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Statement by H.E. Mrs Solveiga Silkalna, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of LATVIA to the UN at the 16th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development
New York, 15 May 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Latvia aligns itself with the statement made by Slovenia on behalf of the European Union.

All the themes of this year's CSD review session – agriculture, rural development, land, desertification, drought, Africa, as well as water and sanitation - are important for all member states. The main challenge is to address these issues in a sustainable and integrated way.

We therefore welcome the increasing attention being paid to the linkages between agriculture, land management, and the natural resource base, with a focus on water, forests and biodiversity.

Mr. Chairman,

Biodiversity and forests provide benefits for present and future generations through ecosystem services, which are vital for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Latvia's nature is still surprisingly rich and diverse, in spite of rapid economic development. Close to half of our territory is covered in forest. We have designated approximately 12% of our territory as protected areas where strict protection rules and development limits have to be observed. Preservation of biodiversity is only possible by balancing interests between the spheres of agriculture, rural development and transport needs, and by taking into account sustainable development principles.

Mr Chairman,

At this session we are rightly focusing on the increasingly pressing question of food security. While rising food prices are not nearly as acute a problem in Latvia as in many other countries, our society is feeling the effects of the current global situation and understands the urgency of the matter.

One of the related topical issues facing the global community is the potentially conflicting need of land resources for food and for biofuel production. Bioenergy can be a win-win option, with potential for agricultural diversification, a narrowing of the rural energy gap, a reduction of national expenditures on oil imports, and decreased global dependency on fossil fuels. That said, use of land resources must be balanced, to prevent loss of biodiversity, and development of “second generation” biofuels is an important further step.

It is also important for the global community to agree on a set of criteria for defining sustainable energy and especially sustainable biofuels, and for subjecting them to adequate environmental and social impact assessments.

Mr. Chairman,

We need to speed up progress towards meeting the objectives and principles set at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Enforcement of Multilateral Environment Agreements is essential in achieving progress. The cost of non-action will magnify the negative impacts of climate change, and far outweigh the cost of mitigation and adaptation. Latvia favours innovative approaches that lead to environmentally sound and resource-efficient technologies. To promote those technologies we need to create an enabling environment for investment in science, which is a key element for sustainable development in the future.

Thank you.