



U.S. State Department Briefing on Rio+20

12 September 2011

On a rainy Wednesday, September 7, 2011, as part of our MobilizeUS! campaign, the Human Impacts Institute attended the U.S. State Department's Foreign Policy Dialogue Series Briefing on the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). The briefing was a chance for administration officials to converse with citizens about the US government's ongoing preparations, ideals, and goals for the conference.

Following the opening remarks was a question and answer period. At this time, several notable issues were addressed, and interesting notions raised:

The panelists rejected the notion that global environmental governance is in need of a new institution. Even in light of the failures of the Council on Sustainable Development, there will be no push from the United States for a new agency of the UN, or a World Environmental Organization of any type, but only for reform. However, Mr. Grumbiner did say the U.S. was in support of strengthening the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Panelists were interested to hear a suggestion from participants that the government fund a competitive grant program to support civil society travel to the conference. In view of their acknowledgement that access to the conference is often difficult, and considering the importance they placed on inclusiveness, this response was encouraging.

They were also supportive of efforts by US civil society to engage the U.S. public, in particular our youth, women, and state and local governments. Groups engaged in such efforts were encouraged to liaise with the State Department.

The panelists were insistent that the U.S. government sees the issues of climate change and sustainable development as separate matters for consideration by the international community, intertwined as they are in practice. They were thus not open to speculating on how the upcoming Durban climate change conference may influence the proceedings at Rio.

A final question from Professor John Dernbach provoked an enthusiastic response, though. He asked if Rio was not an excellent opportunity to reflect and magnify the conversation at Rio+20, especially as it concerns values and the environment, back to the US.

This briefing is part of a period of public comment before the U.S.'s submission of its conference objectives on November 1, 2011. Interested parties are encouraged to submit their thoughts before that date. The government is likewise soliciting partnership with civil society organizations, especially for public outreach. As one State Department official put it, they can't do it by themselves. This is just the space that MobilizeUS! looks to live in as the conference draws near, and we look forward to the ongoing conversation.

By Alex White

Link to original article: <http://www.uncsd2012.org/rio20/index.php?page=view&nr=267&type=230&menu=38>