



United Nations Environment Programme

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PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT • PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

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UNEP Executive Director Klaus Töpfer's Speech at the Ministerial Segment of the 5th Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention Basel, Switzerland, 9 December 1999

Mr President,
Mr Federal Chancellor,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year the Basel Convention celebrates ten years of its existence. And we are all back to the roots here in Bale, in this dynamic city on the River Rhine, the city which gave its name to the Convention, a city of dynamism, profiled by the chemical industry, well known for its activities in renewable energy, especially in solar energy, a city of hospitality and culture.

We are very glad to be here in Switzerland, where the Secretariat of the Convention has its location in Geneva, in this country of Switzerland well known for its constructive contribution to multilateral environmental agreements and very well known for all the backing it gave us in the past.

As we celebrate the achievements of the Basel Convention, we must also, of course, cast our minds back to those people who made it all happen. The people who, ten years ago, negotiated and drafted the framework for one of the most successful multi-lateral environmental agreements currently in place.

And, as we mark ten successful years of Basel, let us rightly think once again of the architects of the Convention and appreciate their vision and their commitment which made the banning of the transportation of hazardous wastes a reality for the world.

I am particularly pleased, of course, that some of the founders are with us today in Basel. As was already mentioned, first and foremost, I want to express our gratitude to my predecessors, to my grandfather as the Executive Director of UNEP, Dr. Mostafa K. Tolba. I am very glad Mostafa, that you gave time to spend with us to give your vision today in your main speech. But, I am also glad to see here present the other architects, those visionaries of ten years earlier. I see our friend and colleague, Minister Sven Auken of Denmark. Heartily welcome ! It is a pleasure to have you with us. And I also want to mention of course the others, for example, Iwona Rummel-Bulska, without who's endeavours it would have been be very difficult to come to the same achievement.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I also want to mention our friends from Greenpeace. I remember those ten years ago very well. It was a very hard time for the German Environment Minister.

It was a very hard time indeed. Investigated by Greenpeace mainly, I was blamed for the illegal export of hazardous wastes from Germany to Romania. I was blamed for the outdated stocks of pesticides, illegally exported as merchandise goods to Albania – and I had a tremendous job to do to bring those wastes back to Germany. This was really only made possible thanks to the large public support, and there are all my experiences from ten years ago with these incredible, often criminal practices of those times – to export hazardous wastes for out-of-pocket costs to developing countries or to countries with economies in transition, with no handling capacities available there, and consequently, with extremely high risks for human health in handling those wastes and with a high risk to the environment. This was ten years ago.

These ten years proved also, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues, that a Multilateral Environmental Agreement, that this Basel Convention, is a suitable legal basis for important trade-related decisions, far from any green protectionism - quite the contrary – but for banning the export of risks and enjoying the advantages of economic growth at home. This Convention proves that the precautionary principle is a valid and necessary criteria – a criteria not misused as an alibi to avoid scientific research concerning the risks linked with substances and products, as we widely singled out with a list of hazardous wastes, but as a basis for early action.

This Convention, the Basel Convention, proved in these ten years that it is an advantage for the quality of the solution and action on a global level, to work in an open, in a very transparent process, integrating all nations on an equal footing, integrating all parts of civil societies – NGOs, private industry, academia, trade unions and others. And this Convention, the Basel Convention, proved and will have to prove in the future even more – that globalization must necessarily be combined with a new culture of solidarity, with a respect for regional identities, and with cooperation for mutual benefits.

It is in line with the precautionary principle to ban the export of hazardous wastes from OECD countries to developing countries – and this amendment must be ratified with more speed to reach sooner the required quorum. It is in line with this approach to decrease the quantity and the hazardous potential of waste – to come to a cleaner production and to change consumption patterns.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues, the next ten years will require continued commitment and the willingness to take on a new and challenging task. Specifically, we must improve environmentally sound management and the minimization of hazardous wastes. We must be clear and rigorous in our implementation and our enforcement of the Conventions.

The touchstone of our policy must be the upgrading of the technical, legal and institutional capacity, especially in the developing countries and in countries with economies in transition. Our policy must respond to the need for a stronger partnership with our stakeholders, in civil society and industry. We must focus on the further development of economic instruments and other incentives. And we must develop synergies between the Basel Convention and other environmental conventions especially those linked to the chemical agenda as well such as the Prior Informed Consent Convention and hopefully quite soon, the finalization of the Convention on the Persistent Organic Pollutants. We have to sit together, dear friends and colleagues, and ask what will be going on in the chemical agenda in the future, in the light of those successes.

Let me only mention some additional sentences to those five areas.

First, the management of hazardous wastes in an environmentally sound manner. Here, the crucial step must be to prevent and minimize the generation of hazardous wastes. It is imperative to come step-by-step to an integrated life-cycle approach and to leave behind us the throw-away-based society.

This approach necessarily involves the market economy by stimulating its sense of responsibility regarding the generation of wastes--its storage, transport, treatment, re-use, recycling, recovery and final disposal. We have to integrate the activities concerning the wastes already in the development of products. Only then can we come to this life-cycle approach so urgently needed for the new century, the new millenium. Innovative approaches to environmentally sound management need to be developed and practically explored. Here, the private sector has a key role to play. And we proved in UNEP, especially in our division in Paris, on technology, industry and economics, that cleaner production measures are only visions but that they are economically feasible as well. There are lots of win-win situations and we have to single those out.

And the participation of all members of the civil society is essential. We must also address the demand side. Consumption patterns must be changed. We must discover means of reducing the demands of products and services that result in hazardous by-products.

Increased information for consumers is necessary and we have to improve our cooperation so far, for example, as to include the advertising industry. I am pleased to note in this context, what was already mentioned by the Federal Chancellor. And I am pleased to note that the Secretariat of the Basel Convention has assisted in brokering a landmark agreement between the Swiss Government, Novartis and the Government of Uganda. This agreement will pave the way for the return of 40 tons of outdated cotton herbicides. This will be incinerated at the state-of-the-art facility, owned by Novartis. And I can only congratulate you, Mr. Federal Chancellor for this outstanding, wonderful activity and sincerely hope that this is also the beginning of the re-importing of hazardous wastes and outdated pesticides which can be much better handled in the developed countries than in the developing countries.

Let me add an additional comment on a second task, the implementation and enforcement of the convention. A major goal for all Parties of the next ten years, must be to advance the effective implementation of the Convention and I sincerely hope, that we also can come, as I already mentioned, to a very fast ratification of the amendment. I am also pleased that the Environment Ministers of the G-8 countries, have recently placed the issues of illegal traffic and environmental crime on the agenda. Illegal traffic and hazardous wastes is a significant component of the larger problem of environmental crime and requires our utmost attention. Over the last months, UNEP concentrated its work on this topic and I put more resources into this very outstanding need, in cooperation with national governments, INTERPOL, and other multilateral environment treaties, to combat crimes, and I am very glad that we have the best possible staff member in these activities.

To come to the third point, it is also the need to build the capacities of the developing countries and countries with economies in transition. And I believe we have to go in two directions. We have to deepen efforts to improve the existing Centres and we have to broaden efforts to develop new Centres, especially in those countries where these needs are especially important. The Regional Centres for Training and Technology Transfer established under this Convention will take the lead in strengthening the ability of nations within each of the regions to minimize the generation of hazardous wastes as well as manage wastes in an environmentally sound manner. I would like to thank each of the host countries, of the regional centres, for their commitment to this very important work and I also want to express my gratitude to all those donor countries making it possible to run those centres. I can only underline UNEP's contribution with regard to the cleaner production centres. We want to qualify our Regional Offices as well to be a partner in this important topic.

We need a better building of stronger partnerships. This establishment of new partnerships is central to the future implementation of the Basel Convention. In addition to international organizations, key partners should include industry environment, NGOs, academia, and civil society. And I underline especially the cooperation with the private business, the chemical

pharmaceutical and mining and metal industries which are keenly interested in the implementation of the Basel Convention. Many companies in these fields have made great strides in hazardous waste management and we must use those technologies. We must improve technology transfer to allow for use of the best environmentally friendly technology in all parts of the world.

And lastly, ladies and gentlemen, we have to underline the cooperation with other conventions. I am very glad that this will be clearly on the top of our agenda - the cooperation with PIC and with Persistent Organic Pollutants. Altogether, let me conclude, I would really like to come back after ten years and take note that the second ten years were as successful as the first ten years. If this can be done, I believe we will be able to say that we did a very good job.

Thank you very much.