

**Thematic Seminar Series: Waste Management**  
**Tuesday 12 January 2010**  
**Talking Points for Tariq Banuri**

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

- I am pleased to welcome you to the opening of the CSD thematic seminar series. The aim of these seminars is to provide delegations with policy-relevant and practical information on the current CSD themes and create opportunities for exchanging views with experts. We hope that they will help generate greater convergence of views on the progress made, the obstacles and challenges remaining, and on the limits of the possible, i.e., what has worked and hasn't worked in practice.
- The series is one of the innovative elements that the CSD18 Bureau has introduced in the organization of work. It builds upon other innovations introduced by the CSD17 Bureau.
- I am grateful to His Excellency, Hilario Davide Jr., Vice Chair of CSD 18, and the Permanent Representative of the Philippines for hosting this briefing. It is fitting that Ambassador Davide is chairing the meeting. Before his current assignment, he was far more famous for attacking another kind of waste, namely the one that comes from the excessive use of power. His success there attested by the many awards and honors he has received. We look forward to achieving similar success under his leadership on the elimination of more tangible forms of waste.

Review of Hazardous and Solid Waste

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- No one here needs to be reminded that the origins of the modern sustainability movement lie precisely in the subject with which we begin this series of seminars. Rachel Carson's acclaimed book, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, was the first to compile detailed evidence that the accumulation of waste and pollution would undermine the very basis of life on the planet. Carson awoke us from our slumber and inspired an entire generation, not only to address pollution, on which several landmark legislations were enacted within a few years, but also to pursue broader sustainability concerns. A decade later the first in the series of UN Summits on sustainable development was convened in Stockholm, which among other things established UNEP, and also drew the attention of the international community to the need to address environmental and development issues in a synergistic manner. Within the topic of our interest today, one of the achievements of UNEP is the successful shepherding of several global agreements on chemicals management, including Ozone (1985) and trade in hazardous wastes (1989), trade in chemicals (1998) and management of POPs (2001).
- In the evolution of policy towards chemicals and hazardous substances, a fundamental contribution was by Chapter 20 of Agenda 21, which helped to place the challenge of environmental protection explicitly in the context of sustainable development; in particular by broadening the approach from "control" to "sound management". This chapter prescribed the sound management of chemicals and hazardous wastes throughout their life cycle for the protection of human health and the environment. This was refined further at the subsequent summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg, in the decision to adopt SAICM, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals

Management, and especially its 2020 goal, namely that by 2020, all chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of adverse effects on human health and the environment, using transparent science-based risk assessment and risk management procedures, and taking into account the precautionary approach set out in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration.

- While the overall policy framework on sound chemicals management has begun to evolve, action is lagging in a number of areas. These include in particular the need for technical and financial assistance to support the development of environmentally sound disposal facilities, including technology to convert waste into energy, in developing countries, and generally for strengthening their institutional and technical capacity for sound management of solid and hazardous wastes. Much more action is also needed to achieve the implementation of the recommendation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation for environmentally sound management of solid wastes and sewage, with priority attention to waste prevention and minimization, reuse and recycling.

#### Upcoming Inter-sessional Events

- To continue the expert engagement, DSD, UNCRD, and the Japanese Ministry of the Environment, plan to organize two complementary international events under the overall theme of Collaborative Approaches and Solutions to Waste Management Challenge:
  - An International Consultative Meeting on Expanding Waster Management Services in Developing Countries, 18-19 March 2010, and
  - An International Conference on Building Partnerships for Moving Towards Zero Waste in January 2011.
- These events will bring together mayors and heads of municipalities with experts as well as representatives from international institutions, communities, civil society, and the private sector, to discuss challenges as well as practical solutions for waste management in developing countries.

#### Follow-Up Online: E-Discussion on Waste Management

- After the close of today's seminar, I would like to invite you to continue the dialogue and engage with the wider global community through an e-discussion to be launched on the Division's website: [http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd\\_csd18.shtml](http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/csd/csd_csd18.shtml). The website will provide access to a summary of today's discussion, copies of the materials presented, and a link to the e-discussion forum that is open to everyone.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In launching this seminar series, we are fortunate to have with us a distinguished panel whose members combine rigorous scholarship and passionate advocacy in the tradition of Rachel Carson.

Professor Paul Connett is a person you cannot help but admire. When Paul says zero waste, you can be sure that he means Zero Waste. You can also be sure that he is not talking as an armchair academician, but as a man who knows what works in practice, what are the practical solutions, and what are the lessons from the field. You can also be sure that he is not advancing a mere philosophical proposition,

but speaking with the dedication of a tireless campaigner. He has traveled the world over to challenge the common practice of disposal of wastes through incineration.

Allen Hershkowitz exemplifies the spirit of civic entrepreneurship. He has led many successful initiatives, but the one that I admire the most is the one that is not successful yet, the campaign to establish the Bronx Community Paper Company to recycle some of the 12,000 tons of waste paper the city produces each day. As the philosopher Hannah Arendt reported in a quote from the Roman Cato “*Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni*”. Victorious causes please the gods, but the failed ones please Cato.

Ianthe Smith has done so many things in one life that she must have been working over time. She has developed policies, built networks, worked with the business community, especially on ISO 14000 registrations, and represented Jamaica in international negotiations on Ozone depletion. She is currently working on an integrated waste management strategy and action plan for Jamaica.

And finally, my good friend, Munyaradzi Chenje, is the Head of Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs at UNEP. He is an environment assessment specialist by training. For me, his most significant work in the past was the coordinator of UNEP’s flagship publication GEO for several years. As someone who has contributed to the scenarios analysis of this publication, I can attest to its quality as well as the professionalism and excellence of the coordinating team. Munyaradzi has also been our key counterpart from UNEP in the CSD process.

### Concluding Remarks

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- We do not need a crystal ball to know that a sustainable future would be a future without any waste. It will not be a world with less waste. It will be a world with Zero Waste. From Rachel Carson we know that the accumulation of waste will eventually kill us. And from Nature we know that it is neither sustainable nor necessary to create waste. Rather, what is sustainable is the closing of the circle and the ecology of reuse and recycle. In Nature, nothing is wasted because everything is useful. What is waste to one gets reprocessed by another and becomes useful again. Like prodigal children, we humans for far too long treated nature as the enemy. It is time to call off this battle. We know that the clock is ticking and it is time to return home again, and to relearn the lessons taught by Nature in our infancy. We have indeed learned mechanics and engineering, and put them to use. It is time to learn ecology.
- The long term vision is not in doubt. The question is not *whether* this would happen but *when* and *how*. How soon do we need to get there? And how can we get there from a world characterized by such incapacity, incontinence, insatiability, ineptness, inexpertness, inequity, incomprehension, and even innocence? What are the practical steps from here to there?
- I am grateful to our panelists for helping us find some of the answers and to you for your interest in converting these into decisions. I hope that you will find this seminar as well as the rest of the series useful in the preparations for CSD-18 and 19. Thank you.