

MEDIA RELEASE

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UK Government shows effects of 'green policy subsidence' as Parliamentary committee urges commitment to Rio+20

On a day when the **Cabinet** is coming under fire for being **split on green issues** [1], the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) has published a report [2] warning that **business as usual may rule the day** at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development next year.

Halina Ward, Director of the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (FDSD), whose written evidence [3] has been extensively referenced [4] in the EAC report, said:

On the **EAC report**:

"There is a real risk that Rio + 20's green economy theme will deliver little more than 'slightly greened business as usual', particularly given the difficult economic circumstances in which many nations find themselves."

On the possibility of the **Prime Minister not attending** [5] Rio+20:

"If the Prime Minister will not be attending Rio+20, we sincerely hope that Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg will go instead. It is vital that UK the shows a high-level political commitment to sustainable development."

On the **Cabinet split**:

"The fact that the Cabinet is unable to come to a shared position on the green economy shows clearly that the UK is suffering from a dangerous 'policy subsidence' on sustainable development issues."

"If your commitment to sustainable development is based largely on rhetoric without proper strategic and institutional underpinning, it's like building a house on sand -- policy subsidence is the inevitable result. And that's what we're now seeing."

*"The emerging **green split** at Cabinet level is just the latest symptom of a lack of strategic thinking on sustainable development."*

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/oct/26/chris-huhne-renewable-energy-critics> and <http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/osbornes-antigreen-agenda-splits-coalition-2375993.html>
2. The EAC report is available at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/news/rio-20-report/>
3. Evidence from the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development is available at:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmenvaud/1026/1026vw08.htm>
4. Specific parts of FDSD's evidence referred to in the EAC's report are listed below.
5. See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-15450273>

FDSD'S EVIDENCE REFERRED TO IN THE EAC REPORT

It is clear that to energise Rio+20, two decades after the original Earth Summit, a new generation needs to be enthused about the need for action and the difference that they can make. As the Foundation for Democracy & Sustainable Development put it, civil society involvement in Rio+20 is needed for 'sharing good practice and catalysing the next generation of political activism and social innovation for sustainable development'.^[12]
(paragraph 7)

The Foundation for Democracy & Sustainable Development (FDSD) identified 'signs of erosion in the overall global political commitment to sustainable development'.^[14]
(paragraph 14)

The poverty-reduction imperative, flowing from the Brundtland Commission giving the 'over-riding priority' to meeting the needs of the world's poor, led to 'an over-emphasis on economic growth'. Rio+20 might further that imbalance.^[33]
(paragraph 15)

A common thread in the evidence we have taken is that a green economy should also be a fair economy.^[72]
(paragraph 30)

The Foundation for Democracy & Sustainable Development (FDSD) highlighted that the North/South divide over the green economy has helped polarise discussion on technology transfer and financial assistance for developing countries.^[84]
(paragraph 33)

FSDS want to see a UN High Commissioner for Future Generations created,^[115]
(paragraph 43)

IIED, however, think that reform of governance at UN level is a 'misplaced prioritisation' because the 'dominant governance capacity to deliver sustainable development lies at national level'.^[117] FSDS made a similar point.^[118]
(paragraph 43)

A further danger is that the current financial crisis will tempt countries to aim for a 'slightly greened business as usual'.^[146]
(paragraph 53)

In the international arena, the Environment Secretary has visited Brazil to discuss the Conference.^[157] She also contributed to European Environment Council 'conclusions' agreed on 10 October,^[158] which took on board the European Commission's June 2011 paper on Rio+20. FSDS saw 'wishful thinking' in that earlier paper because it did not see slowing growth as a response to the need to protect the environment.^[159]
(paragraph 56)

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