

Waste prevention, minimization and recovery – a role to play for the Basel Convention

Delivered by Ms Soledad Blanco at the opening of COP-10 of the Basel Convention in Cartagena de Indias at the forum Prevention, Minimization and Recovery on 17 October 2011

Dear Ladies and gentlemen, your excellencies, Mr. Hatta from the Republic of Indonesia and Mr. Zhang Lijun from China,

Mr. Willis, executive secretary of the Basel Convention,

distinguished speakers and guests of this year's 10th conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention.

It is a great honor for me to be given the floor to pass on a few key messages from the EU's perspective on **waste prevention, minimization and recovery**, which are a concern of utmost importance and urgency for all of us, for the whole world Community.

We are all aware today that the age of industrialization brought about dramatic changes for the way we produce, consume and throw away. Rapid depletion of world natural resources and destructive pressure on world climate and world ecosystems are the known consequences.

Still today waste production is largely following GDP growth and economic systems still encourage inefficient use of resources by pricing below true costs.

It is evident that the increase of world population to 9 billion expected by 2050 with a newly emerging middle class of 2 billion in developing

countries will increase consumption and further aggravate environmental pressure.

We are aware today that natural resources are **not infinite** and that industrial emissions to the air, caused by production and transport, are threatening the fragile balance of world eco systems dramatically.

Climate change and depletion of non-renewable resources put future generations at a serious risk of being deprived of raw materials, energy, clean air, water and sufficient arable land to sustain livelihoods in dignity and peace.

I think we all agree that ensuring sustainable growth, while preserving natural resources for future generations, is of global concern.

But let me briefly explain the EU's contribution to environmentally sound waste management and resource efficiency.

The **first Waste Framework Directive from 1975** recognized that waste was a common concern, but at that time more weight was given to sanitary aspects than to aspects of diligent resource use.

An extensive body of legislation was later developed with recycling targets for specific waste streams.

Environmentally sound **landfill of waste** was subject to legislation since 1999 establishing a certification system for sanitary landfills.

Only in 2008 with the adoption of the **new** Waste Framework Directive the EU recognized the need for a paradigmatic shift from environmentally sound management of waste to **increasing resource efficiency and waste prevention**.

A **legally binding 5 step waste hierarchy** brought waste prevention, reuse, recycling and other recovery in the focus.

More concretely:

The new Directive **encourages Member States** to take measures towards **extended producer responsibility** in order to strengthen **reuse, prevention, recycling and other recovery of waste**.

Producers may face new concrete obligations such as:

- **Taking back** end of life products
- **Informing consumers** about reusability and recyclability of products
- **Designing products** in a way as to minimize their environmental impact and the generation of waste during their use and end of life phase
- Producing **technically durable and repairable goods**, suitable for proper and safe recovery and environmentally compatible disposal.

The Directive puts also waste prevention in the focus

Giving **Waste prevention** an **absolute priority**, Member States are obliged to develop **waste prevention programs** by December 2013.

They have to take into account **the whole life cycle of products**, i.e. design, production and distribution as well as the use and end of life phase of products.

The Commission will **scrutinize current consumption patterns** and deliver an **action plan** and will set waste prevention and decoupling objectives for 2020. Waste prevention indicators may be adopted.

All these measures will help **creating sustainable economic growth as well as employment in new industrial sectors** of recycling, other recovery, repair or refurbishment.

Only a few weeks ago the European Commission adopted an ambitious **roadmap for a resource efficient Europe** with concrete steps paving the way to a true recycling society, **limiting residual waste close to zero and phasing out landfill until 2020**. This links in with the **EU 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During this week's COP 10 in Cartagena de Indias we will discuss environmentally sound management of waste under many aspects and try to agree on a 10 year New Strategic Framework, setting the agenda for modern waste management worldwide.

In many parts of the world the top priority is still, catching up with sanitary waste management requirements. **But we cannot stop there** and leave **waste prevention** for later generations. We need to act here and now.

In the EU we are well aware of how challenging this task is. Although waste generation and GDP growth have to a certain extent been decoupled, reducing waste generation in absolute terms is much more difficult. In developing countries and emerging economies, with more economic growth and increasing consumption levels, the challenge will be even more demanding.

I believe that the BC, together with other international bodies, still has a decisive role to play in eradicating open dumping and open burning of waste. **But it is now time to vigorously go a step further and promote waste prevention, recycling and other recovery to achieve minimization of waste.**

For this COP ahead of us, I wish that it would be remembered as a **COP of results** for concrete and effective steps towards preserving of natural resources worldwide, for a future and a better livelihood of all humans.