

OECD-UNEP CONFERENCE ON RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

Opening remarks by Mr. Per BAKKEN, UNEP DTIE Deputy Director

23 April 2008, Paris, France

Good afternoon, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. On behalf of UNEP, I want to welcome you to this conference. I am very pleased to welcome our distinguished conference co-chairs: Mark Mwandosya, Minister for Water and Irrigation of Tanzania, and Masayoshi Namiki, Parliamentary Secretary for Environment of Japan. I want to thank Mr. Pier Carlo Padoan, as well as the OECD team for the pleasant cooperation in the organisation of this event. And most importantly, I want to thank all of you for being with us. As you know it will be up to you to make this event to a success.
2. Mr. Padoan has already outlined the major issues of concern of this conference:
 - more people with more needs;
 - more resource use, production, extraction and distribution;
 - which results over the full life cycle to enormous challenges for the environment and the economy. This all has prompted, as we can see today, a new global awareness about limits to growth. More than thirty years after the Club of Rome's early warnings, we now indeed see more clearly than ever the economic, environmental, social and political limits of our current consumption and production patterns.

Resource Efficiency a priority for UNEP

3. The current resource crisis is a major emerging challenge that we have to face. It has its impact on us all. The way we consume and produce and how we lead our lives. Global developments on the resource markets have a direct and visible impact on not only our daily life here in Europe. My concern goes foremost to the poor. The mother in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, the hard working farmer in Ghana, and all those millions of others who for decades have been struggling to make ends meet and now face even

tougher conditions. Our global efforts to eradicate poverty and ensuring dignity for all, as targeted through the Millennium Development Goals are directly at stake.

4. It is in this light certainly not a coincidence that only a few months ago, in our last Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Monaco, Resource Efficiency (RE) was welcomed as one of the six crosscutting priorities of the Medium Term Strategy for UNEP. I would like to point out however that we define resource efficiency in the broadest sense. You can very *efficiently* pollute the environment. And we can all very *efficiently* live our lives and increase our wealth, while others keep living in misery. We have called our priority 'RE/SCP'. The SCP stands for Sustainable Consumption and Production. We believe that RE is not a goal in itself, rather a means to achieve something.
5. Resource efficiency means reducing the environmental impact of the consumption and production of goods and services over their full life cycle. The 'doing more with less' slogan indicates the focus on *more* outputs with *fewer* impacts (fewer resources, less pollution, fewer impacts on the conditions of poor people). Efficiency gains do however not guarantee that the overall outcome stays within the ecological carrying capacity of the Earth. Influencing the demand side is therefore another prerequisite for sustainable development. It will only be by a combination of resource efficiency and resource *sufficiency* measures that the ultimate goal of sustainable consumption and production patterns can be achieved.
6. It is indeed timely to recognize, like our Executive Director Achim Steiner has said, that “there are more inconvenient truths that need to be addressed.” The world cannot achieve sustainable economic growth with old fashioned consumption and production patterns. Companies will have to accelerate the trends of polluting less and of designing, producing and marketing better products and services. Consumers have to get used to the fact that environmental concerns are as important in their daily choices as considerations of price, convenience and quality. And governments and civil society have a key role to play in inspiring such a process.

7. The policy response should not be advocating a return to the past, consuming less, nor asking others to *not* want the welfare we in the industrialised countries have enjoyed for decades. Doubling or quadrupling economic growth, as some countries may need to achieve, can simply not be achieved with the current consumption and production patterns. And this calls for decoupling. Breaking the links between economic growth and environmental degradation is a necessity. We have to do it better - with the knowledge of today - and we have to help others to do so as well. From the throw-away society towards a circular economy or a '3R' society. From wasting resources to re-using and recycling them. In short, closing the loops everywhere. And removing the obstacles to do so.

The International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management and the Marrakech Process

8. This issue of decoupling is what the new Panel, the International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management, is all about. Based upon solid and authoritative scientific assessments of key resources on the global level, the Panel will contribute to a better understanding of how to bring decoupling about. A highly timely effort, supported by many governments and other stakeholders, from developed and developing countries. The development of the ten-year framework on Sustainable Consumption and Production, as encouraged by the WSSD more than five years ago, has entered its decisive phase, with the upcoming review at the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD; 2010/2011) approaching. The main goal of the framework is achieving decoupling. And we have to admit that despite all encouraging activities carried out so far by so many governments and task forces, we still have to make decisive and authoritative progress on defining what decoupling is, where we are at the moment, and how to bring it about.
9. I am therefore extremely pleased and honoured that the co-chair of the Panel, Dr. Ernst Ulrich Von Weizsaecker, is with us today. The 'father of Factor 4' will without any doubt direct the panel in such a way that all stakeholders realise the sense of urgency, and take the actions needed, not in the last place the governments which need to integrate resource efficiency in their policies, legislation and economic instruments.

10. This Conference is an important stepping stone towards that goal. You will today address Resource Efficiency in the Global Context, with a government and business perspective. And tomorrow you will in parallel groups discuss the Policies, Measures and Technologies, with a Moving the Agenda Forward session on Friday.

Conclusion

11. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This brings me to the end of my introduction. This conference has been organized jointly by OECD and UNEP. UNEP, the environmental heart of the UN, and the OECD are with this conference recognizing their joint responsibility. We both want to underline our common commitment to provide warnings to governments and other stakeholders on this issue. This conference gives us all the possibility to demonstrate the challenges ahead and the ways and means available to achieve progress. I spoke about early warning and about limits to growth. It takes apparently some years before serious action is taken. Let us hope that with the knowledge and the partnerships of today the outcomes of this conference will be translated in tangible policies much earlier than after one generation.