

WAVE Belgrade Declaration

Adopted at the WAVE Conference, 13 October 2007

We, the participants of the WAVE (Women as the Voice for the Environment) conference here in Belgrade,¹ come together from 30 different countries in the PAN-European region, 20 years after the publication of the Report of the Commission Brundtland 'Our Common Future' and 15 years after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, to call for the right to a healthy environment.

We recall the spirit and outcomes of the UNEP WAVE Assembly which took place in Nairobi, October 2004, brought together more than 150 women and men from different regions in the world, and resulted in clear policy recommendations, project ideas, and the WAVE Manifesto.

We underline research that shows equality helps people move quickly out of poverty, and enhances the wellbeing of men, women, and children. Investment in women improves the lives and livelihoods of all.

Therefore, we are concerned about the growing inequalities in our regions and see that the poor and marginalised are most subject to environmental injustice, suffer more health effects from environmental destruction and pollution, and are less able to defend their environmental rights. We are also worried by militarization, armed conflicts and war, that creates great environmental destruction and undermine equitable and sustainable development.

We pay tribute to the poor worldwide, in particular the 70% women among them, who under difficult circumstances sustain their livelihoods and communities. We recognize their invaluable contributions to preserve the environment and its natural resources, to safeguard the health of their families and communities, to work towards economic independence, and to strengthen social networks.

We gather here to share our concerns regarding the health of our planet, our societies and our children, and to share our practices in the areas of safe water supply and healthy sanitation, secure and sustainable energy use, diverse and healthy food production, promotion of safe products and substances, and a sustainable way of life for all.

¹ WAVE Lunch and Conference, 10 and 13 October, held in Belgrade, Serbia, organized by Women in Europe for a Common Future in cooperation with Environmental Ambassadors and UNEP.

We come together to voice our demands for the recognition of our right to a healthy environment.

Right to Biodiversity

Biodiversity encompasses all life-forms on our planet, providing for the future of our species and our civilisation.

We are deeply concerned about the disastrous biodiversity loss due to unsustainable development and human pressures, which is clearly demonstrated in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and reflected in the deterioration of ecosystems, landscapes, species and species varieties in our pan-European region.

We urge Governments in our region to implement existing commitments to biodiversity protection, in particular the Convention on Biodiversity, and take the urgently needed actions it stipulates.

Agro-biodiversity, consisting of traditional, bio-diverse crops, seeds, fruits, and farm animals, is a living, immeasurable gene pool and the basis of our food production. However, biodiversity is endangered by agro-industry and trade measures.

We therefore call for the promotion of a sustainable, bio-diverse, fair, ecological and regional agricultural production, which includes the reduction of subsidies for industrial agriculture, and support for the environmental as well as social services of farmers. We demand the recognition of the cultural heritage that our (agro-) biodiversity offers, not in gene banks or museums, but in their living environments. We demand the avoidance of negative effects on biodiversity caused by the promotion of bio-energy production and call for the labelling of biofuels.

Right to Safe Food

We see a major danger in the promotion and use of GMOs² and products based on nano-technologies in our agriculture, environment, and societies. These technologies are not sufficiently tested for health and environmental effects and also hold the danger of patenting life and basic

² Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

elements such as atoms and molecules. We are also concerned about the widespread use of pesticides in agriculture.

We therefore demand the recognition of the right of citizens to safe, diverse, fair, and locally produced agricultural products. We demand the right to be able to protect ourselves, our families, and our environment from GMOs and products based on nanotechnologies and thus call for a moratorium on such products until all health, safety, and even human rights aspects have been thoroughly studied by independent experts, particularly for the EECCA³ and SEE⁴ region. We also call for clear targets and timetables for the reduction of pesticides in agriculture in our region.

Right to Safe and Affordable Water and Sanitation

We are deeply concerned about the lack of access to clean drinking water and the absence of safe sanitation for more than 100 million people in the EU⁵, EECCA, and SEE region (particularly in rural areas), and the morbidity and mortality this causes, especially for babies and children. We are concerned about the enormous health, physical and psychological burden this puts on children.

We are worried about the increased contamination of water resources and water wasting practices, and are troubled by the investments in unsustainable conventional sanitation systems, privatisation of services, and steeply rising water prices in the region, with a lack of measures to compensate the poorest populations, particularly elderly and female-headed households. Water cannot be considered as a commodity but is a basic need for human and biological life.

We therefore demand the safeguarding of the right to safe and affordable water for all, and call for the promotion of preventive water source protection, including sustainable and affordable sanitation, and water saving approaches. We demand communities and citizens have access to information and the possibility to participate in decision making on water issues at all levels.

We call on Governments to develop water policies for extreme weather conditions, climate change, natural

and industrial disasters, and demand fair and affordable water pricing policies, the prevention of corruption in the water sector, and the recognition of the right to clean and affordable water in national Constitutions. Governments must also use an integrated water management and ecosystems approach in national legal frameworks and implement this on all levels. Finally, we call to include safe water, sanitation and hygiene, as a subject in regular educational programs.

Right to Safe Energy

We are alarmed by the detrimental energy situation for poor households and schools, hospitals and other public institutions and facilities in our region. Poverty forces people to burn waste (e.g. plastics, tar, oil, kerosene, traditional biomass) indoors for heating and cooking purposes, emitting toxic fumes and causing major health problems.

We therefore demand Governments to invest in safe and affordable energy devices, energy efficiency technologies and sustainable energy sources, and establish tax incentives for clean and safe energy and energy efficiency. We demand access to affordable, efficient, renewable and clean energy for all in the region and call for education on energy efficiency, renewable energy and conservation at all social levels. We call for the participation of the public, especially women, in decision making on energy sources and management. We demand assessments of local, regional and national energy needs, and capacities for conservation, renewables, efficiency, and safe energy development. Energy, including renewable energy, must be produced in a decentralised, environmentally sound and fair manner.

We are concerned about the effects of climate change and the burdens that climate-related changes and disasters put on women, men and children, including health, environmental, and economic impacts in our region and globally.

We therefore demand a strong political commitment from every Government in the world to ratify and implement the Kyoto protocol. Tools like the Clean Development Mechanism should be introduced and implemented in a way that local people, particularly those living in poverty, and the environment will benefit. We also

³ Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia (EECCA)

⁴ South Eastern Europe (SEE)

⁵ European Union (EU)

demand a major endeavour from our Governments to promote a gender-sensitive and effective post-Kyoto regime in the new agreement beginning in 2012 (to be discussed in the forthcoming UNFCCC⁶ Conference of the Parties (COP), December 2007 Bali, Indonesia). This regime can only be successful if the perspectives of women are fully taken into account. Surveys show women give greater priority to safe, renewable energy and will support measures needed for the implementation of this regime.

Nuclear energy is no option

We are deeply concerned about the promotion of nuclear energy as a solution to climate change, especially as evidence shows that the whole cycle of nuclear energy consumes a great deal of resources and produces much CO₂. Uranium as an energy source is limited and will be exhausted in 65 years at the current level of use. With the planned increased number of nuclear plants it will only last 30-40 years.

Nuclear energy production can never be safe; any material defect or human error can lead to immense consequences, not to mention the security threats nuclear facilities pose. Additionally, there is no safe disposal of highly toxic radioactive wastes from uranium mining, milling and nuclear energy production. We know the devastation this technology has caused in our region and worldwide, and the disastrous, everlasting impacts it has on the lives of women, men, children and future generations.

We therefore demand our Governments remove subsidies for unsustainable energy sources such as nuclear and instead give financial support to safe, efficient, sustainable clean and renewable energy resources and to promote these technologies. We further demand that local communities have the right to not only participate in the selection and development of their own safe energy sources, but also to participate in decision making, including the right to oppose or propose other forms, on the development of large energy projects such as hydroelectric dams, and coal and nuclear power plants in their communities.

Right to Safe Chemicals

We are concerned about the effects of harmful chemicals in our food, environment, and everyday products on our health and that of our children and families. Scientific insights show that even very low levels of hazardous chemicals can negatively impact the health of a child with lifelong effects. Pregnant

women can unwillingly and unknowingly transfer hazardous substances accumulated in their bodies to their child. We are also concerned about the strong increase of breast cancer in our region, and the scientific evidence that links this disease to environmental pollution.

We are worried by the lack of public awareness about hazardous substances affecting our health and we see too little protection through regulation.

We therefore demand Governments put the principles of substitution, precaution, liability and compensation (polluter pays), and the public right to know in every international and national legislation on chemicals.

Children should be protected and born free of a toxic body burden and we call on Governments to put the health of children and the pre-birth environment high on the agenda of all chemicals strategies, agreements, plans and programs. As a first step, we call on Governments to ban all hazardous chemicals in children's products (e.g. toys, clothing, food), and link this to their national Children's Environment and Health Action Plans (WHO Europe Region).

We demand the phasing out and mandatory substitution of all carcinogenic, mutagenic, bio-accumulative and toxic, repro-toxic, persistent, endocrine disrupting and neuro-toxic substances, all which can harm the health of women, men and in particular children. Furthermore, we demand the effective implementation of REACH⁷ in the EU so that it leads to the protection of humans and the environment from hazardous chemicals, and call on governments in the EECCA and SEE region to take the initiative to adopt similar measures as those stipulated by the REACH legislation in their national policies. Double standards in our region cannot be tolerated; dirty technology and hazardous chemicals transfers including those in products from North to South and East must be banned by all parties and the highest standards must be ensured for the production of safe products.

⁶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

⁷ Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and restriction of Chemical substances (REACH)

SAICM⁸ needs to be implemented as a matter of urgency and we call on Governments to implement measures for the reduction of hazardous chemicals and to promote green chemistry tax incentives.

IFCS⁹ is a necessary mechanism through which Governments and other stakeholders can discuss effective chemicals policy measures. We thus call on them to uphold their commitments to this forum, along with more political support and funding.

As a society, we need more information through proper labeling, campaigns, multi-stakeholder conferences, and call for integrating new issues like chemicals safety or chemical environmental health effects into school curriculums.

Right to Information, Participation and Justice

Access to information, public participation and justice on environmental matters needs to be secured for everyone. In particular, the voices of minority, poor and otherwise marginalised groups, especially women throughout the region must be heard in policymaking. However, there is yet no balanced influence of women on decision making and policy implementation, meanwhile women's voices reflect half of the region's population and are essential to build sustainable and just development.

We therefore demand the increased participation of all citizens in environmental decision and policy making. In particular, we call for the full participation of women in agenda and priority setting, policy development and implementation at every level. We also demand the right of all citizens, women in particular, to have easy and full access to environmental information and environmental justice. This needs to be guaranteed through the full implementation of the Aarhus Convention and we call on those Governments in our region who have yet to ratify this Convention to urgently do so, including the Amendment on GMOs. We call on Governments to promote the Convention at an international level, bringing its principles into other international forums and processes, fulfilling Rio Principle 10.

⁸ Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)

⁹ Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS)

Our Right to a Healthy Environment

We call on our Governments and all other sectors of society to recognise the environment as the foundation and sustainer of our societies, our economies and our lives.

We call on our Governments to guarantee the right to a healthy environment, taking into account the full protection of communities, in particular our children and future generations, by implementing existing measures and introducing new legal means.

We call on our Governments to place equitable sustainable development at the top of their policy agenda. This should be reflected in the budgets of local and state governments. Education for sustainable development is an integral part of such an agenda.

We call on our Governments to make the eradication and prevention of poverty a first priority by implementing equitable sustainable development and environmental justice, providing safe and affordable basic necessities of life (water, food, energy, housing, education, sanitation).

We call for the fully balanced participation of women in policy and decision making at local, national and international level. We call on Governments to invest in environmental cooperation as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building processes.

Our Commitment

We commit ourselves to work together, exchange information and lessons learned, to share ideas and visions, and cooperate with scientific and technical experts and socially responsible businesses. We will dialogue and build partnerships to demonstrate and implement sustainable lifestyles and practices and bring together our unique and diverse strengths for our common goal: a just, peaceful and healthy planet.

We participants of the WAVE conference in Belgrade call on all Governments and stakeholders in the region and worldwide to join our efforts to promote the right to a healthy environment for all!



