

Commission on Sustainable Development
High-Level Session
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Address by Siv Friðleifsdóttir, Minister for the Environment, Iceland

Mr. Chairman, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is highly appropriate that the theme of this first substantial session of CSD since the Johannesburg summit focus on water and sanitation and human habitats.

Mr. Chairman, Minister Børge Brende, allow me at the outset to congratulate you for your relentless efforts to shape and focus this important debate.

Studies show that it is hard to find any measures that give higher returns in terms of human welfare than investments in improving freshwater supplies and sanitation. Yet, these are issues that do not normally grab headlines and the interest of world leaders. And it is hard for many countries to mobilize resources for measures in this regard, as the profit is usually measured in better lives rather than monetary terms. We must find ways to change this in order to reach our agreed goals. This session of the CSD has already brought forward many good practices and ideas for us to build on in our policy session next year.

Allow me to mention briefly the importance of involving women in actions taken in the fields of water and sanitation. Women bear the greatest burden - often literally - in bringing water to households, and they play a keyrole in solving the sanitation problems. Women's education, empowerment and involvement in decision-making are key to success.

Mr. Chairman,

My country, Iceland, has more freshwater resources per capita than most or all countries represented here. Annually, we use only one-tenth of one percent of our available water for human and industrial consumption. Water shortage and lack of sanitation seem like problems far from home. Yet, while the challenges we are discussing here are local in nature, they do have a global environmental dimension.

My country, Iceland, is surrounded by water. The oceans are an integral part of the water cycle. We do need integrated water resource management, not only from hilltops to the oceans, but beyond.

Freshwater pollution problems do not end at sewage pipe outlets and river deltas. They simply become saltwater pollution problems.

The growth in urban communities this century will largely take place in coastal areas. With sanitation and wastewater issues neglected, this may cause serious pollution of coastal waters in parts of the world. Such pollution causes local health problems, and can adversely affect fisheries, tourism and other industries. Such pollution can also affect the ocean ecosystem as a whole, and the critical ecosystem services that the oceans provide and we enjoy everyday.

An improvement in sanitation in rapidly growing coastal cities can bring a double dividend: Enhancing health in the cities, and preventing the deterioration of their environment. The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities is an instrument which highlights the need to improve sanitation and wastewater treatment in coastal areas. Actions taken within the GPA, especially in accordance to its Strategic Action Plan on Municipal Wastewater can help bring about this double dividend.

Mr. Chairman,

Iceland has recently announced its intention to greatly increase development aid in the coming years and is currently developing a medium-term Policy Statement for Development Cooperation. The Statement will be integral part of Iceland's foreign policy with sustainable development as one of its main pillars.

Thank you