

Agenda 21: Just the Facts

Have you heard about Agenda 21 in the News? Not sure what to think? Here are some Myths and Facts:

Myth: Agenda 21 seeks to promote “world government” through the creation of “a centralized planning agency that would be responsible for oversight into all areas of our lives.”

Fact: This is a completely spurious charge. Agenda 21 encourages, rather than compels, UN Member States to take into consideration the environmental impacts of their land, resources, and transportation development policies. Adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, the document reflects a broad international consensus that worsening poverty and growing stresses on the environment require greater integration between environmental and development concerns. Such a comprehensive approach to development is necessary in order for countries to be able to continue to meet the basic needs of their citizens, improve living standards, and manage the planet’s natural resources in an efficient manner.

Agenda 21 is not a treaty and is not legally binding. Rather, Agenda 21 sets out a general blueprint, or, in the words of Tariq Banuri, Director of the UN’s Division for Sustainable Development, “a common vision” for environmentally-sustainable growth. At the end of the day, implementation of any part of Agenda 21 is the prerogative of individual governments, not the UN itself. This is reflected in the document’s own preamble, which states that Agenda 21 “reflects a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level on development and environment cooperation. Its successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of Governments.” The voluntary and non-binding nature of this agreement has also been confirmed by the Heritage Foundation, a staunch critic of Agenda 21. Indeed, a recent paper by three Heritage scholars argues that it is local, state, and federal initiatives to promote sustainable development, rather than Agenda 21 and other international efforts that should be of greatest concern to opponents of sustainable development.

Myth: Agenda 21 would supersede the domestic laws of the United States and other sovereign nations.

Fact: As a non-binding agreement, Agenda 21 **does not** take supremacy over U.S. law. National governments are ultimately in charge of their own development, and neither the UN nor any other international organization has the right to encroach on the sovereignty of any country in the implementation of Agenda 21. This is once again confirmed by Tariq Banuri, who stated in an interview that “The basis of the international system is that all countries pursue whatever is in their national interest. A founding pillar of sustainable development is national sovereignty over natural resources.”

Myth: Agenda 21 is an amalgamation of socialism and extreme environmentalism with strong anti-American and anti-capitalist overtones.

Fact: Agenda 21 provides a blueprint for sustainable development—development that simultaneously promotes economic growth, improved quality of life, and environmental protection. Agenda 21 was adopted unanimously by all 178 countries that participated in the 1992 Rio Conference. U.S. President George H.W. Bush was among the 108 world leaders present at the conference when the document was adopted.

Myth: The UN is bypassing national governments, using the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) “to make agreements directly with local governments” on implementing Agenda 21.

Fact: Many municipalities and cities around the world have found that Agenda 21 is a very good guide for their own urban planning efforts and have joined an international group—ICLEI—to help implement some of its recommendations. **ICLEI is not part of the UN.** Many cities and towns throughout the U.S. belong to ICLEI, **but their participation is not linked to any UN mandate.**

Myth: Agenda 21 calls for the elimination of private property ownership, single-family homes, private car ownership and individual travel choices, as well as family farms.

Fact: It says nothing of the sort. Agenda 21 does not call for the confiscation or appropriation of land or property anywhere, in any country. It is fully consistent with personal freedoms and the right of citizens to own property, homes, cars and farms.