

SustainUS Policy Platform

Preamble

1. “We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.” When written in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, this introduction to the Earth Charter bore a spirit of hope now these same words embody a sense of urgency, perhaps even desperation.
2. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) forged a global plan for sustainable development, but we have yet to see that plan put into effect. Our leaders promised to promote economic development, protect the environment, and maintain social welfare. But since UNCED, poverty has increased, Official Development Assistance has decreased, and the world's biological and natural resources have greatly diminished. These trends are not indicative of a planet moving towards sustainable development; rather, they point to a planet in an implementation crisis stalled by shortsighted policies, unsustainable lifestyles, and an uneducated populace.
3. The world may be without progress, but it is not without will. Youth everywhere recognize that their future is at stake at the negotiating table and that future generations will live in the shadow of today's policies. Youth deserve a voice in determining a global course of action. We, as youth of the United States of America, have organized to achieve that voice.
4. Our instrument for education and advocacy is SustainUS, a network of United States youth dedicated to educating about and advocating for sustainable development. We differ in our backgrounds and in our beliefs, but we share a commitment to our common future. What follows are elements of our collective vision for the world we hope to inherit and the country we call home.

I. Poverty Eradication

5. Sustainable development begins with the eradication of poverty. Approximately 1/6 of the world's people live on less than \$1 a day, and approximately 1/3 live on less than \$2 a day. Eradicating poverty presents a formidable challenge that requires the cooperation of governments, civil society, and private enterprise. Nonetheless, it is a challenge that can and must be met.
6. National governments should commit to achieving the Millennium Development goals and to halving the number of people whose income is less than \$1 a day. Governments should expand social services to all people and contribute to a World Solidarity Fund for the eradication of poverty.

7. Key to eradicating poverty are well-targeted aid projects, especially those that facilitate entrepreneurship. International Financial Institutions and aid donors should actively promote micro-, small- and medium-size enterprises in developing countries to encourage investment, increase employment, and build capacity.

8. The international community should recognize the precedence of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA's) over WTO rules. Governments should be responsible for ensuring that International Labour Organization (ILO) core labor standards and health standards are upheld within their borders.

9. For poverty eradication to be socially sustainable, local control of resources, in particular water and energy, is essential. The international community should recognize access to and control of energy and water as fundamental human rights. Governments should ensure that the Millennium Development goal of halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015 is realized.

10. The international community should recognize and support the efforts of all people to obtain food, shelter, emergency medical attention, basic health services, sanitation, and work in humane conditions.

11. Governments of industrialized countries should finance large-scale technology transfers for capacity-building, particularly in the areas of health, energy, and agriculture.

12. Recognizing that women and children constitute a majority of the world's impoverished people, action at all levels should be taken to ensure that safe work for reasonable wages, equal access to medical care, equal voice in decision-making processes, and education are available to women. Governments should immediately ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Actions should be taken at all levels to make education and preventative care available to women to achieve sustainable levels of population growth.

II. Consumption and Production

13. The phrase, "think globally, act locally," should be our guide for achieving sustainable patterns of consumption and production. Our recent past has shown us that small-scale and even individual consumers and producers can cause incredible social and environmental damage. Conversely, informed and conscientious consumers and producers can make meaningful improvements in people's standards of living and contributions to environmental protection. Ultimately, the fate of sustainable development rests in large part on the extent to which consumers and producers fulfill their duties as global citizens.

14. Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, largely in industrialized countries, have already inflicted a great deal of harm. With that in consideration, Governments should wholeheartedly endorse the principle of common but differentiated

responsibility at all levels. Because of past ecological and social debts owed, unsustainable consumption and production patterns within their borders, and greater financial resources available, industrialized countries have a special responsibility to undertake widespread reforms immediately.

15. Governments and producers should recognize the social and environmental cost of goods.

16. Producers should uphold core labor standards, maintain the social well-being and health of their employees, and minimize their ecological damage and resource use. No producer should deliberately release a product if it has significant adverse effects on consumer health.

17. Producers are responsible for making information readily accessible to consumers. Food producers, in particular, should disclose information on the use of genetic modifications, antibiotics, chemicals, hormones, drugs, or other foreign substances in food production on product labels.

18. Producers should advertise responsibly; advertisements that reinforce unhealthy stereotypes or encourage overconsumption impair the progress of sustainable development.

19. Corporations can be responsible, but they cannot be counted upon to be responsible. The international community should establish a binding Convention on Corporate Conduct to make corporations accountable for the social and environmental damage that they sometimes inflict across national borders and outside the reach of strict labor- and environment-friendly domestic legal systems.

20. Consumers should make purchases that support sustainable producers, minimize the overall amount that they consume, and reuse and recycle as much and as often as possible.

21. Concentrating waste near low-income or ethnic neighborhoods constitutes the highest form of injustice. Actions should be taken at all levels to ensure that waste disposal is race- and ethnicity-blind and is equally distributed among all socioeconomic groups. Governments should make special efforts to avoid disposing waste on the lands of indigenous peoples.

22. The principle of common but differentiated responsibility should apply to waste management. Costs for municipal services should be proportionate to waste produced on all levels.

III. Protecting Natural Resources

23. A clean atmosphere, biodiversity, stable climate, minerals, energy, land, water, and other natural resources are necessary to support life. As we make changes to our natural

habitat, we must preserve viable ecosystems and their natural resources for future generations in order to achieve sustainable development.

24. Unsustainable energy production has already begun to change our global climate and threatens climate stability in the future to an even greater extent. The consumption of fossil fuel-based energy, whose limited supply, ecologically dangerous extraction process, and unclean consumption make it unsustainable, should be gradually phased out. The international community should launch an action campaign to gradually phase out fossil fuel consumption. Developing countries that choose to exploit their fossil-fuel reserves should protect their economies from dependence on fossil-fuel exports. Actions should be taken at all levels to make at least 15% of the global energy supply renewable by 2010. Governments should ratify the Kyoto Protocol and make efforts to reduce all greenhouse gases. Industrialized countries should increase their share of renewables by at least 2 percentage points by 2010. The international community should continue to award credits for carbon sinks in climate change agreements.

25. To address climate change, governments and private donors should establish and finance an international fund for renewable energy. The fund would subsidize sustainable energy, and would contribute to a market-based solution to climate change.

26. If current deforestation rates continue, the world's rainforests, which are crucial for maintaining biodiversity and mediating climate change, will soon be destroyed. The international community should finance global rainforest protection and support rainforest stewardship by indigenous groups. Rainforests should be protected even at great costs to local economies and international trade.

27. Governments should take action and offer incentives, when necessary, to end the practice of whaling, which has a significant impact on marine ecosystems and threatens biodiversity.

28. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) should closely monitor the world's fisheries in order to identify the overfishing of certain species to extinction.

29. If managed responsibly, tourism has the potential to be a boon for the poor and for threatened ecosystems. The tourism industry should minimize negative social and environmental impacts and help preserve the cultures, traditions, and lifestyles of all people.

30. The international community should deliver significant amounts of aid to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in order to address the challenges they face in climate change and preserve their unique habitats and natural resources.

IV. Sustainable Development in a Globalizing World

31. No one doubts that the world has become more interdependent in recent years. Improvements in transportation and communication have increased our exposure to one

another. They have allowed us to open a global discourse on ideas, values, and policies. And they have brought us to the negotiating table to construct a workable plan.

32. These same advancements that have brought us together, though, have also drawn us further apart. Some worry that our debates over ideas have brought the world to the brink of a “clash of civilizations.” Many condemn the newly interconnected global economy for its failure to work for the poor. And there is a growing fear that, with national governments’ complex foreign interests and the absence of strong global governance, mechanized warfare will put sustainability, and indeed life itself, in jeopardy.

33. To say that globalization is a positive or a negative trend would be an oversimplification. Quite simply, globalization has raised the stakes for our efforts to achieve sustainability: we have more to gain – but more to lose as well.

34. Supporting the cultural heritage of all peoples should be a priority amid uncontrollable cultural globalization and the threat of hegemony. Actions should be taken at all levels to ensure cultural integrity, especially of indigenous peoples. Local authorities can play an important role in cross-sectoral partnerships to maintain cultural diversity.

35. Development assistance should not be contingent on structural adjustment policies. When implemented, structural adjustment policies should not infringe on local control of resources.

36. Governments should provide humanitarian assistance wherever and whenever it is needed.

37. The international community should commission an independent (stakeholder) review of the International Financial Institutions (IFI’s) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The IFI’s and the WTO should operate with complete transparency to civil society. IFI development projects should focus on fostering entrepreneurship, especially in micro-, small- and medium-size enterprises.

38. Governments of industrialized countries should commission independent (stakeholder) reviews of their development assistance agencies.

V. Health

39. The Rio Declaration states: “Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.” Sustainable development demands that a cooperative agenda be crafted and implemented to support life that advances good health and dignity for all people.

40. Sustainable development faces a daunting challenge in disease prevention and treatment. Governments should finance the Global Fund to Fight AIDS and make significant contributions and efforts to eliminate all preventable diseases, especially in

developing countries. Industrialized countries should share medical technology with developing countries without hesitation and in spite of domestic patent laws.

41. International and domestic health programs should pay special attention to the health of children.

42. Improving women's health is a key step in achieving development and sustainable population growth rates. Above all, it is important that women have access to a wide range of options in all areas of health and the capacity to choose from among those options. In particular, actions should be taken at all levels to provide women with access to basic reproductive care, sexual education, prenatal care, and a variety of preventative and contraceptive methods. Governments should support a global effort to promote sexual education and require that insurance companies and health management organizations compensate their clients for contraceptives.

VI. Means of Implementation

43. UNCED brought us together to forge a common agenda and maintain a cooperative dialogue, but negotiations alone do not produce results. Actions must be taken at all levels to see that sustainable development is achieved.

44. Both binding agreements and cross-sectoral partnerships are important tools for implementing sustainable development. Governments should collaborate with civil society and the private sector and simultaneously pursue legally binding international settlements including MEA's, institutions, treaties, and conventions. Merely promoting voluntary partnerships should not release any government from its obligation to become party to binding multilateral arrangements.

45. The international community should set realistic but ambitious targets and timetables for all sustainable development initiatives.

46. Developing economies are important both in their own right and as markets in the global economy. To that end, the external debt of developing countries, which is the greatest impediment to the development of those countries, should be gradually relieved.

47. The international community should facilitate and institutionalize programs for technology transfer. Governments should finance and support the transfer of technology to developing countries, especially in the areas of health and agriculture.

48. Governments should fulfill the commitments made at UNCED to allocate 0.7% of their respective Gross Domestic Products (GDP) to Official Development Assistance (ODA) for developing countries.

49. The success of sustainable development ultimately rests on the transfer and proliferation of knowledge through education. With that in consideration, the international community should recognize educators as a major group of stakeholders in

the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) and encourage their participation in negotiations and partnerships. Actions should be taken at all levels to integrate sustainable development into curricula at all stages and in all disciplines of formal public education. Governments should ensure universal access to education regardless of economic status, color, gender, ethnicity, or religion. Governments should also help finance informal sustainable development education programs run by youth and NGO's.

50. Community gardens and green public spaces, which provide a link to the natural environment, are important recreational areas and tools for sustainable development education. Governments should cooperate with local authorities and civil society to promote the proliferation of these areas.

VII. Institutional Frameworks

51. The only way to make progress toward sustainable development, prevent anarchy, and overcome the rule of force is by creating sound systems of public leadership. Indeed, sustainable development depends on good governance and well-designed systems of governance at all levels.

52. Good governance entails respect for and promotion of all human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and the International Bill of Rights, the absence of corruption, independence from private interests, and attention to stakeholders. All governments, the private sector, and civil society, should make good governance a priority.

53. Sustainable development necessarily involves conflicts between states, shared resources, and ungoverned areas like oceans and the atmosphere. Global governance, therefore, has a special role in implementing parts of Agenda 21 and achieving sustainable development goals. As a rule, international institutions should be empowered and established, when necessary, to address global problems. Governments should recognize the authority of the CSD to make binding decisions on state and non-state actors on international issues relating to sustainable development. The IFI's and the WTO should report and be accountable to the CSD.

54. The CSD should be primarily responsible for the implementation and enforcement, where applicable, of the over 500 MEA's relating to sustainable development. Areas designated as wilderness by governments should be jointly administered by domestic governments and the CSD to ensure that no government unilaterally abuses shared environmental treasures.

55. The IFI's should coordinate assistance strategies with UNDP, private donors, and national and regional aid organizations to achieve mutually reinforcing, not competing, policies.

56. Governments should establish a system of indicated assessed contributions to UNEP to ensure the predictability and stability of its budget. In order for UNEP to address environmental crises, its funding should also be increased.

57. Actions should be taken to strengthen the role of major groups and NGO's in the CSD, other international organizations, and institutions of domestic governance.

58. Peace is a prerequisite for sustainable development. The international community should take support institutions and initiatives aimed at preventing violent conflict, including the International Criminal Court (ICC), UN peacekeeping missions, and international security forces. All institutions should operate transparently and with respect to basic human rights.

59. Sustainable development should be incorporated into the priorities and mandate of the UN Security Council.

60. For institutions to be sustainable, fair, or effective, women must have equal voice and status. Actions should be taken at all levels to promote women's involvement in decision-making and policy implementation.

61. The UN should reevaluate its process for identifying and endorsing corporations whose practices exemplify sustainability.

VIII. Youth

62. If sustainable development aims to protect the ability of future generations to meet their needs, youth are, by definition, its beneficiaries. Numerous declarations and General Assembly resolutions have reaffirmed youth as the leadership of the future, but that reaffirmation is not enough. For progress to be made toward sustainable development, policymakers must recognize youth as the leadership of today. We proudly assume our role as full contributors to the policy dialogue and appeal to decision-makers to value and endorse our contributions.

63. Concerned youth have demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to sustainable development by educating their peers about the challenges that our generation must inevitably confront. Governments should support these efforts by financing youth organizations and informal sustainable development education programs run by youth.

64. All institutions require representation from diverse parts of their beneficiaries. Youth institutions are no different, but universal participation in youth decision-making bodies is impeded by a strain on financial and technological resources in developing countries. The international community should take action to transfer technology for communication, especially via the internet, for youth in developing countries. The CSD should make funds available to bring youth delegates from developing countries to meetings of the International Youth Caucus (IYC).

65. Governments should heed numerous General Assembly resolutions that call for the inclusion of youth delegates on all delegations to international conferences and

institutions. Governments should also establish youth advisory councils for domestic legislative bodies, committees, agencies, and other institutions.

IX. The United States as a Global Partner for Sustainable Development

66. No state in history has ever occupied such a dominant position in world affairs as the United States does today. With the world's most powerful military and strongest economy, can make or break the international efforts to achieve a sustainable future. Our country has long emphasized the importance of concepts like accountability, transparency, and human rights; the U.S. must continue its commitment to these ideals in the 21st century, both domestically and internationally, and incorporate sustainable development into its main priorities and values. We, as empowered American citizens, will do our part for advocate for a U.S. foreign policy that makes us proud.

67. The U.S. should be a responsible global citizen. Our country should pay all dues to all international institutions, programs, and ventures in a timely fashion. The U.S. should not obstruct any effort to advance sustainable development or human rights that enjoys a broad international coalition.

68. As host of the UN, the U.S. should recognize the necessity of universal participation at international conferences. With that in consideration, the U.S. should provide visas to all foreign delegates to the United Nations, be they in government, civil society, or business.

69. The U.S. should immediately ratify all agreements that advance sustainable development, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

70. The U.S. government should fulfill the commitment made by President George H.W. Bush at UNCED to allocate 0.7% of our GDP to ODA for developing countries. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) should cooperate with the IFI's, foreign aid organizations, private donors to coordinate strategies. USAID should also consult stakeholders and consider the different needs and development goals of each recipient country to produce effective assistance plans.

71. In keeping with its commitments to free trade, the U.S. government should cease to offer subsidies to industries that compete with their counterparts in trade partner countries. In particular, the U.S. should discontinue subsidies for the agricultural and steel industries.

72. Technology transfer to developing countries will be one of the primary means of implementation for sustainable development. The U.S. offer financial incentives to corporations that share technology with private enterprise in the developing world.

72. The U.S. should adopt measures to improve voter turnout and citizen participation in government, including same day voter registration. The U.S. should also take steps to increase the level of public funding for elections.

73. Creating an environment of gender equality, particularly in the workplace and schools, should be a priority in the U.S. The U.S. government should reaffirm its commitment to that ideal by ratifying CEDAW.

74. The U.S. government should collaborate with local authorities and civil society to maintain and establish community gardens, which can serve to educate people in the U.S. about local growing conditions and potential for agriculture.

X. Our Mission

75. As responsible and concerned citizens, we will work tirelessly to advocate for our vision of a sustainable future. We will continue to educate our peers, our communities, and ourselves. Inevitably, as a result of our continuing education, our vision will evolve. Our commitment, though, will remain steadfast until the promise of sustainable development becomes a reality.