

Chairman, Heads of State, Heads of Government, Ministers, Excellencies, NGO representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased and honored to address you all – one of the most distinguished audiences of world leaders and policy makers.

Our meeting here isn't starting on a blank page. Twenty years ago, the world leaders of that time met here in Rio and launched an ambitious set of environmental agreements, designed to change the countries of our planet from self destructive units into a dynamic, knowledge-based and environmentally aware alliance. The Earth Summit held here was a monumental step towards a transformation of our attitudes and behaviour, to create a better, sustainable future for generations to come.

Since then, a lot has been achieved in terms of the global discussion on sustainability related issues, but when it comes to actions and results, there is still much to be done. For example, the latest estimates of the global ecological footprint show that during the last two decades, the global ecological overshoot has actually increased. Not only has our demand for natural capital exceeded the carrying capacity of our environment, but the situation has become worse than it was 20 years ago. Our words have not matched our actions. Growth has taken priority over a clean and healthy environment.

“We, the next generation, demand change” we were all told by Brittany here, in her emotional address to this audience yesterday. Looking at where we stand right now, I have to be honest and say that we don't have a lot to be proud of. We are not ready to change, to transform our lives, to give a chance to our planet and our children.

Ladies and gentlemen,

What has happened to us? Our civilization has always been able to think straight and has always stepped up for the next generation. Therefore, I have to ask myself - have we become so ignorant, so selfish and greedy, that we are like no other generation before? I refuse to accept that. I believe that our

society today is more caring, environmentally prudent and more involved in national and international decisions which affect our future than ever before.

Therefore, I urge all of us to aim higher. I believe and aim to prove that we can all do better than this. I believe that to change the current course of events, the contributions of small countries are as important as those of larger ones. Several small and not so small countries are proving that inclusive and environmentally responsible actions should not be sacrificed in the interests of economic growth and the quality of life.

Let me share Latvia's story with you. In recent years, Latvia's economy and its people went through one of the hardest periods since the country's proclamation 95 years ago. As many of you probably know, in 2008, after years of booming economic success, the Latvian economy took one of the world's sharpest dives, with its GDP shrinking by over 20%. The Latvian government was forced to ask the International Monetary Fund and the European Union for an emergency bailout loan. The country's credit rating was downgraded to the non-investment grade or "junk" level. The number of unemployed people in our country tripled after the onset of the crisis, giving Latvia the highest rate of unemployment growth in the European Union. A very gloomy picture, indeed. However, Latvia is now back on track, being among the top performers in the European Union and is receiving praise from some of the most prominent world leaders for its achievements in tackling the crisis. Why am I now telling you all of this?

Throughout the last 20 years, despite economic hardship and, in many cases because of it, a lot of environmentally wise decisions were actually made and implemented in Latvia. As a result, at the beginning of this year, Latvia received a ranking as the second greenest country in the world on the "Environmental Performance Index" as assessed by Yale and Columbia universities. This month, the International Monetary Fund lauded Latvia's accomplishments in turning the country's economy around. The people of Latvia proved that by working together for a common dream they gained immense power. Latvia provides hope and proof that we should not be forced or force ourselves to make an either/or choice. I am sure, that we can have and must have both – an environmentally sound, sustainable policy as well as

growth. If I am wrong, we may meet here again in 20 years without having made any significant achievements and we all know we cannot afford that. We know why we are here and we know where we need to be in next two decades. “I have a dream.” a great man once said. His dream changed the world. Ours can too. Let’s just do it!