

Speaking Points

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Presentation of the video Made in Forests

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I am glad to be able to address you again from this podium today. This time I will focus on a cause to which I dedicated much time this year: sustainable fashion.

In particular it is my pleasure to present to you a video I produced with the United Nations Television and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva. It is the story of how the sustainable and beautiful outfit I am wearing today was produced, a story about the impact of fashion on our planet and how solutions can actually be inspired by and come from nature.

You may think sustainable fashion is not that relevant for Agenda 2030, it is a 'narrow' topic, only for rich countries and elites.

Well, before we feature the movie about my journey in the world of sustainable fashion, allow me to clarify that fashion and clothing is a major issue if we are to achieve Agenda 2030, relevant to all countries and to all individuals, no matter where we live.

The fashion industry is no narrow business: it is one of the largest and most value-creating industries in the world – above media, transportation, and even commercial and professional services.

The fashion industry is valued at more than 2.5 trillion dollars, employs over 75 million people worldwide, and the amount of profit generated by the industry has doubled since 2009. The total global annual consumption of textiles is about 100 million tons and is expected to increase to three times that amount by 2050.

If the fashion industry were a country, its market size would equate to the seventh-largest GDP in the world.

However the fashion industry is responsible for producing 20 percent of global waste water and 10 percent of the global carbon emissions– more than the emissions of all international flights and maritime shipping combined.

In addition, the textiles industry has been identified in recent years as a major contributor to plastic entering the ocean. It is estimated that around half a million tonnes of plastic microfibers shed during the washing of plastic-based textiles such as polyester, nylon, or acrylic end up in the ocean annually.

In addition to the negative environmental impacts, fashion is often a synonym of dangerous working conditions, unsafe processes and hazardous substances used in production. High cost and time pressures are often imposed on all parts of the supply chain, leading to workers suffering poor working conditions with long hours and low pay, with evidence, in some instances, of modern slavery and child labour.

Today we count around 3.2 billion people in the global middle class. By 2030, this number will rise to about 5.4 billion with the major part of the growth occurring in Asia. The 2.2 billion people entering the global middle class will aspire a similar lifestyle as we know it today – which includes a similar consumption pattern with respect to clothing.

Thus, again, sustainable fashion is not a narrow concern, of relevance only to a few. This is a major development challenge. Fashion and clothing is an essential element for the transition towards sustainable societies.

The video I am presenting today is about my journey and my individual choice as a consumer. While the challenge is global, fashion is and will remain strongly also an individual choice. Governments need to be informed and involved in the evolution of the sector to point it in the right direction, however it will be ultimately the responsibility of individuals to start the fashion 'revolution'.

Are we thinking, as individuals, of the consequences of our actions when we buy our clothes?

Did you know for instance that for to make one single pair of jeans, we need ten thousand litres of water? This is what one of us drinks in 10 years.

Did you know that the production of one ton of polyester spun fibre creates almost 10kg of CO₂ emissions?

Do you know that sustainable fashion is not more expensive than normal fashion and you can make a difference often by simply checking labels and making your choice?

Certainly, as for any change there will be scepticism at the start and many questions. The transition often comes at a cost, and it is not often simple. For instance, I understand some of you will think that reducing the use of cotton or polyester would have an impact on the economies of many countries.

But let me also tell you that, as also the movie will point out, sustainability also means transitioning from one solution to another. The movie will show how sustainable textiles can be produced out of modern forest fibers.

Again, many of us would also think that forests are best left untouched, however is often by adding value to their products that we can best protect them, and in many cases restoration efforts can be coupled with productive forests.

It is a fact that restoration efforts of forest degraded lands are already ongoing in many countries which have suffered from intensive cotton agriculture, and forest can provide alternative livelihoods and businesses. Forests are an option not only to restore land but also to create productive ecosystems, to support local and rural communities.

Moreover, forest fibers are already a reality and textile businesses are growing or buying large forest extensions to this end.

New fibers are highly sustainable, their carbon and ecological footprints are low, and there are different fast growing species suitable for different places and climates.

Let's face it: changing the production and consumption patterns of the fashion industry will have a domino effect on many aspects of development and provide a visible and meaningful contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

What the movie provides you with is an example how the transition can be made.

I do hope that through the Made in Forest movie developed with the UNTV and the UNECE I will be able to reach out beyond this room to my fans, to those in the world of fashion and to the different generations of internet users and Youtubers. I hope they will pick up on my message as I will continue to advocate, through my role as UNDP Goodwill Ambassador but also as an actress who has an important role in setting trends, for sustainable fashion.

I hope that you now, as government representatives as well as individuals with a great power of choice, will join me in this journey, and become also an advocate of sustainable fashion for a better future.

Enjoy the video!
