

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (Rio+20)

FINLAND STATEMENT

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Thursday 21 June 2012

When I was born in 1946 the world's population was 2,3 billion. Since then it has grown over three times. Today's over 7 billion will grow to 9 or even 10 billion before reaching its peak.

This population growth is the single most important factor for understanding how the world has irrevocably changed. Most obviously this is crucial for how we arrange our existence with our natural environment.

In only a few hundred years time, since the beginning of the industrial revolution, we have developed ever more efficient and wondrous ways of extracting natural resources, transforming them into products for our use and in doing so, have let ever growing amounts of waste, emissions and poisons into our environment. Only relatively recently have we realized that the way we have treated our natural environment has been unsustainable.

The undeniable advance of global warming and climate change has been the most striking wake-up call. We know that even the international community's stated goal of limiting global warming to 2 celsius degrees on average will not be achieved. With the accelerating loss of biodiversity and current other changes we may, at best, have only a few decades time to reach ecologically, socially and economically sustainable development. No-one can be certain that we can do this, or even if it is possible at all.

We need a strong sense of urgency to be able to correctly address our agenda. The effects of climate change, future shortage of natural resources, and possibilities of making a decent living during economic turbulence - are all critical and tightly connected challenges for a secure future.



On the way to Rio, Finland has tried to do its modest part in finding ways to cope with and resolve future challenges. Former president of Finland, Ms. Tarja Halonen co-chaired with President Zuma from South-Africa the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability. We hope that the Report could give fresh encouragement for a resilient and better future for all of us.

Madame Chair /Mr. President,

Twenty years ago, 114 heads of States and Governments had the courage to take bold decisions. Today the world is politically much smaller than 20 years ago and ever more interdependent. No country, be it a super power or a small island micro-state, can deny the sad condition of our planet. Sustainable development is the only response. Rather than facing it as a challenge – it should be seen as *the opportunity*.

The interdependence nurtured by globalization, population growth and technological, demographic and environmental developments, together with ever more demanding consumer habits, are changing the world with an unforeseen pace.

Here I also want to highlight that poverty and inequality are global problems, which need to be solved to make sustainable development possible. Even though the economies of many countries have grown rapidly, wealth has not been necessarily distributed to all. We cannot continue to grow unsustainably at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable people and our natural environment. At the same time, climate change and environmental degradation are also growing sources of vulnerability of societies.

The dramatic change taking place has to thus be reflected fundamentally also in how security is defined and what is done to achieve it. A sustainable and secure future requires first and foremost multilaterally agreed rules and their implementation.

No-one can meet the challenges we are facing on their own. Everyone needs truly global solutions. This emphasizes the role of the UN system. The Rio+20 is vital for the United Nations and its ability to cope with challenges.

Madame Chair /Mr. President,



We came here with the aim of reaching a commitment for global sustainable development before it is too late and to find concrete solutions for achieving this. In light of the agreement on the final outcome document we have to acknowledge that while we have made significant advances and reiterated important commitments, we have also left a lot of the work that should have been completed here in Rio for later. Therefore the follow-up to this conference is vital and will determine whether we can call this conference a success or not.

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) have been widely discussed. I firmly believe that the SDGs could provide us with new ways to make wiser needed policy decisions. But we also need appropriate indicators which go beyond the traditional GDP to better reflect sustainable development including natural capital and social wellbeing.

Fears that sustainable development would challenge the traditional development agenda are completely unfounded. In fact, these agendas are not competing *but* complementing each other. The challenge of equal economic and social opportunities while respecting planetary boundaries and human rights are equally vital for all our societies.

Madame Chair /Mr. President,

This Conference has brought the concept of green economy to the UN Conferences. This is from where we have to continue our efforts. The "Finnish version" of green economy has been a set of policies and tools, which strive to enhance more sustainable consumption and production and eco- innovations as well as strategies to create new businesses around renewable resources and ecosystem services. In this regard, I welcome the adoption of the 10 –year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production that we have Finns have been advocating since Johannesburg Summit.

A number of green economic instruments have also been introduced in Finland. The emphasis of taxation has gradually been shifted from taxation of work to taxation of activities polluting the environment. The main instruments for creating economic incentives to reduce pollution are taxes and charges imposed on emissions directly - or indirectly, on products closely related to harmful emissions.

In practice this means a triple win situation as we take into consideration economic, social and ecological considerations of our actions. We cannot



afford to make wrong and short-sighted decisions. The challenge – or the opportunity – is the same, be it in the north or south or in the east or west.

Take for example the water issue which has been one of our priorities here in Rio. Only a few decades ago many of our lakes in Finland were badly polluted. We have gone a long way in cleaning our lakes. The Baltic Sea is one of the most polluted seas in the world and now we are working together with the other coastal states to improve its condition. But we do not work only with the neighboring states. We work with the civil society, academia and private sector as well.

One aspect of it, wastewater treatment, contributes to social, economic and ecological sustainability: improvements reduce water born diseases of which the poorest suffer the most. It brings economic savings through increased resource efficiency and protects water resources and ecosystems for future generations.

It is important *to join our efforts*.

Our problems must also be resolved in innovative ways: using the knowledge of citizens and all stakeholders in our societies.

What we also need, are the right *incentives* – both for consumers and enterprises alike. It is our governments' responsibility to create these conditions. This is our urgent task today.

Madame Chair, Your Excellencies,

I could have touched upon many issues related to this Conference.

My choice was to highlight the urgency of action and opportunities for future generations.

Thank you for your attention.

