



Statement by H E Ms Lena Sommestad, Minister for Environment, Sweden, on *Impact of natural disasters on water, sanitation and human settlements - prevention and response*, at the Commission for Sustainable Development, New York, April 20, 2005

Thank you Madame/Mr, Chairperson,

The earthquake and the tsunami that struck in December last year was a devastating natural disaster. This catastrophe was a reminder of our resilience to the force of nature. It was a proof of our interrelation and our interdependence. I wish to begin by expressing my sympathy for the victims and their families and the countries struck. The grief is a common grief. More Swedes died in the tsunami than in any natural disaster ever before. The will of the international society has been grand, and the need for continuing cooperation is great.

Let me now make three brief points.

First, lives saved in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe were saved by local people, by friends, neighbours, and volunteers. The first line of defence is always local. This is providing a strong case for supporting local disaster preparedness capacity.

Second, coastal management saves lives. There is clear evidence that where coastlines were protected by natural vegetation, such as mangrove, and where coral reefs had not been mined for minerals or blown up for fisheries, the impact of the tsunami on coastal communities was much reduced.

Third, disasters strike most violently against the poor. Families who make the living from the sea have seen their complete livelihoods taken away. Reducing risk has a social dimension, it must include protecting the assets of the most vulnerable.

During the reconstruction of future tourist and fish industry in damaged areas, it is absolutely essential to protect coastal vegetation, avoid large scale exploitation in fragile areas, and build special buffer zones, in an overall ecological sustainable manner.

Sweden has contributed large amounts of funds, both bilaterally and multilaterally, such as 1.4 million USD to the UN appeal for economic support for building up an early warning system in the Indian Ocean.

We have recently joined a special multi donor trust fund for reconstruction after the tsunami, under the trustee ship of the World Bank. This gives us good opportunities for policy influence along the lines of a sustainable reconstruction.

Water, sanitation and human settlements are all areas in which we have the chance to contribute to an environmentally sustainable recovery after the catastrophe.

Thank you.