

'We can't fail!' - but still to agree position

Title

And the meetings have now started! Yesterday, Mr. Sha Zukang, Secretary-General of Rio+20, opened the 3rd Preparatory Meeting to the Rio Conference. He announced that at the end of these meetings days, Members of the United Nations will have completed 43 days of negotiations over the 'outcome document'. He pleaded to the countries: "we can't fail!" and recalled that the outcome document must bring a significant set of changes to sustainable development. Positive and encouraging words were circulating throughout the opening plenary. And fair enough, he called for strong commitment by the civil society: "we can only do it together with major groups", which is how organized groups, such as NGOs, farmers, businesses, women, are called within the UN. The positive atmosphere persists on the contact groups, but, unfortunately, not for long. After a short half an hour at plenary, countries were split up in contact groups to discuss chapters of the outcome document. The first words of the chair and co-chair were on the direction of building on common agreement, showing the world the will for commitment. But soon after, countries showed there are still major differences of interests and an overall predominance of economic interference. I followed discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals - 'SDGs' - for Water and Climate Change. There is still no common understanding on what would be the best process to define the SDGs, and who should be engaged and at what phase. The representativeness of countries was a key call from the representatives of the developing countries. With climate change, as usual, there was much less progress. An hour discussing which paragraphs should be left aside or to be included on the negotiations. The questions are mainly on what Rio should commit to beyond what is discussed within the United Convention to Combat Climate Change (UNFCCC). I hope Mr. Sha Zukang at the end of meetings can say with confidence "We've succeeded!" But by seeing these opening discussions at first hand, I do fear how much of the meeting will be a success.