

World Science Forum

**"Investing in knowledge:
Investing in the future"**

Budapest

10 November 2007

Your Royal Highness,
Mr Prime Minister,
Mr Chairman,
Friends and colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me as European Commissioner for the Environment to address this World Science Forum.

As the world's population climbs towards seven billion people and more, the global environment on which we all depend for our food, our health and our livelihoods is facing enormous pressures.

Let me mention two of the most serious pressures:

- Firstly, man-made global warming threatens to cause irreversible and catastrophic changes unless we act swiftly to limit temperature increases to 2°C. To succeed the international community will need to make rapid and deep reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases;
- Secondly, we are destroying natural areas at an alarming rate and degrading more than half of the ecosystem services – services such as the purification of air and water – which form the Earth's life support system.

These and many other environmental pressures are manifestations of a deeper problem. It is that we are using natural resources at an unsustainable rate.

The global population is now so big that the amount of resources needed to sustain each of us exceeds the Earth's biological capacity by almost 25%. On current trends we will need two planet Earths in 50 years' time.

In consuming natural resources far faster than they can regenerate – when they can at all - we are not only harming our environment. We are also undermining the basis for mankind's future economic development and well-being, and jeopardising the achievement of efforts to eradicate poverty. Competition for resources is becoming a source of international tensions.

The role of science is paramount if we are to have any chance of success in tackling our unsustainable resource use and the severe environmental problems it is causing.

Firstly, we need scientific research to establish the facts on the ground. Without this knowledge we cannot develop the right policies and measures to remedy these problems effectively.

Secondly, we need science to develop the technological innovations that will allow us to use energy and other natural resources far more efficiently in future.

I therefore very much welcome the launch here yesterday evening of the International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management set up by the UN Environment Programme.

The Panel can fill a major gap in our knowledge by providing an independent scientific assessment of the environmental impacts of using renewable and non-renewable resources. It should also help us all to move towards a society where we 'do more with less.'

The lack of authoritative scientific evidence to date has clearly hampered efforts to develop policies in this area. That is why the European Commission proposed the creation of the Panel when we published our strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources in the European Union two years ago.

The Panel's launch is now turning that proposal into reality. I am impressed by the calibre of the Panel UNEP has assembled and I can assure you that the Commission will take full account of its advice in our policy-making. We have already provided significant funding for the Panel and will continue to do so.

Let me take this opportunity to highlight two issues that I hope will be high on the Panel's agenda.

The first is the efficiency and impacts of metal recycling schemes around the world. This issue is particularly worthy of attention given that global reserves of some metals are likely to be depleted by the middle of this century. Recycling metals can save up to 90% of the energy needed to extract metal ores from the Earth. I believe we will soon need a global

strategy for the sustainable recycling of metals to protect the environment and our resources.

The second issue is biofuels. While a number of studies have already been done, the Panel should also deal with this important issue. We have to ensure that biofuels are sustainable. The European Union has set itself a binding target of increasing the share of biofuels to 10% by 2020, provided that the biofuels are sustainably produced and that second-generation biofuels are developed. Both environmental and social impacts will have to be taken into account.

Achieving more sustainable use of natural resources is a process that will take time but we have to start taking action now. The EU's strategy establishes a framework for action spanning the next 25 years. It is the first such framework anywhere in the world.

Our goal should be to decouple resource use and other environmental impacts from economic growth. We in the EU are working hard in this direction. As a next step the European Commission is planning to put forward action plans on a sustainable industry policy and on sustainable production and consumption early next year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the theme of this World Science Forum tells us, investment in knowledge is investment in the future.

There can be few better examples to illustrate the truth of this than the remarkable Fourth Assessment Report produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change with the involvement of more than 1000 leading scientists from around the world. The award of this year's Nobel Peace Prize to the IPCC and to Al Gore reflects the growing recognition that climate change will pose a serious threat to international stability in the medium to long term if left unchecked.

The Fourth Assessment Report gives us knowledge with which we can quite literally shape the future of this planet.

Among many other things it confirms that we need to limit global warming to no more than 2 degrees Centigrade above the pre-industrial temperature if we are to prevent climate change from reaching very dangerous levels. This will require us to stop the rise in global emissions within a decade and then cut emissions to half of 1990 levels by 2050.

Very importantly, the report also confirms that these reductions are both technologically achievable and economically affordable.

Now the world has to act on this knowledge. A month from now environment ministers from across the globe will meet in Bali to discuss what action to take on climate change after 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol's emission targets will expire.

The European Union's position is absolutely clear. The Bali conference must agree to launch negotiations on a new UN climate change regime that is ambitious enough and that involves action by all key emitters.

Bali will be a crucial test of the international community's political will to translate our new and comprehensive scientific knowledge into policy. There is no time to lose if we are to avoid a potentially devastating hiatus in global action at the end of 2012.

Mr Chairman, let me conclude.

Science holds the key to the policies and technologies that we need in order to tackle the unsustainable use of resources that is at the root of global warming, the destruction of natural areas and many other current pressures on the environment.

The International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management has the potential to provide the informed scientific assessments that are necessary to start getting our resource use onto a more sustainable track. I wish it every success and look forward to its results.

Thank you.