

## **Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition calls for action in Rio**

### ***Rio+20: An unmissable chance for sustainability***

The run-up to the Rio+20 Conference (June 20-22) - the most important global summit on sustainability in 20 years - has seen the recent publication of the fifth edition of the *Global Environmental Outlook*.

In this publication, The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) outlines the progress which has been made on 500 important environmental aims which have been internationally agreed.

Unfortunately, the results are disappointing. There have been significant improvements in only 4 areas: protection of the ozone layer, the use of unleaded gasoline, improved access to safe drinking water and research into reducing sea pollution.

The UNEP report, which involved the contributions of 600 scientists, confirms once more what many of us had already suspected: the way in which we treat our planet leaves a lot to be desired, and cannot be sustained in the long term. A tough message, but important nonetheless.

The job of turning the tide will be even more challenging in the coming decades owing to the growth of the world population (from 7 billion today to 9 billion in 2050), the ageing of this population, the increase in the number of chronic diseases and the advent of a new middle class in *emerging markets* with an associated increase in consumption. At the same time, these developments naturally afford many new opportunities for (Dutch) businesses.

One thing is certain: a solution will only be possible if we all rise to the challenge and if governments, businesses, NGOs, consumers and academics each accept their share of the responsibility. In short, we urgently need a combination of sustainable government policy, sustainable business strategies and socially responsible *consumers*. Businesses are able to contribute to solving complicated problems, particularly through their capacity for innovation.

Dutch businesses are world leaders in the field of socially responsible entrepreneurship, as can be seen for example from the many high scores in various prominent international sustainability indexes.

A number of leaders in the field of sustainable entrepreneurship among Dutch businesses have therefore recently begun collaborating in the *Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition* (DSGC).

These businesses want to learn from one another's experiences of sustainable business strategies and share them with others. They also want to contribute to the international recognition of the Netherlands as one of the world's *Sustainability Valleys*. The Netherlands certainly has something to offer the world in this respect.

In our opinion, the "New Business Policy" of the Dutch government rightly focuses on strengthening the so-called 'Top Sectors', including Water, Agriculture & Food, Energy, Chemistry, Life Sciences & Health and High Tech Systems and Materials. The competitive strength of the businesses in these 'Top Sectors' also determines the extent to which they can (continue to) perform a leading role in solving a number of the biggest global challenges, including the so-called *energy-food-water nexus*.

We are pleased to confirm that the Dutch government has also included a number of these 'Top Sector' themes in the new development cooperation policy.

This gives rise to a much needed synergy and accommodates important public-private partnerships, for example the successful Sustainable Trade Initiative [Initiatief Duurzame Handel (IDH)].

According to reports, negotiations on the final text of the Rio+20 Conference are currently stalling, owing partly to the global financial and economic crisis and the fact that governments are faced with the need to reduce towering national debts.

No further proof is needed that this priority, which is in itself justified, cannot lead to a worsening of the crisis in relation to the environment and sustainability in general.

The businesses united in the *Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition* (DSGC) are asking that our world leaders begin negotiations in Rio for implementing *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs).

These SDGs must continue to build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations which date from the year 2000 – a series of eight development goals which serve as a significant blueprint for bringing the world more welfare, health and equality in 2015.

The solution to the often fragmentary implementation of the MDGs is, however, not simply to stop setting ambitious targets. The real message here is different: goals that have been set for a reason should actually also be implemented!

The SDGs must therefore comprise specific targets, including in the field of driving back poverty, food security, reducing the consumption of CO<sub>2</sub> and water, maintaining biodiversity, protecting forests, increasing the use of renewable energy, *recycling*, *clean development mechanisms*, and the quality of health.

It is hugely important that the SDGs contain a framework for making full use of the opportunities for public-private cooperation in the context of sustainable development.

The businesses united in the *Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition* should use their sustainable business strategies, innovation and influence in numerous international product and production chains to contribute, where needed, to the realization of the SDGs.

The SDGs need to be accompanied by a concrete timeframe: at the latest by 2015 there should be agreement on the precise SDG aims, including quantifiable worldwide *targets*, with a view to full implementation by 2030.

We can thereby create a seamless link to one of the most important lessons from the UNEP report quoted above, namely that the international environmental treaties with specific and concrete aims appear to show by far the most progress. We surely can't let such an unmissable chance pass us by?

Ben Franklin once said: "*You may delay, but time will not, and lost time is never found again.*"

A response from our government leaders in Rio will follow in the next few days. In any case, a large number of Dutch businesses are now ready to take up the challenge.

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