

**Ministry for Sustainable Development****Plenary Statement by Ms. Mona Sahlin, Minister, Ministry for  
Sustainable Development, Sweden****CSD14****New York, May 10, 2006**

Sustainable development is, at heart, a question of attitudes, lifestyles and political will and of power over resources, decision-making and agenda setting. It is a matter of rights: to freedom from hunger, decent work and health – including sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is an issue of healthy ecosystems, and of peace and freedom – for everyone, regardless of sex, age, ethnicity, class or faith.

In all our societies, energy is key to development. It is essential to provide for the basic necessities of families, in all types of production, and where energy consumption is growing more than anywhere else: in transportation. Energy – and oil in particular – has become the blood in the veins of societies everywhere. We, the affluent world, above all, must take our responsibility and shift to more sustainable lifestyles and more sustainable consumption and production. This must be given priority in current discussions nationally and globally, where power over energy is at the forefront, be it in terms of security, supplies, accessibility – and in addressing political unrest caused by sharp increases in oil prices. Power over energy – an issue not even mentioned in the Millennium Declaration 2000 - is today and for the foreseeable future a major challenge to us all.

Rightly used, energy can be a global tool for sustainable development and energy provisioning – and for poverty eradication. Wrongly used, in self-interest and with a short-term perspective - it causes conflicts, air pollution, and climate change and as reported recently by the World Bank, the sharp increase in oil prices over the past few months has already augmented poverty in a number of countries by 4–7 per cent.

Sweden has for decades pursued policies to reduce the national dependence on fossil fuels, particularly oil and this year a special commission has been set up under the stewardship of the Prime Minister to phase out our dependency on oil by 2020. For long, oil has been perceived as an accessible and affordable source of energy. We have too often disregarded the *external costs of oil* in terms of air pollution and ill-health – and been blind to the consequences our future generations may have to pay for our depletion of a major non-renewable resource.

We must also address women's empowerment and gender equality in *all* aspects of sustainable development. This is an area where we do need some "leap-frogging". Discussions on sustainable development tend to be pursued at the macro level, where individuals – both women and men – largely remain invisible. Thus, we need to build bridges so *that people become visible*, and not only when we move to the households and see women and children suffering from air pollution. We must change from seeing women as victims to see women as actors and agents of change. and ensure women's rights and well-being by challenging underlying power structures and gender stereotypes that are obstacles to human freedom and limit individual freedom of choice in terms of lifestyles. In addition to these structural and strategic aspects of gender, we must also act on practical matters, such as ensuring access for poor women to safe and affordable energy that does not cause ill-health, to energy that facilitates work in the household and to energy for transportation, to schools, hospitals and jobs. The Network of Women Ministers for the Environment has put forward a number of suggestions to that end. In addition, at this CSD, Sweden is organizing a side-event to elaborate on some of the strategic aspects of power over resources – and the question of if women in general leave a smaller ecological footprint than men.

In conclusion, I would like to challenge you, my colleagues here at the CSD, by asking you, in due time for CSD 15, to *put forward the best examples possible of how to empower women at all levels*. We need strategic proposals that address the underlying power structures, and proposals that can help us bridge the macro level, with men at the decision-making table. We also need proposals for measures on the ground on how to provide reliable, affordable and accessible energy so that poor women do not need to spend up to four hours a day in search of fuel wood. Energy is key to development and is crucial for the creation of more equitable and just societies. Because power over energy can help empower people.

Thank you.