

## For a more sustainable State of the World

Speech by

**Pieter van Geel**

State Secretary for the Environment

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Ladies and gentlemen,

### Introduction

Thank you for inviting me to take part in the Symposium State of the World 2005 – Redefining Global Security. There can be no better location for a meeting like this than the Peace Palace – a symbol of international conflict management, jurisprudence and justice. Perhaps, when it was built in 1913, the architects had meetings like this one in mind.

Today we will be focusing on the Worldwatch Institute's recent report *State of the World 2005* which clearly sets out why sustainable development is so vital. As you know, many environmental problems are caused by our consumption and production patterns. Ever since the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, the international community has accepted that if we want to deal with environmental issues, climate change, dwindling supplies of raw materials, poverty and, by extension, security, we have to make changes. Ultimately, environmental pollution causes shortages of water and other natural resources. If we are not careful, these shortages may lead to social instability, insecurity and even conflicts. And all this entails.

### Nuclear energy

By 2030, world-wide demand for energy will have increased by between fifty and sixty percent. Two-thirds will come from rapidly developing countries like India and China. To meet that need over the next thirty years, trillions of euros will have to be invested in the energy sector.

All indicators point to the fact that we will continue to use natural gas, oil and coal over the next few decades. Supplies are limited, however. So we are at risk of becoming embroiled in what my colleague Ben Bot, Minister of Foreign Affairs, calls the world-wide Great Game for oil, gas and other raw materials. A Game with spheres of influence as the main prize: it would raise tensions across the globe and stop prosperity from growing and spreading. And it would make it more difficult for us to work together on solving problems like terrorism and climate change.

In short, the demand for energy is rising fast while supplies of fossil fuels are shrinking. Which brings the risk that countries will start competing for fuel and is the reason why we have to change our attitude to energy.

Let me take Europe as an example. As supplies of Norwegian and British oil and Dutch natural gas become exhausted, Europe will grow increasingly dependent for its energy on unstable countries elsewhere. As Ben Bot also said, for the Netherlands this means less energy security and an end to the billions of euros of windfall profits pouring into the treasury.

I believe that there are several things we have to do. First and foremost, we must use energy and raw materials more economically and be more eco-efficient. Doing that will require that more energy-saving products and more economical, clean cars are put on the market. I don't have to tell you that traffic is the main culprit when it comes to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the greenhouse effect.

But that will not be enough. In Europe, we will have to make full use of every energy source at our disposal – solar and wind energy, for instance. And even that will not solve all our

problems. Which is why we cannot exclude the possibility of using nuclear energy and must develop hydrogen technology as quickly as possible.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not making a case for nuclear energy. But I do want to keep the door open and discuss the issue without being dogmatic. We must stop being dependent on oil, gas and coal – that is, traditional fuels we have to import from unstable countries. Not only in order to avoid international conflicts but also because fossil fuels do serious harm to the climate and the environment. Air pollution and climate change, for instance. As I said, we have to find other forms of energy – forms of energy which are sustainable and less harmful. Clean nuclear energy must remain an option. And that is also why I do not simply want to go ahead and shut down the only nuclear power station in the Netherlands.

### **State of the World 2005**

I would like to return for a moment to the main topics of the report which is the focus of our discussions today. I will not burden you with an endless list of responses to every topic in the report. But I should like to set out what I believe is the key to sustainable production and consumption, and what our objectives should be.

### **Sustainable production**

I am pleased that manufacturers had a hand in initiating this meeting. Mr Van Melle, (the man) who invited me to speak, has earned an excellent reputation for his company through his pioneering work in the field of sustainable development – clean, clever and competitive before they became watchwords. Clean, Clever and Competitive, formed the central environmental theme of the Dutch presidency. And for good reason. Because they offer excellent opportunities for win-win situations for both the environment and the economy on the road to sustainability. Environmentally-friendly innovations can strengthen Europe's competitiveness, and eco-efficient innovations contribute to that competitiveness at every level. Companies can significantly reduce costs through efficient use of energy and natural resources. Doing so also makes them less dependent on fluctuating import markets. Eco-efficient innovation is a cost-effective way of meeting European and world-wide environmental targets and produces less waste and polluting emissions. It opens profitable, new markets at home and new export markets in countries like China and India.

Many innovative products have already been developed. But it is not always easy to get them to the market. Market prospects must be improved, and there are several ways of doing so – factoring environmental costs into prices, green purchasing by governments, providing tax incentives, and eliminating subsidies for environmentally harmful activities and products. Funds freed up by measures like these could then be used for sustainable energy, cleaner technology and cleaner production.

This would strengthen the market position of eco-efficient innovations. The products would enjoy a good reputation. And, unlike those which cause pollution and harm the environment, they would satisfy future, more stringent requirements. But I don't expect socially responsible companies to wait until The Hague or Brussels enacts new legislation. I expect them to be much quicker in getting sustainable processes off the ground.

Apart from all the fiscal measures governments can take, they can commit themselves to green purchasing and contracting. As an example, I would point to the Netherlands which is now working on purchasing and using only sustainably produced wood for residential construction, ports and government buildings. Our forests must be protected against illegal logging.

There can be no sustainable consumption without sustainable production.

## **Sustainable consumption**

How can we get the consumer to buy clean, sustainable products instead of products which pollute? Several things have to be done. Sustainable products must be as competitively priced as non-sustainable ones. The consumer has to know what has gone into the product. One way to provide information to consumers is the life cycle approach for which manufacturers – and governments – will have to assume serious responsibility.

Ultimately, for consumers to make responsible choices, they need transparent information, perhaps by appropriate labelling, and a balanced pricing system. We cannot expect consumers to analyse products themselves.

NGOs, in particular the consumer and environmental organisations, have a vital role to play here. They too must engage in dialogue with companies to ensure that management is transparent. I also believe that, like benchmarking, and naming, faming and shaming, reports comparing products are an important educational tool.

## **Conclusion**

Fortunately, the Dutch government does not have to work in isolation. UNEP has been tasked with working out the Johannesburg action plan and developing a Ten Year Framework Programme for achieving sustainable consumption and production.

Last year, the European Commission designed a plan of approach covering several major topics – greening the tax system, eliminating harmful subsidies, promoting transparency, analysing a product's life cycle, encouraging recycling, reducing waste, and eco-labelling – all important initiatives. But it is even more important for large-scale operators like China and India to participate. I am not going to use this podium to give India and China advice, but it will become clear that greater consumer spending in China for instance is a two-edged sword. We should be delighted because such spending signals economic and personal development. But, at the same time, we must not ignore the serious consequences this has for nature, the environment and natural resources.

I am in regular contact with China and India and have the impression that they too are working hard to achieve economic growth based on sustainability and sustainable energy.

I hope that this seminar, and, in particular, the Worldwatch Institute report, will be decisive steps on the way to a more sustainable State of the World.

Thank you.

## **Pieter van Geel**

State Secretary for the Environment  
The Netherlands Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment  
The Hague, The Netherlands  
Internet: [www.vrom.nl/international/](http://www.vrom.nl/international/)