

**Welcome address at the IDDRI Conference "International Environmental
Governance"**

Strengthening environmental protection in the United Nations

Federal Environment Minister Jürgen Trittin

Paris, 15 March 2004

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Chère Roselyne,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I.

The Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Malmö four years ago called emphatically for "an institutional architecture that has the capacity to effectively address wide-ranging environmental threats in a globalizing world".

We are only making slow progress towards this goal. Your Conference provides a good opportunity to take stock. I welcome this initiative and would be pleased if we could jointly hold a follow-up conference on International Environmental Governance in Berlin in 2005. In the tough debate on governance, we need regular review: what has been achieved so far, how can we optimise and improve our approach?

The goal is clear: to strengthen and enhance the United Nations Environment Programme.

In the Johannesburg Implementation Plan, we committed ourselves to a range of very specific and ambitious measures for implementing sustainable development. Take, for instance, water and basic sanitation - key topics of this year's CSD meeting at the end of April: by 2015, we must succeed in halving the proportion of the world's people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. And we will only achieve this if we have a better institutional framework at national, regional and international level. With regards to poverty reduction as a whole: if we want to make real improvements in living conditions, we need a fundamental counterweight to the World Trade Organisation and to the international environmental governance structures which are driving globalisation forward.

Two separate goals are of key importance for the reform of environmental governance. One relates to UNEP's structure, the other to its status within the system of the United Nations as a whole:

- universal membership of all UN Member States in the UNEP Governing Council and consequently also in the Global Ministerial Environment Forum
- enhancement of UNEP to a UN Environment Organisation in the form which is currently being discussed in a New York working group headed by France.

This is not just symbolic policy. On the contrary, these are the necessary steps to ensure that environmental protection has success-oriented structures within the United Nations system.

II.

I believe that the legitimacy of decision-making processes is a key point. When, for example, decisions are about to be taken in the UNEP Governing Council, it is true that all governments present are entitled to join in the debate – either as a member of the Governing Council, or as an observer - but the actual decision-making process remains in the hands of the 58 Governing Council members. This has a negative impact on the "ownership" of the countries and consequently on the acceptance and implementation of the decisions.

The conditions which are a matter of course in the Conferences of the Parties – i.e. the same right for all Parties – must also apply to the United Nations Environment Programme: all UN Member States should effectively be given the same rights in the UNEP decision-making processes. Far more countries would, as a matter of course, actively support UNEP decisions, for instance on chemicals policy, on sustainable consumption and production patterns and on post-conflict measures in trouble spots, if their governments had actually been involved in the decision-making process.

Day-to-day business could then be conducted by an executive body with a smaller number of participants, in a similar fashion to the procedure in the UN Development Programme.

The introduction of universal membership should also be accompanied by a clear improvement in UNEP's scientific basis. It is of prime importance to have international

scientific consensus on the nature and extent of environmental problems, as well as on possible solutions and obstacles.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a successful model. Without it, the international community would probably never have taken even small steps in matters of climate protection. The Federal Republic of Germany therefore supports the establishment of a comparable Intergovernmental Panel on Global Environmental Change.

This Panel would not only provide convincing arguments supporting the need for decisions, but would also help global environmental policy to attract greater attention from the international media. It would assist UNEP in giving the UN system policy guidance on environmental questions – a role which at present tends to be neglected. This guidance would also include recommendations from UNEP's Global Ministerial Environment Forum to the different Conferences of the Parties on how to resolve contradictions among the different Conventions.

These are the ambitious yet at the same time practical steps which we should focus on in the coming weeks.

III.

A separate issue here is the debate on how UNEP - even more than is the case today - can become the globally recognised voice of the United Nations on environmental protection.

The current debate on the "Major Event 2005" where the goals of the Millennium Declaration are due to be reviewed, shows how weak the voice for the environment is at present. The preparations so far are geared towards classic development policy. UNEP's weaknesses can be seen in the fact that the needs of the environment cannot make themselves heard in such a process.

Things do not look much better in the difficult relationship with trade policy. The principle of sustainable development cannot assert itself at international level. This is due to the fact that in its current format, UNEP is not an equal partner to the major players of the UN system, not to mention the World Bank and the IMF. It is unacceptable that the institution championing questions of survival for this planet remains a junior partner in the United Nations.

In contrast to major international organisations such as the FAO, ILO and WTO, as a United Nations programme UNEP's structure is not strong enough to allow it to influence international policies in favour of environmental protection in the way major challenges necessitate:

- Compliance with the international goals for water and sanitation requires massive efforts. The Global Ministerial Environment Meeting in Jeju (Korea) and CSD 12 will show how far away we still are from reaching these goals. UNEP must be put in a position to ensure the enforcement of the necessary steps at all levels, in cooperation with other international actors (World Bank, UNDP, FAO, WHO).
- Halving the proportion of the world's population living in absolute poverty is also a question of access to energy. We have to provide those still living without electricity with decentralised renewable energies, without waiting for the sluggish development of centralised networks. UNEP has already bridged gaps with a range of activities. This process must be reinforced.
- In Johannesburg we agreed to review in future the increased use of renewable energies. The question of who reviews this will be a point for discussion at renewables2004 in Bonn in June. I want to bring the diverse networks and institutions to better cooperation for the accelerated expansion of renewable energies. Otherwise the many voluntary initiatives in particular run the risk of losing both legitimacy and effectiveness. I expect renewables2004 to contribute to dismantling existing barriers, especially in the field of financial and institutional capacity-building. A strong UN environmental authority could play a crucial role here.

We agree with the French Government that strengthening UNEP presupposes its transformation into a specialised agency, a UN Environment Organisation that is on equal footing with major players such as the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Organisation and the World Trade Organisation. Globalisation must be structured in an environmentally and socially compatible way. To achieve this we need a strong UN Environment Organisation. We cannot expect every UNEP Executive Director to have the same capabilities as Klaus Töpfer, whose personal dedication sometimes papers over the cracks in UNEP's weak structure, but which cannot eliminate them.

I welcome the stance on the UNEO that the French Government has outlined on numerous occasions, most recently at the New York working group. France's clarification that this is not a case of an institution à la WTO is correct, since the WTO is not a member of the UN family. The UN Environment Organisation needs the same status as the FAO and the ILO, namely that of a specialised agency. It is also true that the major task of operating worldwide capacity building for efficient environmental policy cannot be achieved by a UNEO alone. It requires the solidarity of the UN Development Programme and the World Bank.

Germany supports the French initiative that targets a solution in line with the realities of the UN system and that takes due account of the common interests of developing and industrialised countries.

IV.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The often incredibly defensive arguments from environmental policymakers and NGO representatives regarding these institutional issues must not lead to a culture of low expectations in which progress is excluded per se.

On the contrary: we must always bear in mind how young the now universally recognised WTO actually is, and how long international trade policy was carried out via the auxiliary tool of GATT. The shift from GATT to WTO undoubtedly brought a considerable increase in focus on international trade policy. The demands we are talking about here are realistic.

Figuratively speaking: Transforming a hut - in Nairobi - into a house needs no justification. And those living in houses should not tell those living in huts that they don't need a house.