate is expected to fall below 15% thus meeting the target .The rate in 1950 was an astounding 50%.Some of the poorest countries have made great strides in education, the number for child mortality under five from preventable diseases has declined, Nearly 2 billion people now have access to clean water. Sanitation and maternal health, however, are very bad. In summary, there has been some progress but poverty remains high, too many children die before age 5 and still too many mothers die unnecessarily during child birth.

## **Some good news.**

Activity outside the main negotiating sessions produced hundreds of side agreements not requiring ratification or direct financing by governments. They offer hope of incremental but real progress. For example, Microsoft will go carbon neutral by 2030, oil giant

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ENI will reduce its flaring of natural gas. The most impressive agreement was from the eight largest development banks who committed \$200 billion to finance sustainable transportation systems in the world's largest cities.

Dr. Chan, WHO Director General spoke at an important side event on Energy, Health and Women's Empowerment. She pointed out the crucial importance of a reliable supply of electricity, without which vaccines, blood and medicines cannot be safely stored or equipment properly sterilized and surgical activity in operating rooms can be detrimentally seriously affected. Solar energy can provide cheap and reliable power for both households and clinics.

## **Action without the blessings of international agreements**

Exposure to indoor pollution from coal cook stoves kills nearly two million people annually, mostly women and children. Cleaner energy could halve the number of childhood deaths from pneumonia and reduce the burden of more than one million who die each year from chronic lung disease caused by indoor air pollution. ***Clean cooking stoves and electricity can be a very major project for Humanists.*** There is a growing capacity of grass-roots organizations and corporations to provide environmental action without the blessings of international agreements..

Over the last few years the US, Europe and China have spent hundreds of billions of dollars on clean energy research and deployment. The price of solar and wind power has fallen sharply. Governments often play a crucial role in financing many of the most important technological innovations of the past century. Some examples: semiconductors, radar, internet, radio, jet engine, and medical advances in developing antibiotics

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## Where are we right now?

The world is grappling with economic stagnation and instability. We have both financial crises and ecological crises. The world's leaders must summon cooperation and political will **now**. Tomorrow is too late.

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