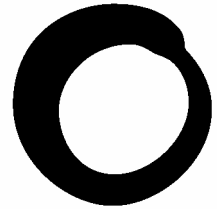


# Media Briefing



**Friends of  
the Earth**

August 2002

## SHORT ON SUSTAINABILITY

FOE RESPONDS TO THE CRITICISMS OF CLARE SHORT,  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (the Earth Summit) is about development and environmental issues. These issues are closely related – environmental problems cannot be solved if issues of global debt and poverty are not also addressed. Successful and lasting development cannot be achieved in Southern countries unless the world economy is run on a sustainable basis.

UK Development Minister Clare Short has attacked “environmental groups”, including Friends of the Earth, for protesting over the likely outcome of the Earth Summit. Indeed she has said that the Summit is not “an environmental summit”. But environmental issues lie at the core of sustainable development. Here are some of the reasons why her criticisms are unjustified – and her arguments about the Summit are wrong.

### **“There’s too much talk about the environment, and not the real issue of poverty”**

Poverty increases the vulnerability of society to environmental threats (GEO3 UNEP 2002). It is poor communities who bear the brunt of environmental problems, and whose health and quality of life are most affected. For example, while northern industrialised countries produce most greenhouse gas emissions, the impacts of climate change, such as disease and flooding, are more likely to be felt in the South. And between a quarter and a third of global disease can be attributed to environmental factors (GEO3 UNEP 2002).

Access to food is also a key issue in poor communities. Yet the intensive export-driven agricultural model promoted is not only bad for the environment, but at the current rate of change would take 130 years to rid the world of hunger (UN Human Development Report 2002). The current trade rules have marginalised small producers and increased unemployment and poverty (FAO, 1999). Alternative models of low impact, locally-based food production have received little support.

### **“Developing countries need to trade their way out of poverty”**

There is no clear evidence that trade “liberalisation” - *of the kind favoured by the IMF, World Bank and many northern country governments* - will really help developing countries to grow and relieve poverty. In Ecuador, Argentina and Bolivia attempts to force countries to adopt such an agenda have been economically and socially disastrous.

Many southern countries are already very “open” for trade but the difference between rich and poor within and between states is still getting worse (take for example Haiti). A “free-trade” response is not the answer to poverty in the developing world or in the north.

Our partners in the south say what they need is:

- Ability to produce food for themselves and local markets
- Cancellation of debt and increases in aid
- Freedom from outmoded ideas and controls of IMF and World Bank
- Global rules for multinational corporations and rights for people
- A halt to pressure for new powers and agreements in the WTO
- Rich and northern countries to clean up first

#### **“A reformed WTO could deliver a free and fair rules based trading system”**

- “Free trade” of the kind favoured by many northern governments and financial institutions does not guarantee fairness, and can make things worse. *“For the least developed countries available evidence shows that trade liberalisation has so far not been closely associated with poverty reduction...poverty is increasing in those countries that have liberalised their trade regime more”.* (UNCTAD 2002)
- While the WTO is indeed far less democratic than its rhetoric claims, fixing this problem would not alter the flawed and outmoded economic thinking upon which WTO rules are based. We need to build global institutions and rules that put environment and people first, and which should include a UN corporate accountability convention.

#### **“GMOs are needed to feed the world”**

- Ending hunger is a matter of political will and distribution. There is enough food to feed everyone in the world very comfortably – but not everyone who needs the food gets access to it.
- GMOs are likely to perpetuate intensive agriculture, causing damage to the environment.
- GMOs come with increasing corporate control, including the issue of patents and the payment of royalties, which effectively charge the poor for access to their own biodiversity.
- GMOs are not needed. For example, Ethiopia (formally an area of famine) is now producing a surplus of food for the seventh year in succession without GMOs, using traditional farming methods, with minimal use of chemical fertilizers and without GMOs.

#### **Corporations can be relied on to deliver sustainable development**

- While businesses do have a role to play in delivering sustainable development, there is little evidence that a voluntary approach will deliver on the scale and in the time that is needed. Since Rio, the majority of corporations have failed to reduce their environmental impact and are still carrying on *with “business as usual”* (UNEP 2002).

#### **“You are nothing but a bunch of well meaning but mistaken northern NGOs**

....”

Friends of the Earth is actually a democratic international network of 70 grassroots organisations, the majority of which are in the South. We are part of an extensive network of global networks covering both development and environment agendas. We work through consensus and try to represent the public interest.