

Statement by Parliamentary State Secretary  
Ms. Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, Federal Ministry for the Environment,  
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during the Ministerial Dialogue on „Charting the Way Forward“  
on 9 July 2014  
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Sustainable Development, New York

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me be frank: the **true cost of inaction** on sustainable development is the future of our children and our children's children. If we don't act now, they will inherit a planet that will be more and more inhabitable, with ever widening gaps between rich and poor individuals and countries.

Besides our long-term concern for future generations, however, there are **hard economic reasons** for making the transition to more sustainable economic development now, in our lifetime.

Business as usual will cost us dearly in the short to medium term. The reason for this is quite simple: Our **planet's resources are not limitless**. Scientists are showing us that we have already crossed several planetary boundaries and are close to crossing others. The IPCC tells us time and again that **climate change** is threatening to raise ocean-levels and make

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vast amounts of land unarable, and ultimately uninhabitable, forcing millions into migration.

**Land and soil degradation** is already a reality in many parts of the world, most notably in subsaharan Africa. Regional conflicts related to **access to water** are frequent. **Air pollution** is causing millions of premature deaths and is a heavy burden on health care systems.

Scientists are increasingly worried about the speed and effects of **ocean acidification**, with consequences they cannot entirely predict as of today. The **loss of biodiversity** and ecosystem services is also leading to consequences none of us can fully grasp at present, yet we have science to point to some effects which are already noticeable today, and they indicate that our landscapes and the way we grow crops will change for ever if we don't act now.

Ladies and gentlemen: The writing is on the wall, and it is amounting to a bill that neither we nor our children will be able to shoulder.

That is why we must agree on an **ambitious post-2015 agenda**, and that is why the High-level Political Forum, which

will **review** our collective progress towards achieving its goals, is so hugely important.

A compelling and comprehensive **global sustainable development report**, with input by eminent scientists, will be of key importance in order to be able to bring the Forum's attention to new challenges which we do not even know about today.

The second question we are discussing here today is: What can governments do to bring about the **paradigm shift** that is needed to advance a profound structural transformation of our economies?

It will be key to **identify and promote drivers for inclusive, sustainable economic growth** and creating **decent green jobs** while respecting the ecological carrying capacity of the Earth. **Science can help** us to make the necessary policy choices.

So what are scientists – and economists – telling us? For one, a responsible and efficient use of natural resources through **sustainable consumption and production** will be a central task for any society. Above all, this makes economic sense: there is ample evidence that **resource efficiency** can strengthen **eco-**

**nomic growth, create jobs, alleviate poverty and contribute to environmental protection.**

Ultimately, in a world of limited natural resources, this means that we have to **decouple growth from resource use**. There is simply no way around this. Policy choices in this area include sustainable public procurement and fiscal incentives, such as tax breaks or subsidies, for resource efficient production and a circular economy. Germany has taken an important step in this direction with its resource efficiency program.

Another imperative that we as governments must act on in the interest of intergenerational fairness and the economy is **protection from climate change**. We must agree on a legally binding agreement on climate change that will be applicable to all countries in Paris next year.

The EU and Germany will fulfill their responsibility in this regard. In Germany, we aim to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 80 to 95 percent by 2050, and ensure that by then at least 80 percent of our electricity is produced by renewable energies.

But ultimately it is imperative that **all countries become low-carbon economies** as quickly as possible. Policy measures

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that governments can employ to achieve a low-carbon economy include emissions trading schemes, feed-in tariffs for renewable energy, incentivizing energy efficiency, phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and promoting sustainable agriculture.

Therefore the **transformation to inclusive environmental-ly sound economic growth** will be one of the key areas of the post-2015 agenda.

And as mentioned before: **The establishment of an efficient review mechanism** for the post-2015 agenda should accelerate the implementation of the goals, involving also civil society and the private sector.

Last but not least, the proposal to appoint a **high-level representative for future generations** as laid out in the Secretary General's report **makes a lot of sense to me** as we risk overlooking their interests again and again.

Let me conclude: The adoption of an ambitious agenda in September 2015 and our work in this forum offer us the opportunity to change direction **for the wellbeing of humanity**. Future generations cannot pay the price if we fail – they may not even survive.

Thank you for your attention.