

Nora explained that General Themes emerged from these meetings and are seen as influential in the way the Critical Issues will be approached at Rio+20 Earth Summit on Sustainable Development in June 2012. Nora addressed these issues:

Current Financial Crisis: The current financial, economic and solvency crisis has reduced budgetary resources for social and environmental progress in relation to sustainable development attitudes. There is reduced political support for structural changes and this has had an impact on developing countries striving to meet MDGs. There is need to counter these problems with strong political commitment and perhaps look at having SDGs now. We are therefore being challenged to lobby governments in relation to the urgency of the current crisis to be addressed at Rio. We will need another half planet by 2030 to accommodate our needs if we are to continue using resources at the present rate of exploitation.

Role of Women: There was a strong vocal presence of women representatives at the Geneva meeting. The role of women was stressed as many forget to give appropriate value to the degree of invisible care provided by so many women worldwide. Women are very powerful agents of change as they have such direct influence on their children as the foundation of the next generation. It is estimated that 60% of women are in charge of households yet 70% of the 1.3 billion poor are women. The role of women and their rights need a place on the Rio agenda.

Youth and education in Sustainable Development and Ombudsman for the young: We need to get youth to Rio+20 as they hold the key to what is to happen in the future. Great concern was expressed at the lack of concern of radical economic developers for the damage being done to the environment and of their lack of concern for the next generation as they measure their success in economic outcomes as against human well-being. It was suggested that an Ombudsman for youth be created to protect the rights of young people.

Urbanization: By 2030, 60% of the world's population will live in cities therefore we urgently need to start talking about sustainable cities as we are being compelled to see this as a serious challenge in the near future in relation to sanitation, water resources, disasters and general management of health issues. If population continues to grow at its present rate there will be 9 billion people by 2050 and this will certainly mean greater sharing of food, less waste and more sustainable lifestyles.

Challenges for Governments: The three pillars of the Aarhus agreement which the Irish Government signed into law on 30th Oct 2001 have not been visible on the ground in terms of law making for the majority of people.

Access to Information: Public participation in decision making: Access to Justice: These three pillars should mean that all increases in levies, taxes, planning restrictions etc. need full explanation, reasoning and agreement to enable change to happen from the bottom up rather than from the top down. This is stated clearly as a need in the Aarhus agreement.