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Statement delivered by His Excellency

Ambassador Dirk Jan van den Berg

on behalf of

His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange

At the Thirteenth Session of the Commission

on Sustainable Development

of the United Nations

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

"Twice should be enough." That is what Confucius, the great Chinese philosopher and teacher, once said about the man who always thought three times before acting. In other words, if you want to achieve something, it is better not to postpone the step from thinking to action too long. I believe that is a wise lesson, certainly in light of 2015 - the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals - and Professor Sachs' latest report. Acting means doing. And fortunately, people the world over are now convinced of that. This thirteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development on turning political commitment into action underscores that.

So I have not come to New York to convince you yet again that something **has** to happen. Today I want to talk to you about **what** and **how**. What are the key elements? And, to fuel discussion, I want to translate those elements into a concrete suggestion at the end of my speech.

First, it is important always to keep in mind the people we are doing it for. That is easier said than done. In international conference rooms, the focus usually lies on the big promises:

- to feed two billion extra people,
- to give 2.6 billion people access to sanitation,
- to connect 1.2 billion people to drinking water networks,
- and to give 100 million slum dwellers a roof over their heads.

Perhaps it is these big figures that make it difficult to turn commitments into action. Because where do you start? The simplest answer is: at the beginning. With that, I mean that the basis for success lies in simply keeping promises. Of course we will never achieve the Millennium Development Goals with only regular development funds. But we would be on the right track if every donor country met the 0.7 per cent commitment. The same applies to developing countries on good governance. Countries that have their social structures in order get far greater returns from both people and money. The UN secretary-general recently pointed that out again, and I wholeheartedly agree with him.

So turning commitment into action starts with keeping promises. The next step is to choose the right method. I am convinced that you should start and finish where you want to achieve your results. And my views were confirmed recently by a number of people who were clearly in a position to know. A few weeks ago, I spoke to people from various developing countries who were in the Netherlands for a short but intensive capacity building programme on the

subject of water management in relation to the MDGs. Their message was that genuinely sustainable long-term solutions start and end at the local level, and that NGOs have to play a leading part. This advice was spot on. It dovetails seamlessly with the main message being delivered in this Year of Micro Credit: that you can often achieve a lot with very few resources, provided you give local people very specific opportunities. For instance, by focusing on the important role of women. In addition private players can and must play a much more prominent role.

How does that work in practice? Let me tell you about a very inspiring project, in which I am indirectly involved. It is now under way in Burundi, and is being implemented by Unicef and Aqua4all, an organisation of Dutch drinking water companies. 200 wells and two water distribution systems are being restored, and 4,500 latrines are being built for schools, orphanages and villages. Part of this project is a large-scale training programme for the people using these facilities. What's more, the project is being carried out using local materials and local labour. Issues like the environment, sanitation, health, housing and economic reconstruction go hand in hand. All in all this project leads to maximum results for the relatively modest sum of about four hundred thousand dollars.

The need to focus on the local level was also one of the most important conclusions of the FAO-Netherlands conference on water for food and ecosystems, which was held recently in The Hague. Only a quarter of the people we want to reach with the MDGs live in cities. The other three quarters live in rural areas. That is why we talked in The Hague about rural water management as the cornerstone for rural development. To do that successfully, we need to get every stakeholder to the table. A system that doesn't meet local needs or cultural conventions is doomed to failure. What's more, an approach like that takes no account whatever of the knowledge and experience of local people and NGOs. That is why the conference in The Hague came up with a whole series of action points to boost their role.

The second message that came through loud and clear at the FAO-Netherlands conference was that only an integrated, sustainable strategy will work. The interaction between water, food and ecosystems is clear to see. But it is in fact true of everything on the sustainable development agenda. Most people know and acknowledge that now, but they too find it difficult to practise what they preach. They often find it much easier to operate only within their own sector. That is why the conference in The Hague didn't only decide what actions were needed for an integrated approach, but also who should carry them out. For political commitment you need accountability.

The need for an integrated strategy applies in particular to the environment. The alarming UN report on the future of our natural resources underscores that on every page. This report - the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment - shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that sustainability must be our watchword - not just on the way to 2015, but beyond that date too.

Let me put it this way: if the international community sees the MDGs as stand-alone projects, sooner or later we will grind to a halt. For example because at some point increasing shortages of water will prevent further economic development. We haven't reached that stage yet, but we need to face this reality **now**. In Asia for instance it is much easier to connect large groups of people to drinking water supplies in the short term than in Africa. So it would be easy to score points that way. But if you do that, the time will inevitably come when there are hardly any natural resources left, while you still have the most difficult half of the game to play. And that is the sustainable development agenda after 2015.

So going for the easy points ultimately leads to even bigger problems. That is why I would say, go for the long shots too. It doesn't have to be that difficult, and it can often be done just as quickly. Provided you have a strategy that allows you to go for more than one MDG at once.

Let me illustrate that with an example from my own field of expertise, water management. A successful project has been implemented in the Kitui district of Kenya. Thanks to a series of simple little dams, far more groundwater can now be stored. That is good for local farmers and food security. But it is also good for the environment. On a bigger scale too, water storage presents all sorts of opportunities to combine sustainable development goals. Certainly in countries with unpredictable rainfall patterns, it is very important for a whole variety of sectors, like farming, water supply, energy and the environment.

The international debate on whether or not to carry out major infrastructure projects, like dams, is of course very much in the news again. It is not my intention to go into the subject here. But I would like to say that if countries work together and draft a strategy for the entire river basin, many problems can be solved. Especially because water storage always calls for serious consideration of different interests. The best place to build a dam is where the maximum number of people gain maximum benefits, at the lowest cost to the environment. And the best ones to decide that are the countries that share the river.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is only a very small step from an integrated strategy to the CSD work programme up to 2015. This is the last year in which water, sanitation and human settlements are the primary topics on your agenda. The CSD has taken some very important steps. But it would be a big mistake to allow your attention to stray from water-related subjects in the next few years. Because water is a key element in practically all the topics that will follow, up to 2015. Starting with those on next year's agenda: energy and climate.

So you bear a heavy responsibility. Here in this international forum, but at home as well. After all, the results of this and earlier CSD meetings will now have to be turned into plans, projects and actions by your governments. You will by now have gathered that I see only one way of doing that. By cooperating and coordinating with your fellow ministers. Especially your heads of state and finance ministers, because turning political commitments into actions is above all a matter of political support, with money coming a close second. It is up to you to deliver both - here in the CSD, and at the Millennium Review Summit in September.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I promised to give you fuel for discussion. And I have already given you a foretaste when I said that political commitment needs accountability. My question to you is simply this. If it is really so important for NGOs and local stakeholders to be involved, and if everyone agrees that an integrated, sustainable strategy is the only way to work, shouldn't there be mechanisms to enforce that? For instance, by making these elements a condition for the funding of projects. Or by putting together a team of independent experts, including NGO representatives, in every country to assess projects for compliance? And I'm sure that there are other ways. What matters is that important, widely accepted principles can be safeguarded. I am interested to know your views. Not because I want to postpone the step from thinking to doing any longer. But because, looking to 2015 and beyond, we must hit the bull's-eye with every shot.

Thank you.