



**Welcome Address**  
**M. (Ries) Smits**<sup>1</sup>

**At the reception for the participants on 10 May 2004**

**The Hague Conference on Environment, Security and Sustainable Development**  
**Peace Palace, The Hague, 9-12 May 2004**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, on behalf of the municipal executive, to welcome you to The Hague, the city which has the honour to host the Conference on Environment, Security and Sustainable Development.

Like with so many other subjects, international cooperation is of vital importance to the environmental security, the sustainable use of natural sources, as to the equitable sharing of its benefits. The Hague fully acknowledges this and is proud to host the Institute for Environmental Security. The international city of peace and justice is of course the right place for this young NGO. The link between international law and environmental security is obvious. International environmental law is becoming more and more important.

However, notwithstanding the importance of the international cooperation, allow me to tell you something about the local situation in The Hague.

The Hague - you might have noticed it yourself - is in spite of its size, a very **green** city, due to the presence of several preserved former rural estates, and because of the many parks and green areas that have been created throughout the years. The green character of our city highly contributes to the quality of life in The Hague. In order to preserve this climate of life, the city government must pay great attention to environmental questions.

What have we done so far to keep our city green?

The development took place along three lines:

**One** line is about **education**, to improve the involvement of residents with their living environment. This line started in the seventies with the education of kids for environmental awareness, by taking them to the country-side, by making gardening-facilities for them and special educational materials.

A **second** line focuses on a more **ecological** approach to **public parks**. The early eighties saw the publishing of the so called **Hague Green Paper**, which provided a steering policy instrument. The content concentrated primarily at the physical development of green areas. Ecological development was lacking, because of the general absence of data on the functioning of natural ecosystems.

However, it also was not clear how such results should be included in the overall consideration of urban planning. Yet, in practice the choice of vegetation was adapted to more natural and indigenous varieties. The use of chemical weed killers was drastically reduced and environment-friendly forms of plant protection were applied. Mowing programmes were adapted in order to allow growth of a wide range of herbaceous plants.

**Another** line is about environmental consequences of building, which started in the nineties, when the attention for the environment was growing and a great number of studies about ecological building were published.

---

<sup>1</sup> **M. (Ries) Smits** is Vice Mayor of the City of The Hague

In the early nineties, ladies and gentlemen,

These lines came together. Also in that period, the **green main structure** was fixed. The green area's, parks, former estates, as well as the recreational areas and the connections between them, were declared as **green framework**.

This structural plan for green spaces was a city-wide plan, in which ecological structures played and do play an important role.

In order to promote the biodiversity, **connecting zones** had to be created, between the existing and potential natural areas in the city and outlying areas. This was no simple matter. Often research data or fundamental ecological knowledge were lacking.

It was very important to make first a state of the art of nature values and after re-arrangement or changes in management, continue with monitoring.

However, the city government does not have enough knowledge and not enough employees to appoint specialists to handle this at its own.

We therefore cooperate with **nature conservation groups**. Data are gathered by specialists on birds, bats, frogs and so, mainly from the large green areas. This cooperation is very important.

The **inhabitants** of The Hague are also involved. For two connecting zones data were gathered. Each participating inhabitant had its own 300 or 500 metre part.

Observations were done and data were gathered by the Hague Environmental Centre. These data were also connected to our green management system, to check if measurements have effects.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The awareness is growing that cities nature is very import. Also for the integration of ecological aspects in physical planning steps forward have been made.

Any way, it is clear to everyone what we intend to do, which is:

- improve the quality of the environment
- involve the inhabitants in sustainable city development, and in management of their own neighbourhood
- improve natural values in the living environment.

We still have a long way to go, but I am convinced that the basis has been laid for an urban development that supports biodiversity and sustainable development. Not long ago, I was able to receive the positive report of an international peer review on durability in The Hague. However, this report also points out that our city should balance its view on sustainable development and communicate about it. So, enough work to do, as long as we will not go under in the water of the North Sea, as predicted by the Pentagon earlier this year.

For now, I wish you an interesting conference and a pleasant stay, with dry feet, in The Hague.

10 May 2004

---

**Institute for Environmental Security**

[www.envirosecurity.org](http://www.envirosecurity.org)