

Briefing



**Friends of
the Earth**

Earth Summit

Frequently Asked Questions

Friends of the Earth inspires solutions to environmental problems which make life better for people

Friends of the Earth is:

- the UK's most influential, national, environmental campaigning organisation**
- the most effective environmental network in the world, with almost one million supporters across five continents and over 60 national organisations worldwide**
- a unique network of campaigning local groups, working in over 200 communities throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland**
- dependent upon individuals for over 90 per cent of its income.**

To join or make a donation call us on 0800 581 051

Friends of the Earth

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Overview

In 1992, world leaders met in Brazil to agree global action to protect the world's environment. This largest ever gathering of world leaders was for the first Earth Summit; decisions made at it helped move sustainable development on to the world's agenda. Ten years on world leaders are due to review progress and agree future commitments at an August meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa. Friends of the Earth International will be there too - making sure improvements to existing agreements are made and pushing for a new treaty to make corporations accountable for their actions.

To help you cut through the jargon, campaigners have produced two briefings about the Earth Summit. This one answers frequently asked questions. The other (*The Earth Summit – from Rio to Johannesburg*) looks at the progress that has been made on specific issues – areas that Friends of the Earth International campaigns on and which will likely be the focus of the next Earth Summit meeting at Johannesburg. You can receive copies of both briefings by calling freephone 0808 800 1111 or download from www.foe.co.uk/earth_summit/

What is the Earth Summit?

The Earth Summit (officially known as the World Summit on Sustainable Development or WSSD) is a United Nations (UN) global conference, which was set up to find ways to halt the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and tackle pollution of the planet. The first Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 and was attended by over 170 governments and more than 2,000 representatives from non-government organisations (NGOs). In 1997 the UN General Assembly called a special session in New York to review progress since Rio. Now, in 2002, world leaders meet again, this time in Johannesburg, South Africa to review progress and agree future commitments for the third Earth Summit.

What was agreed at Rio?

Three agreements and two legally binding conventions were agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit.

Agreements

- 1 **Agenda 21** – a wide-ranging comprehensive action plan for achieving sustainable development worldwide.
- 2 **Rio Declaration on the environment and development** – a series of principles defining the rights and responsibilities of states.
- 3 **Statement of forest principles** – a set of principles to underlie the sustainable management of forests worldwide.

Conventions

- 1 **The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** – to prevent global climate change. The Kyoto Protocol, the global agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions, was developed as part of this Convention.
- 2 **The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** – to prevent the eradication of the diversity of biological species.

What has progress been like?

The 1992 Earth Summit put sustainable development on the map. But despite gains in some areas, it failed to deliver the real changes necessary to protect the environment for future generations. Political will has waned, corporate influence has grown and the poorest have suffered. Here are just some of the facts from the last decade:

- There are now **six billion people** in the world – but despite a decade of unprecedented growth (adding over US\$10 trillion a year to the global economy) the number of people living in poverty is virtually unchanged. **More than 1 billion people live on just US\$1 dollar a day.**
- Most big corporations are in the North and they are driving a consumption-based economic order that is hastening inequity and environmental degradation in the South. The cost is violation of protected areas and forests, social havoc and environmental degradation. It's an economic model that has also made the bigger companies very rich: **more than half the world's 100 biggest economies are corporations.**
- **One in six adults cannot read or write;** 99 per cent of illiterate people are found in developing countries.
- In 2000, **18 per cent of the 11,000 species known to be 'threatened' were on the 'critically endangered' list.**
- Forest losses threaten both forest ecosystems and the more than **1.7 billion people in 40 nations with critically low levels of forest cover who rely on forests for fuel wood,** timber, etc.
- The climate is changing. The global temperature record shows the 1990s as the warmest decade since measurements began in the 19th century. Ice readings suggest that **current atmospheric carbon dioxide levels are at their highest level in 420,000 years.**
- We live in a wasteful society. In the UK we produce 414 million tonnes of waste each year and it has been estimated that **for every tonne of products we buy, ten tonnes of resources have been used to manufacture them.**

When is the next Earth Summit?

Earth Summit 2002 takes place between 26 August and 4 September in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Who's going?

World leaders are likely to attend the talks. PM Tony Blair has definitely said he will go but George W Bush, US President, has yet to give a definite answer. Leaders of many developing countries have been less shy to commit. There will also be thousands of official government delegates, business lobbyists and representatives from civil society groups (including environment groups such as Friends of the Earth, development groups and trade unions).

What's on the agenda?

Major issues which effect people worldwide – and which Friends of the Earth works on – covering corporate accountability, trade and food, climate, forests and water. You can find out more about these

issues by looking at *Earth Summit: from Rio to Johannesburg*. Order from 020 7490 1555 or visit www.foe.co.uk/earth_summit/

Will the Earth Summit make a difference?

The first Earth Summit, 10 years ago, did make a difference. It forced environmental issues to the top of political agendas and forced recognition of the importance of policies that achieve environmental, social and economic gains simultaneously, rather than trying to balance one against the other.

Unfortunately governments did not show the political will to tackle the big issues, although there are numerous examples of good projects that have been carried out around the world.

Friends of the Earth feels the only way this Earth Summit will make a real difference is if civil society groups can force world leaders and their governments to show more political will.

Who are the good and the bad guys?

Although Friends of the Earth doesn't agree with all their positions, the UK and the European Union are taking a lead on trying to make the Earth Summit a success.

Environmental groups, development groups and trade unions are working closely together to get progress on issues of poverty and environment.

As expected, the US is being negative about major issues, and does not want new initiatives on the table.

Big business will be heavily involved in trying to stop any moves that may damage their short-term interests.

What are Friends of the Earth's priorities?

Friends of the Earth International was at the first Earth Summit in 1992 and will attend the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. Today it is a network of over 60 environmental organisations from around the world, of which more than half are from countries in the South such as Ecuador, Indonesia and Peru. Wherever they live Friends of the Earth campaigners have clear targets because they bring together perspectives from both the North and the South:

Issue	Friends of the Earth's priorities for the Earth Summit in Johannesburg
Corporate accountability	A legally-binding international treaty which requires international companies, wherever they operate, to adopt best practice in their operations and to be accountable for their environmental and social damage to citizens and communities.
Trade and food	The promotion of food security, food sovereignty and non-intensive agriculture are key issues that governments must commit to addressing through the United Nations (UN). The Earth Summit should agree that international environmental and social

	<p>treaties should not be subject to free trade rules and should take precedence over them.</p> <p>The Earth Summit should not promote the World Trade Organisation’s (WTO) controversial trade-liberalising agenda and instead should map out a path towards new and sustainable economies.</p>
Climate	<p>Recognise carbon debt (ie, industrialised countries have a historical responsibility to reduce emissions and provide adequate funds to reduce the vulnerability of affected communities).</p> <p>Mandate negotiators in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process to define “dangerous” climate change and move towards a system of safe, global per capita emissions limits, and to accelerate the next round of emissions reductions.</p> <p>Establish targets and timetables for the rapid deployment of renewable energy and the phase out of international and domestic fossil fuel subsidies.</p>
Forests and biodiversity	<p>A robust mechanism for establishing certification of legality which includes independent verification. There are precedents for this, such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).</p> <p>An agreement that consumer countries make it illegal to import illegally sourced timber products.</p>
Water	<p>Access to water needs to be explicitly recognised as a human right throughout the UN system.</p> <p>International co-operation on freshwater strengthened via an international framework so water supplies are managed by people, communities and governments at the most suitable local level.</p>

Table 1: Friends of the Earth priorities at Earth Summit 2002

How does the Earth Summit affect me?

The issues on the agenda are really important and will affect all our lives, and the lives of future generations. Although the big environmental issues - climate change, wildlife loss, forest damage, fisheries and food – so often make life harder for people living in poorer countries, none of us will be able to escape their impact for long. That’s why discussions and action agreed at the Earth Summit may have lasting effects on us all. We owe it to the planet to ensure that the voice of ordinary people around the world is heard at the Earth Summit rather than just the voice of multinational corporations, governments and other self-interest groups.

Now that I’ve seen this information I want Friends of the Earth International to be able to make a difference at the Earth Summit 2002 in Johannesburg, so...

What can I do?

Make sure the corporates don't dominate Earth Summit 2002. Make sure delegates hear Friends of the Earth's call for a global treaty on corporate accountability by adding your voice to Friends of the Earth's special Earth Summit action. See the leaflet *Make a noise at the Earth Summit* for how to be counted in as supporting controls on multinationals.

Want to keep up to date with news as it happens at the Earth Summit?

Register your name for a maximum of three updates about how the Earth Summit is going by signing the leaflet *Make a noise at the Earth Summit*. If you don't yet have this leaflet, or you want to order extra copies to share with family, work colleagues and friends, or you want further information about environmental issues call freephone 0808 800 1111. You can also register by signing up at www.foe.co.uk/earth_summit/. And that's not all: hear what campaigners from around the world have to say about the Earth Summit by tuning into Radio Earth Summit – a special radio service created by Friends of the Earth which you can reach by visiting www.foe.co.uk/earth_summit/.