

Women as the Voice for the Right to a Healthy Environment

WAVE Belgrade

Report of the WAVE Belgrade Events 2007



WAVE 2007 Report

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Background

Women's participation and experience are central to environmental management and sustainable development. Recognizing this, UNEP brought women's voices to the forefront of the environmental agenda in a landmark event, the Global Women's Assembly on Environment, "Women As the Voice of the Environment" (WAVE), which took place in Nairobi, Kenya, October 2004. The event intended to make women's crucial roles in conservation and sustainable development visible to all. A Manifesto on Women and Environment was written with concrete policy recommendations and a portfolio of specific project ideas.

3 years later: WAVE Belgrade 2007

Exactly three years later, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) together with Environmental Ambassadors (EA) and United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), organized the regional follow-up conference in Belgrade, entitled "Women as the Voice for the right to a healthy environment".



S. Gabizon, Exec. Dir., WECF, at WAVE Lunch-event

The WAVE Belgrade events were two-fold; a High Level lunch held October 10th as a Side Event within the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, and a High Level Conference held October 13th to develop and approve the WAVE Belgrade Declaration. Approximately 150 people were in attendance at the WAVE events.

WAVE Lunch event: Outcomes

Nearly 100 participants, including government delegates, citizen organizations and the international press, took part in the WAVE lunch, an official side event of the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The WAVE lunch was sponsored by WECF and EA. The WAVE event was attended by three women environmental Ministers – two former and one present, – who were joined by the Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Program, to support grassroots women's concerns in the Pan European region.

Four women's environmental NGO leaders gave testimonies on how environmental rights in their region were being disregarded, for example on how the health of the people near the Mayak nuclear complex in Orzersk,



Russia is still effected, even 50 years after the Mayak nuclear explosion, as their region is still used to store plutonium spent fuel. The great grandchildren of nuclear clean-up workers pregnant at the time, suffer health effects from their parents and grandparents exposure. In addition, in the summer of 2007, 2,000 workers in the Mayak nuclear complex were exposed to radiation resulting from a leak. The NGO, Planet of Hopes, provides juridical assistance to the victims of these accidents.

Other testimonies included cases of the lack of access to safe drinking water, safe sanitation and agro-biodiversity.

Professor Tamara Steger presented instruments that can be used to protect environmental rights.

In comment to this, **UNEP Executive Director, Achim Steiner**, shared the case study of Africa's largest waste dump, in Nairobi, where children scavengers make a living for their families, but pay with their lives. The UN agencies in Nairobi obtained health data which shows that these children might not live to their 30th birthday due to the high levels of heavy metals and other pollutants they were exposed to during their "work." The solution is not immediately evident; closing the dumpsite, as NGOs are asking for, will mean these children and their families have no more income. UNEP is looking for cooperation with governments, civil society organisations, and business so that safe waste management jobs will be created.



Achim Steiner, Exec. Dir., UNEP



Minister of Environment Norway, Helen Bjørnøy

Steiner also announced that he was launching a new, five-person strategic implementation team- essentially the "Blue Berets" of UNEP. He had specifically named Janet Macharia to serve as Strategic Advisor on Gender in that team. Steiner stated:

"I would like to have gender issues become more and more part of how [UNEP] breathes, thinks and acts." He continued: "What you are doing is very important. We will continue to work with you, and with the networks – WEDO (Women's Environment and Development Organization) the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and WECF – together, we can make a difference."

Helen Bjørnøy, Minister of Environment from Norway, gave clear credit to the women's movement for her rise, not only to being the most prominent woman in environmental advocacy in Norway, but also to the realization of her earlier career as a Lutheran minister, saying that without the encouragement of women's activism, it is doubtful that she would have had the ability to create such a strong public life. She said that women have an important role to play in Europe's environment – bringing together a community that she believes is often needlessly splintered into small, separate groups working, for example, on climate, biodiversity, toxics, and energy policy.

"Women have expertise about how to do more than give small solutions," Bjørnøy stated. "There are three answers on how women can build bridges to the future – continuing the struggle for women's rights, networking, and making the connections on the issues."

WAVE Belgrade Conference: Outcomes

More than 120 participants took part in the WAVE Belgrade conference, and deliberated the WAVE Belgrade declaration focusing on the right to biodiversity, the right to safe energy, the right to water and sanitation, the right to safe chemicals, and the right to public participation and environmental justice.

The WAVE Conference was opened by an informative and inspiring speech from **Janet Macharia, Senior Gender Advisor of UNEP**. In her remarks she noted,

“today more than ever, to preserve a healthy environment for human well-being, environmental considerations must be embedded in a wide array of human activities. ‘Mainstreaming’ of environment is thus requisite if we are to address the underlying forces that drive environmental degradation. “

Janet Macharia’s key recommendations included 1) building alliances, 2) promoting equal participation, 3) research, 4) gender analysis of natural resources management policies, 5) gender impact assessments of environmental policies and actions, 6) gender budgeting, and 7) the development and use of local sustainable development strategies.

Lena Sommestad, former Minister of Environment for Sweden, was regrettably held up by fog at the airport and could not join the conference at the last moment, however, she sent along her keynote address to the participants. From her past experiences, including that as a former Professor of Economics, Lena Sommestad noted,

“the key challenge for the women’s movement of today is to identify the most successful strategies to be used by women in their struggle for equality, empowerment and sustainable development. “

She paralleled this with her insights from the Swedish model, which notes that the long-standing discourse on population and health as drivers of economic development was instrumental in advancing a gender rights and later environmental agenda. She went further to describe,



S. Gabizon-WECEF, J. Macharia-UNEP, & T. Steger-CEPL

“We must make women visible, by bringing women’s issues into the mainstream political debate.”

The WAVE Belgrade conference was chaired in the morning by Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director of WECEF, and Andjelka Mihalov, President of EA, and former Minister of Environment for Serbia. **Sascha Gabizon, Exec. Dir. of Women in Europe for a Common Future** explained the aims of WAVE:

“We need to ensure greater public participation in environmental decision making – by women and other groups less well-represented at the policy negotiation tables. Bringing the voices of women to the fore has been shown to bring a diversity of views from all sectors of society. We need to connect these views and combine our strengths if we want to achieve the common goal of a healthy environment for everyone.”



Professor Tamara Steger presented research by reputed international agencies such as the World Bank which show that equality helps people move quickly out of poverty. Investment in women improves the livelihoods of everyone.

Andjelka Mihajlov, former Environmental Minister for Serbia, currently presiding the NGO Environmental Ambassadors, one of the co-organisers of the event told the participants, “in the Eastern European countries, women are the most affected by both environmental and energy insecurity, and as a result, we are often more motivated than men to work for a sustainable future.” Mihajlov, who holds a PhD in chemical engineering, continued:

“We are working very hard to promote sustainable consumption patterns, advocating for green procurement at the governmental level and promoting partnerships between women and men, NGOs and governments. Only if we work together can we make real change.”

The conference then continued with women NGO leaders giving testimonies of environmental rights breaches in the fields of water and sanitation, biodiversity, affordable energy, consequences of nuclear power, and a chemical contamination – looking in particular at the environmental causes of breast cancer.

This session was followed by positive experiences of women’s and environmental groups mobilizing for the right to a healthy environment. Examples included a new project on helping parents-to-be create a healthy environment for their baby (the WECF Nesting project, in 6 languages), the Women’s Institute’s climate change campaign in the UK, and sustainable income generating projects of the Katachel NGO in Afghanistan.

In the afternoon, delegates worked in groups on the WAVE Declaration and agreed on a final text, of which the key points are highlighted herein.



Andjelka Mihajlov, former Minister of Environment-Serbia

WAVE Belgrade Declaration: Key points

The approximately 120 participants, from 30 different countries in the PAN-European region, call on Governments and stakeholders in the region and worldwide to join our efforts to promote the right to a healthy environment for all.

We urge Governments in our region to implement existing commitments to **biodiversity** protection, in particular the Convention on Biodiversity. We 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. We demand the recognition of the right of citizens to safe, diverse, fair, and locally produced agricultural products. We call for a moratorium on [GMOs and nanotechnologies] until all health, safety, and even human rights aspects have been thoroughly studied by independent experts.



Elena Manvelyan, AWHHE, Armenia



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 EU, EECCA, and SEE region (particularly in rural areas), and the morbidity and mortality this causes, especially for babies and children. We 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 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 safe and affordable water in national constitutions.

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 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 are deeply concerned about the promotion of **nuclear energy** as a solution to climate change. We demand access to affordable, efficient, renewable and clean energy for all in the region. We 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 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. Pregnant women can unwittingly transfer hazardous substances accumulated in their bodies to their child. 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. We call on Governments to ban all hazardous chemicals in children's products (e.g. toys, clothing, food). 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. We demand the effective implementation of REACH¹, and call on governments in the EECCA and SEE region to take the initiative to adopt similar measures.

We demand the increased **participation** of all citizens in environmental decision and policy making. 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 to bringing this convention to an international level, fulfilling Rio Principle 10.



¹ Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and restriction of CHemical substances (REACH)

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 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.

Next Steps

The adopted WAVE Belgrade declaration will be used as a advocacy, dialogue and engagement tool, circulated widely to relevant politicians, government officials and other organizations to promote the right to a healthy environment. WECF will use the document throughout her network and, alongside other activities, has requested to present key results of the conference at the UNEP Governing Council meeting in Monaco 2008. WECF will also strengthen the lobby of EU, EECCA and SEE Ministers of Environment and Health in order to advance the goal of a healthy environment for all.



All presentations are available on the WECF website. A list of participants is available upon request. For more information contact Irene Dankelman, Gender Coordinator, WECF (irene.dankelman@wecf.eu)



List of Speakers and Topic (Lunch)

- Sascha Gabizon, Exec. Dir. WECF with Andjelka Mihajlov, Pres. EA, former Minister of Env. Serbia
Human rights and the environment
- Prof. Tamara Steger, Centre for Env. Policy and Law
Environmental Rights in the EU and EECCA
- Sabine Breuckmann, Agr. Coord.-WECF (Germany)
Bio and Cultural Diversity, Unserland Project
- Anna Tsvetkova, Mama-86 (Ukraine)
The Right to Sanitation and Water
- Svetlana Tsvetskova, Mama-86 (Ukraine)
Energy Poverty in Odessa
- Marie Kranendonk, Pres.-WECF (on behalf of Nadjesdja Kutepova, Planet of Hopes (Russia)
Mayak Nuclear Plant: Lessons are not learned
- Achim Steiner, Exec. Dir UNEP
UNEP Perspective on Gender and Environment
- Karine Danielyan, former Minister of Env., Armenia
Women's role in achieving a healthy environment
- Helen Bjørnøy, Minister of Env. Norway
Final Thoughts: Women building bridges to the future



Irene Dankelman, WECF with Jacqueline Cramer, Minister of Environment-the Netherlands, at WECF Exhibition stand



List of Speakers and Topic (Conference)

- Sascha Gabizon, Exec. Dir., WECF with Andjelka Mihajlov, Pres., EA, former Minister of Env., Serbia
Welcome and Introduction
- Janet Macharia, Senior Gender Advisor, UNEP
Keynote Address
- Prof. Tamara Steger, Centre for Env. Policy and Law
Environmental Rights & Justice in the EU and EECCA
- Marie Kranendonk, Pres.-WECF (on behalf of Nadjesda Kutepova, Planet of Hopes (RU))
Mayak: Nuclear lessons not learned
- Emma Anakyashan, Coordinator, AWHHE (AM)
Improvement of sanitation in rural areas in Armenia
- Diana Iskrev, Pres., Earth Forever Foundation (BG)
Sanitation and Water in Bulgaria
- Sabine Breuckmann, Agr. Coord., WECF (DE)
Bio and Cultural Diversity, Unserland Project
- Helen Lynn, Co-Chair, Health Group, WECF (UK)
Breast Cancer, an environmental disease
- Elena Manvelian-President, AWHHE (AM)
Video: The Cost of Poverty-Energy Poverty in Armenia
- Sybille Schneehage, Dir., Katachel, DE/Afghanistan
Sustainable Income Generating projects
- Sonja Haider, Dir. WECF
The Nesting project
- Fay Mansell, Chair, Women's Institute (UK)
Successes and Challenges for the Women's Institute
- Olga Speranskaya, Eco Accord (RU)
IPEP in the EECCA Region
- Anna Golubovska, Pres. Mama-86 (UA)
Public Lobby Campaigns
- Victoria Elias, Eco Accord (RU)
Participation in the EFE Ministerial Process
- Karine Danielyan, former Minister of Env., Armenia, with Gordana Comic, Member of Parliament, Serbia
Dialogue on Consequences for Policymakers
- Marie Kranendonk, Pres. WECF
Closing Remarks

About Women in Europe for a Common Future-WECF

Women in Europe for a Common Future is a network of organisations and individuals working for sustainable development, protection of human health and environment and poverty reduction, in Western and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. WECF helps women to actively take part in making their communities healthier and more sustainable. We develop practical solutions to problems relating to health and the environment, with the help of trusted experts and scientists. WECF works to raise the awareness of root causes of environmental health effects and promotes preventative action to eliminate problems at the source. WECF strengthens the participation of women in decision making at local, national and international level, builds knowledge and capacity through skill shares, surveys and training programmes, and draws attention to difficult issues. We work for improvements where there are health threats or social injustice related to the environment. We propose solutions and ask politicians to take action.

www.wecf.eu



About Environmental Ambassadors-EA

Is a not-for-profit, project oriented consulting group of leading experts in sustainable development and environment related issues, environmental: policy, governance; security, diplomacy, strategic planning, impact assessment, due diligence, accession, as well as waste management, cleaner technologies, infrastructure, local development, climate change and renewable energy related issues.

<http://www.ambassadors-env.org/eng/index.php1>



About UNEP

UNEP, established in 1972, is the voice for the environment within the United Nations system. UNEP acts as a catalyst, advocate, educator and facilitator to promote the wise use and sustainable development of the global environment. To accomplish this, UNEP works with a wide range of partners, including United Nations entities, international organizations, national governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society.

<http://www.unep.org/>

