

**2005 Berlin Conference on the
Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change
“International Organisations and Global Environmental Governance”**

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Keynote Address

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“Purpose and Necessity of a World Environment Organisation within the United Nations”

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to the 2005 Berlin Conference on ‘International Organisations and Global Environmental Governance’ to speak about the influence of intergovernmental organisations. You have presented an impressive array of papers on a variety of issues relevant to this topic, including climate change and OECD peer reviews, co-operation between international organisations in North and South, and the current and future role of the UN Environment Programme in light of new mechanisms of global environmental governance. You have also attended several presentations and panel discussions in the past two days. The abundance of information and ideas underscores the importance of thinking and rethinking the role of international organisations in global environmental policy. As you know, I am not a scientist. I serve as state secretary for the environment in the Netherlands. It is in that capacity that I would like to examine the results of this conference and identify what I believe are important conclusions. My talk is divided into three parts:

1. The context: integrated follow-ups to summits, the central role of the MDGs and a look back at the UN Millennium Review Summit;
2. The current environmental architecture in relation to global environmental problems;
3. My views on strengthening UNEP’s role and what the future holds.

1. *The Context*

The major, intractable and global environmental problems we face call for worldwide co-operation. Governments must have the political will to act in order to plot a course towards clearly defined objectives. However, political will is not enough. Governments must also give a political signal that the strong are supporting the weak. The core value of solidarity is the key to making a worldwide strategy effective. I believe that the United Nations demonstrates the kind of international solidarity I am talking about. One way the United Nations can continue to do so is by facilitating multilateral environmental agreements. You may criticise the United Nations, but there is no better alternative! Within the United Nations, I can also see implicit recognition of the importance of the environment in many policy areas, such as security, food safety and health, and in opportunities for education and further development. The international community now accepts that progress is only possible in a healthy living environment.

Of course I am aware that these processes are not moving as quickly as some would like. Likewise, at times it is difficult to see the results that have been achieved. This is understandable, considering the broad spectrum of interests and opinions in play. However, it would be most unfortunate if results are not achieved simply because the UN's environmental pillar is too weak!

Fortunately, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002 has created momentum for the global environment agenda. Important areas received a fresh impulse: energy, chemicals, water and sanitation. Each one is very important to us and to our living environment. The Commission on Sustainable Development has adopted a new working method in order to tackle the 'real' barriers: in the first year, problems are defined. In the second year, policy actions are formulated, and the action-owners identified and asked for their commitment. Winning firm commitments is the toughest challenge. Despite good initiatives, several matters have yet to be resolved. Allow me to briefly explain two pressing issues:

First, the importance of development and poverty reduction is being articulated with increasing urgency. The only strategy that will produce permanent results is one that takes an integrated approach to the environment, poverty and infectious diseases. At least, this is the vision we pay lip service to. The facts speak volumes: there are countless examples in which the degradation of natural resources or failure to find a timely solution to environmental problems has also led to security crises, and in which conservation is crucial to development and the fight against poverty. In actual practice, this integrated approach is rarely reflected in country programmes and Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans. At the same time, we must take account of possible energy scenarios. In the future, UNEP, UNDP and financial organisations will have to act with greater coherence in order to transform theory into practice.

Financing remains a major concern. We have not seen a substantial rise in Official Development Assistance contributions to international environmental management. Moreover, foreign direct investment is finding its way to only a small number of countries. After all, creating global environmental benefits is not the main aim of this type of investment. How can we ensure that more public-private investment is used to help governments live up to environmental agreements? This is a challenge facing the entire United Nations today. Part of the solution is to take advantage of the World Bank's role as a catalyst for financing.

As you all know, the MDGs were reviewed in September 2005. The results were disappointing. At least in the opinion of the European Union and my country, the Netherlands, which were hoping for much more. Far-reaching reforms of the United Nations did not materialise, even though Secretary-General Kofi Annan deliberately opened the way for major change—a move that was supported by the Netherlands and the European Union. The results were less groundbreaking than we had hoped for. In fact, some even say that the Summit was ‘a missed opportunity’.

Matters of security and preventive action were high on the UN summit’s political agenda. During the preparations, the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change clearly acknowledged that the widespread degradation of ecosystems poses a major security risk. That is why environmental conservation should be included in any new security concept. We must take timely and preventive action for each part of that broader security concept. During the UN Summit, I saw no evidence of a sense of urgency about the effects of environmental degradation. The participants talked as if the problems were taking place far away, at some distant point in the future, while the underlying reports clearly stressed the urgency of the matter.

The UN Summit in September achieved less than we had hoped. It is widely acknowledged that the nature and scope of the ecology-based security problems we face are such that they cannot be solved by the national and international bodies we have now. The challenge is to translate this realisation into reforms within the UN system and operational action by the United Nations.

The UN Summit managed, however, to take a few important steps. I will mention five:

- On a number of essential points, the Outcome Document offers concrete proposals for strengthening multilateral co-operation.
- On a more conceptual level, the Outcome Document establishes that peace and security, development and human rights are equal and related cornerstones of the United Nations which form the basis of our collective security. This is crucial.
- The Summit affirmed that an effective multilateral system is essential and that the United Nations should play a pivotal role in that system. It also acknowledged that no country is capable of dealing with today’s threats and challenges on its own.
- Furthermore, it is important to note that—like state security—the concept of ‘human security’ has taken root at the United Nations. This reflects a change in the way we think about absolute state sovereignty.
- This final point is very important to me as state secretary for the environment. More drastic reforms must be initiated in order to establish tightly managed entities for development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. Greater efforts could then be made to create a more coherent environmental architecture. The first opportunity environment ministers will have to continue their work in this area is the UNEP Governing Council in Dubai in early February 2006.

In conclusion, there has been some progress in strengthening the United Nations as an institution in general. However, no concrete operational decisions about global environmental governance have been made.

2. *A Vision of the Institutional Architecture Relating to Global Environmental Problems*

Globally the environment is in an alarming state. In March of this year, 1300 scientists from ninety-five countries concluded in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment that 'ongoing degradation of ecosystem services is a roadblock to the Millennium Development Goals agreed in 2000'. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment highlights four main findings:

- Humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively in the last fifty years than in any other period. This was done largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fibre and fuel.
- Ecosystem changes that have contributed substantial net gains in human well being and economic development have been achieved at growing costs in the form of degradation of other services.
- The degradation of ecosystem services could become significantly worse during the first half of this century and slow progress towards the UN Millennium Goals.
- Under some scenarios, the challenge of reversing the degradation of ecosystems while meeting increasing demand can only be met if we make significant policy and institutional changes.

Through our climate policy, we are trying to keep temperature rises in check in order to prevent the degradation of ecosystems. However, we have failed to protect ecosystems sufficiently—and we will surely come to regret it!

This scenario was predicted in Rio back in 1992, and inspired several multilateral environmental agreements. Many multilateral environmental agreements have been successful, but apparently not successful enough. Compliance and enforcement are typical problem areas. How can we increase coherence in the system of multilateral environmental agreements and thereby strengthen environmental governance, when each agreement has its own convention secretariat? Moreover, how can we improve the link with decision-making processes in capital cities where the agreements are actually implemented? An important element is supporting synergy between themes like climate, desertification and biodiversity in everyday situations. To achieve that, we must find operational solutions, using the UN structure and working together as equals.

We must also channel our resources to the Global Environment Facility. I cannot stress enough: we need a successful GEF replenishment as soon as possible to fulfil our ambitions.

3. *Strengthening UNEP's Role: What Next?*

I would like to return to the subject you have spent the past two days examining: improving global environmental governance. In my opinion, many of the opportunities for effective environmental policy within the UN depend on the role of UNEP: Its status, mandate and positioning within the UN. This role must be strengthened. In my view, the question is not if it should be done, but how.

More work is needed to give UNEP a place as the 'environmental centrepiece' of the UN system. I have learned that strengthening an organisation is a question of focus and growth. UNEP's role should be strengthened by means of a strong mandate and sharp focus, supported by external operational activities and stable funding sources. UNEP's

mandate is also in need of reinforcement, when it comes to preventing conflicts caused in part by imminent environmental crises. UNEP has a solid basis for this in cooperation with international organisations such as HABITAT, UNDP and the OSCE.

Various studies presented at this conference show that UNEP scores high on 'agenda setting and regime creation'. However, when it comes to governing and coordinating relevant multilateral environmental agreements, its score is substantially lower. Personally, I think it is equally interesting to examine which factors were instrumental in determining UNEP's performance over the past thirty years. The material for making this assessment can be found in many studies at this conference. Three root causes of institutional dysfunction are:

- The formal status of UNEP and the impact on its authority;
- UNEP's limited financial resources; and
- UNEP's internal organisational structure.

These are important points. We need to draw lessons from them in order to design the global environment architecture of the future.

I also believe that it is a good idea to focus on both the short and the long term in the ongoing process of reforming UNEP. The EU has been clear. At the Environment Council held in June, the environment ministers of the 25 member states approved a process aimed at: '[giving] priority to the exploration of a more coherent institutional framework for environmental activities in the UN system, including a more integrated structure building on existing institutions, as agreed in the Summit outcome. The EU supports the establishment of a process to carry out this work in the UN, ensuring an in-depth exploration coordinated by the General Assembly President in the context of the broader framework of sustainable development and current efforts to strengthen the UN. The EU supports transforming the UN Environment Programme into a UN specialised agency or UNEO, based in Nairobi with a strengthened mandate and stable, adequate and predictable financing.'

In this way, we can avoid a discussion focused solely on structure. We must guard against 'management by relabelling'. For the sake of effective international environmental policy, I believe UNEP must be better equipped to fulfil a number of functions. The Cartagena recommendations are a step in the right direction. However, they presuppose that UNEP will remain in the same position within the UN system. Only with a different mandate, more stable financing and a stronger role that treats the environment as a pillar of security and development, will a UN Environment Organisation be able to deliver.

Of course, the mere act of transforming UNEP into a specialised agency is no guarantee that things will improve. Indeed, several specialised agencies within the UN are a law unto themselves. In transforming UNEP, we will need to watch out for that tendency. We must have the courage to take strong action and build the necessary bridges. Reform takes a lot of time and energy. The danger in taking small, plodding steps is that when we finally reach the end of the road, we may find that the major changes still have to be implemented. Remember: form follows function. So let us begin with the functions, and ultimately adapt the form to fit them. Not as an institutional discussion, but in order to produce effective environmental policy. This will not only benefit the environment; it will also contribute to poverty reduction. Developing countries will profit from the increased synergy between environmental and poverty-reduction strategies.

Knowing that the desired transformation will require time and energy, I would like to turn to short-term issues. I encourage you to continue the IEG process, a step-by-step procedure for reinforcing UNEP's scientific and financial foundations and strengthening the coordination and synergistic interaction between MEAs. These are all no-regret actions. I fully support the consultation process that will be opened by President Eliasson of the UN General Assembly in January. The outcome of those consultations is uncertain, but we can continue to gradually improve UNEP's current functions, while keeping the attractive prospect of a UN Environment Organisation in sight. That is the direction we must take.

Before I conclude, I would like to present the main conclusions of this two-day conference.

My former colleague Trittin has 'set the scene' yesterday morning by stressing the strong relationship between fighting poverty and protecting the environment. How have a growing group of people access to water, sanitation and energy is the main challenge. He touched also on the issue of equal footing of UNEP, finding its seat at the banquet table with WTO, World Bank and IMF. Bringing a stable financial basis is also necessary. A stronger UNEP cannot do the job alone, so there is a need to strengthen this work with UNDP, GEF and World Bank. It should be clear that the concept of a new UNEO 'should not take over' the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements but streamline them. The idea of a UNEO started by a French-German initiative is now supported by the European Union collectively, and ownership is growing by countries like Mexico, Iran, China and Kenya. Further outreach activities will be necessary.

Executive-Director Professor Töpfer gave an overview based on his experiences and the changes that UNEP went through under his leadership the last eight years. He took us right into the actual political debate by mentioning the eight MDGs, flashing out MDG 7 ensuring environmental sustainability, but also stressing that all eight MDGs have a link with environment. He stressed environment as 'instrumental' for development and the need to fight for ecosystem services in the future. He characterised environment by calling it an 'and-policy': In practice it is always transport *and* environment, agriculture *and* environment, et cetera. Almost every ministry has overlapping issues with environment. In the end, Professor Töpfer gave us an insight in the current debate how to deal with the outcome of the last Summit as a result of what heads of states decided upon. He concluded that UNEP has been very creative in the reform process and will go on along that track. In the end, he stressed that we will need new answers to old questions.

These keynotes served as a very useful start and guide for the over hundred paper presentations that were given in the last two days at this 2005 Berlin Conference. Many important issues have been raised and addressed in the academic debates.

Given the time constraints, I will highlight only a few major points.

For example, effectiveness and influence of international organisations is a key issue both for the academic community to measure, analyse and explain, and for political decision-makers to strengthen and to improve. Many interesting papers at this conference discussed the effectiveness of a variety of organisations, ranging from the UN Environment Programme and the International Maritime Organisation to the many secretariats of international treaties. The conclusions of the many papers were rather mixed. Some papers argued that international organisations have had indeed a major and important influence on global environmental governance. Organisations increase the knowledge and the information about the environment with public and private actors at all levels. International organisations are also important in the implementation of international agreements. Indeed, quite

a few papers argued that international organisations have some influence in the negotiation of treaties.

Of course, international organisations do not stand alone. They function in an environment with many other international organisations, with states, and with private actors. This makes the analysis of the interplay of organisations extremely important. Interplay has been a major subject of research within the international Institutional Dimensions of Global Environmental Change project of IHDP.

This 2005 Berlin Conference has added a number of important papers and research findings to this crucial debate. Interplay and organisational interlinkages is also a major topic for us as practitioners and politicians. The synergies—and maybe lack of synergy—in the interplay of international organisations will therefore also be a subject at our upcoming political debates and negotiations.

However, it is important to note that this conference was not only about intergovernmental organisations. Many papers and panels addressed the many new forms of public-private cooperation and private-private cooperation. New mechanisms, such as the World Commission on Dams, the Forest Stewardship Council or the many type-2 partnerships that emerged out of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, have been discussed and analysed at this conference. From the perspective of a practitioner, I believe that the effectiveness and relevance of these new mechanisms of global governance is indeed an important subject of research. In addition, questions of accountability and of democratic governance beyond the nation state become increasingly important.

In concluding, I believe that this 2005 Berlin Conference was very successful.

It has provided important new insights into the debate on international organisations and global environmental governance, and more generally, on the human dimensions of global environmental change. These sorts of debates and academic discussions are indeed very important, also for us as practitioners.

Therefore, I am delighted that the organisers of this conference series have decided to hold the 2007 event in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam.

I am therefore much looking forward to the 2007 Amsterdam Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change.

Thank you for your attention.