

## **Launch of the International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management**

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*Resource Efficiency to Achieve a Better World*

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

1. It is a great honour for me to be here today in the beautiful city of Budapest - in this historic venue, with this distinguished audience - and as a guest of the World Science Forum.
2. I want to thank you - your Excellency - for your kind words and for inviting us to this meeting. I am pleased to be able to welcome everyone here on behalf of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), its Division of Technology, Industry and Economics and its Secretariat of the International Resource Panel.
3. We have today the great pleasure of presenting an International Partnership for Sustainable Resource Management. And we could not think about any better occasion than the World Science Forum. The flagship activity of the partnership is the International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management. This Panel will be launched right here and right now. So for us, and for many of you, in particular the panel members and the supporting governments and organisations, this is a historic event.

*Why do we launch this Panel?*

4. The Panel will study the issue of 'decoupling'. Decoupling does not mean much to the average citizen, but in this distinguished company I do not have to explain how important this concept is. It is the key for the survival of our society as we know it. We absolutely need to break the links between economic growth and environmental degradation. The world can no longer afford an ongoing or even increasing pressure on the environment as our economies grow. We can no longer accept this link as an almost unavoidable side effect of our way of living. The pressure on our environment, the risks for the health of us all, in particular the health

of our children, and the impacts on the poor, and the attacks on our precious ecosystems have to stop. I call this objective: '*resource efficiency*'. Not in the usual limited meaning (using fewer resources per unit of output). I mean it in a much broader sense: more *wellbeing* for all inhabitants and less consumption of the total resource base the Earth is providing us.

5. I consider this indeed an issue of efficiency. Decoupling is a challenge and a positive and innovative concept of 'doing more with less'. You will not hear me saying that we do *not* need to develop, that we do *not* need to grow, that we do *not* need to feed our increasing population, and that we do *not* need to provide the best products and services we have at our disposal to the world consumers.
6. On the contrary, economic development is needed; it is one of the three pillars of the concept of sustainable development. Some countries claim to have to double or quadruple their economic growth. But in my view this can only be done if it goes hand in hand with environmental improvement. Economic growth in our modern times can simply not be achieved with old consumption and production patterns. And in order to take on that *enormous* challenge we need to mobilise all knowledge in the world.
7. That is why it is so good to know that so many activities are ongoing at the moment. For instance, by the government of Japan with their groundbreaking thinking about the '3R' approach (reducing, reusing and recycling), which is also a major theme for the G8. And by the government of China, promoting the circular economy concept, aiming at closing the loops and re-establishing harmony of mankind with nature. There is also the Marrakech process on Sustainable Consumption and Production. And here, in Europe, many activities are ongoing, with the implementation of the Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and the development of a Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Action plan as shining examples. I can only mention a few of course. Much is happening. The Panel will build on all these activities

*The message is not new, but the awareness is growing*

8. Almost fifteen years ago the concept of "Factor Four" - quadrupling resource-productivity worldwide (doubling wealth while halving resource use) - was introduced as the smoothest avenue to sustainable

development. Now this concept of decoupling is at the centre of our political attention. We all agree that a lot more economic wealth is needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for six and a half billion people let alone nine billion people that we expect to live on earth by the mid of the century. There will always be resources on our planet, but:

- some of them like certain metals will have to be mined or extracted in more remote areas using more sophisticated and energy intensive technologies;
- some of them like fossil fuels have an unacceptable impact beyond the Earth's carrying capacity when considering their whole life cycle putting ecosystems and human health in danger, if not managed properly;
- and some of them face significant increases of prices, responding to the well-known economic laws of supply and demand, thereby influencing the purchasing power of us all.

*What does UNEP expect from the Panel?*

9. That means we have a huge challenge ahead and the questions at stake are tremendously complex to answer and much linked to all pillars of sustainable development. That is why UNEP has set up the Panel: to assess the situation at the global level and to advise which priority issues to address, for instance metal recycling (should we 'mine or recycle', and what are the environmental risks), or the multi-faceted issue of bio-based products (are we tackling climate change, or are we 'burning our food' as some say). It is in these areas where many dilemmas exist, with sometimes seemingly conflicting objectives, and I want to point out that even the full environmental impacts over the full life cycle have still to be better studied. We wait for solid assessments with clear language on complex issues.
10. We do expect scientific assessment reports which can be read by those who can take action. These reports should inform us for instance about the actual global recycling rates of various metals and risks for supply security and give us a better understanding of the environmental impacts of biofuels. Overall, we aim at a global consensus on indicating priority production sectors and consumption product groups on the global level and opportunities for decoupling and resource-efficiency gains. Are housing, mobility and food also the priority consumption clusters at the regional level taking into account the particular needs of regions such as Africa and Latin America? Based on such a problem analysis (current status) we need to establish regular monitoring to answer questions such

as: Has dematerialization or decoupling of environmental impacts and economic growth already taken place? And if so where? My vision is that the assessment reports of the Panel will help improve our understanding of decoupling in such a way that in ten years scientists will be able to carry out a scenario analysis informing us about scientifically based green growth paths for the future.

11. The Partnership for Sustainable Resource Management consists of a scientific expert Panel for Sustainable Resource Management which establishes ad-hoc working groups on issues of particular interest and prepares assessment reports. The Partnership also has a Steering Committee. Organisational support will be provided by the Secretariat hosted in my division in UNEP. It is planned that both the Panel and the Steering Committee will meet twice a year to allow for exchange of ideas and progress on the issues we will decide to tackle.
12. We are glad that the honourable Prof. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsaecker, the pioneer of the famous 'factor 4' concept, has accepted our invitation to become - together with the most honourable Ismail Serageldin - the first co-chairs of the Panel. We could not have found a better duo: in all respects complementing and respecting each other, and with an amazing knowledge and experience in the issues at stake in common. Yesterday they already chaired a first panel meeting with the proposed members. To my and their deep regret they could unfortunately not stay longer in Budapest to also attend this session. But we are very proud and honoured to work with them.
13. The group of invitees to the first Panel meeting included among others: Yong Ren, China, Yvan Hardy, Canada; Ashok Khosla, India; Yuichi Moriguchi, Japan; Oleg Mitvol, Russia, Anna-Bella Siriban-Manalang, Philippines; Mark Swilling, South Africa; Stefan Brinzeu, Germany; Marina Fischer-Kowalski, Austria, Edgar Hertwich, Norway; Lea Kauppi, Finland; Sanit Aksornkoae, Thailand. And there will be more members, the Panel will keep looking for cutting-edge scientists in all parts of the world.
14. The Panel is, as I said, the flagship activity of a Partnership. This partnership is a small group of like-minded governments and organisations which share the same concerns and which want to contribute to raising awareness and finding solutions. I want foremost to mention the European Commission, which generous support has helped us a lot to develop the Partnership. The chair of the Steering Committee,

Mr. Timo Makela, is with us today, and tomorrow morning the Commissioner Stavros Dimas will introduce the Panel in the Hungarian Parliament building. I also want to acknowledge some first movers who have supported us in the initial phase: along with the other partners I would like to highlight the Japanese Government which hosted a workshop on Resource-Efficiency and the Environment which we organised back to back with an OECD meeting in Tokyo last month. I also would like to mention Canada, Egypt, Tanzania, and Norway. Furthermore I am very pleased to have with us the emerging economies China, Russia, and South Africa. From the EU member states I would like to mention The Netherlands, Finland, Germany, Italy; and especially the Government of Hungary which I would like to thank for their support in hosting the first Panel and Steering Committee in Budapest. Please forgive me that I do not mention them all, you will find them in the written materials, and you can talk with their representatives.

### *Conclusion*

15. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, once more I want to say how delighted we are to witness the Launch of the Panel and I wish the Panel Members "bon courage" (strength), wisdom and power in their challenging work ahead to contribute to a better world.

Thank you.