

Norwegian State Secretary Heidi Sorensen's opening speech, at the Fifth Trondheim Conference on Biodiversity "Ecosystems and People – biodiversity for development – the road to 2010 and beyond". Trondheim, Norway, 29 October 2007

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Trondheim and to the official opening of the Fifth Trondheim Conference on Biodiversity.

Norway is honoured to organize this Conference. We have some exciting and interesting days ahead of us. But first, I would like to thank the Mayor of Trondheim, Rita Ottervik, for her very warm welcome. Her city has become a prominent centre for biodiversity knowledge and science in Norway. It's good to be here - in my home region. And I would also like to thank Mr Peter Johan Schei for chairing this conference. I think it is fair to say that you are one of the founding fathers of the Convention on Biodiversity, and "Mr Biodiversity" in Norway.

The Trondheim Conference has become an important meeting point. Here, policy makers, managers and scientists can have an open dialogue on key issues being discussed under the Convention of Biological Diversity. I very much hope that these discussions will provide a valuable contribution to the next Conference of the Parties in Bonn this spring.

This Conference is very well timed! Biodiversity is now being placed high on the international political agenda, in the context of broader development issues. The title of the conference, "Ecosystems and people - biodiversity for development - the road to 2010 and beyond", sets the tone. The dialogues you will have are vital not only for today, but also for far into the future. They are important to peoples' well-being world wide.

As an international community, we have committed ourselves to the goal of "significantly reducing the loss of biodiversity by 2010". In fact, the shared goal in Europe is to "halt the loss of biodiversity" by 2010. In addition, we have promised to make real progress to combat poverty around the world by 2015.

I would like to thank Marina Silva, the Brazilian Minister of the Environment and President of COP 8, for the excellent way you organized and chaired the previous COP in Curitiba.

The appeal from Curitiba led to the integration of the 2010 target as part of goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals on ensuring environmental

sustainability. Under your able leadership, and because of your personal and untiring commitment, it has been firmly stated that biodiversity conservation is everybody's business.

We need to be more mindful of the value of biodiversity, and of how biodiversity contributes to poverty reduction and to the benefit of all life on earth. There is a need for more and better linkages between principles and actions in biodiversity and development cooperation.

One example world wide is the development of ecotourism.

Conservation of nature, protecting the rainforest or the establishment of new national parks attracts tourists to countries building up a sustainable society. If handled environmentally correct, ecotourism has a great potential to countries with a low income rate.

Last year I visited Madagascar, and I would like to praise their ambition to actively use ecotourism as a means to economic growth. Commitments were also made at the same time to protect biodiversity by tripling Madagascar's conservation areas. .

Norway wants to play a leading role in making environmental concerns a part of all development cooperation. In 2006 Norway presented an "Action plan for environment in development co-operation". We realize that we must deal with environmental problems if we are to reduce poverty and solve the development problems the world is facing. What is more, we see frequent examples on how environmental cooperation contributes to peace, reconciliation, security and regional development.

Our new Minister of the Environment and International Development, Mr.Erik Solheim, will address the conference at the closing session on Friday. His nomination as minister for both the environment and international development shows the Norwegian commitment for the topics dealt with at this conference.

Ladies and gentlemen, There are many important issues on the agenda this week. The broad agenda reflects the enormous complexity of the Biodiversity convention and the challenges we are facing. You will later today hear more about our progress towards the 2010 target. We all know that this target is hard to reach. But I strongly believe that the efforts we are all doing in order to reach the 2010 target, will make the way forward beyond 2010 less stressful.

There is also an urge to address the linkages between climate change and biodiversity. Deforestation is causing loss of biodiversity, and is accounting

for roughly 20 per cent of global emissions of greenhouse gases. It is therefore an area of common concern how to respond to the environmental threats related to deforestation in developing countries. In this respect a much closer cooperation between our two conventions should take place.

Deforestation activities may threaten the ability to reach several long term goals. Time is a critical component here! The need for an early action is urgent in order to avoid the most dramatic and irreversible consequences in relation to both the Convention on biodiversity and the Climate Change Convention. When preparing for the Bali meeting in December on climate change, Norway will carefully consider how financial means could stimulate early action to limit and reduce deforestation activities in tropical forests.

Biodiversity worldwide is disappearing faster than ever. At the first Trondheim conference in 1993 Ms Gro Harlem Brundtland expressed that "the library of life" is on fire.

The truth is that it is still burning 14 years later. The growing demands for biological resources are mainly caused by population growth and increased consumption. But even in a sparsely populated country such as Norway, we are losing biodiversity. It is therefore essential to get a better knowledge of existing species and habitats in order to be able to protect them.

The Norwegian seas are known for its many species of fish, whale, seals and other Arctic species of marine life. To our great surprise some mapping activities of the sea bed discovered huge areas of cold-water coral reefs never seen before in our latitudes. Due to these mapping efforts, several cold-water coral reefs of considerable value of biological diversity have been identified outside the Norwegian coastline. This led us to rethink the management of our fisheries, trawling activities and oil production plans.

Under the Convention on biodiversity, mainstreaming of biodiversity concerns is recognized as a key challenge. This challenge cannot be solved by the environmental sector alone - all sectors must contribute. This conference is also an example of this, as it is being organised by my Ministry in co-operation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs.

Improved knowledge and easily accessible information on biodiversity is necessary in order to stimulate sector integration. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is a success. The assessment clearly shows that a scientific platform for the Convention of biodiversity in line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is strongly needed to improve decision making on biodiversity. Likewise - we have to communicate the biodiversity agenda in a

clear and understandable language. We need to bring forward the added value of biodiversity benefiting the society as a whole.

It is also a priority for Norway to reach an agreement on the third objective of the convention of biodiversity - the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from genetic resources.

The recently held negotiations in Montreal on access and benefit sharing show us that we are still far from consensus.

I will therefore encourage all of us to work on obtaining constructive results at the next session in Geneva in January. We need to resolve the outstanding questions before 2010.

Ladies and gentlemen, Nature is the basis of our existence. A natural environment with a rich biological diversity adapt easier to changes such as a warmer climate. Biodiversity is a basis for sustainable development and human well-being. Biodiversity is our life insurance.

It is my sincere wish that the fifth Trondheim Conference will live up to the expectations. I count on your dedication and commitment. I would like to wish you all a very successful and inspiring Conference.

Thank you.

Ministry of the Environment