

Speech by Ms Annika Markovic, Environment Ambassador of Sweden in Borås on 9/9 -13 at the IPLA Global Forum 2013 on Sustainable Waste Management for the 21st Century Cities – Building Sustainable and Resilient Cities through Partnership

Sweden and Sustainable Development!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

First of all, I would like to thank the City of Borås, the Waste Recovery International Partnership and the UNCRD¹, that with support of the University of Borås, SP Technical Research Institute of Sweden, Borås Energy and Environment, and private sector actors have brought together experts from all over the world, to discuss and share experiences in working with Sustainable Waste Management issues.

Inledning

This idea of bringing key stakeholders from all over the world together, to discuss our common challenges and how these can be addressed, is of vital importance for the development of a sustainable future. Ever since the first UN Conference on the Human Environment was organized in Stockholm in 1972, these issues have been dealt with in different ways. The declaration from the Stockholm 1972 conference included 19 principles and became an environmental manifest for its time. It stressed the need to “inspire and guide the people of the world in how to preserve and strengthen the human environment.” This principle is maybe even more important today than it was then. The Stockholm declaration stated furthermore, “To defend and improve the human environment for the present and coming generations has become an unavoidable goal for humanity”. This is indeed the essence of Sustainable Development. It was as important in 1972, as it has been during the decades that followed. It was reiterated at global conferences for Sustainable Development, both in Rio de Janeiro and in Johannesburg 1992, 2002 and 2012. The world probably face far

¹ United Nations Centre for Regional Development

bigger challenges today than it did in 1972. On the other hand, there are way more stakeholders that have been mobilized and who actively engage themselves in education and capacity building efforts, as well as in carrying out measures for improving the situation in the world. Environmental protection, climate change and Sustainable Development have gained in importance on political agendas, both at national and local levels. After the conference in Rio 1992, we saw a tremendous effort taking place through local Agenda 21 work. The nice environment that we experience today is something that we to a high degree can thank the intense and ambitious work at local level, where politicians, local officials, entrepreneurs and civil society representatives cooperated to find local solutions to evolving problems. The city of Borås is a prime example of how Agenda 21 has been implemented and how different stakeholders have cooperated to create a common cause. The work has spurred new policies, the development of new innovations and systems solutions.

The world is now awaiting the next level of local engagement in the global sustainability work. As an outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio last year, the governments of the world are actively engaged in developing a set of globally valid Sustainable Development Goals, goals that will address the social, economical and environmental aspects of development. Since the ambition is that these will form an integral part of the 2015 development agenda, the aspect of poverty eradication will also be given a high priority. As of 2015 this new agenda will be our most important tool when it comes to developing sustainable and inclusive societies. To achieve this, local level action and implementation will be key. If we don't act, we will face an unsustainable future, which will create many problems. We know that climate change and anticipated temperature increase will significantly impair our capacity for economic growth and development.

The Swedish experience

Sweden is a good example of how it has been possible to combine economic growth and sensible handling of the environment with sustainable development. Today, Sweden is a world leader when it comes to developing environmentally friendly enterprises, products and related services. Our experience underscores the fact that the link between emissions and economic growth is not necessarily a negative one. Decoupling is realistic and feasible. Since the 1990:s our emissions of greenhouse gases have decreased by well over 20 per cent while GDP has increased by more than 59 per cent! Now, how has this been achieved?

Many measures have been taken, both through national strategies and international partnerships. Our national vision is to transform the society into a carbon neutral society by 2050. It is an ambitious goal, but we have already come a long way on that journey. The development has been possible through the use of emission goals, policies, measures and recurrent evaluations. Among our international partnerships, an early engagement in market based mechanisms, in particular the CDM market, and in the Climate and Clean Air Coalition could be mentioned. Some instruments used on a national level with great success has been carbon and energy taxes, the polluter pays principle and setting the right economic incentives by pricing carbon dioxide. But certainly simply raising taxes does not create a world-class business climate that encourages corporate green initiatives. Some examples of other measures that has been taken are:

- Support to city development projects with great potential to lower climate impact and increase technology exports and international cooperation (economic support 34 million Euro during 2009-2010).
- Energy research and innovation – contributes to sustainable energy systems and national growth.
- Also installation support for solar panels, green certificates to increase the share of renewable energy,

Other changes that significantly have contributed the lowering of our emission of greenhouse gases are for example: the development of the district-heating sector. In Sweden, a large share of the households is connected to a district-heating network. This has made heating more efficient and the sector has to a large extent phased out the use of oil in favour of biomass. We can also see an increased use of biomass in the industry e.g. the pulp and paper sector. The ban on landfills for waste has also contributed significantly. This focus on the use of district heating and the need for biomass from different waste streams, have made us focus even more on getting our waste handling system right.

Sustainable Resource Management

What have we then done to get this right? For years we have worked with a proactive policy for waste management. Our aim has been to go “From waste management to resource efficiency”.

We wanted to go from a linear economy built on dig, consume and dump towards a closed loop resource efficient and toxic free economy, where reuse and recovery is part of the basis for a sustainable society.

An environmentally smart and resource efficient infrastructure for waste management has been viewed as a cornerstone for the creation of sustainable cities, which requires a sustainable integrated policy and planning at national, regional and local levels.

We are proud of our Swedish waste management system. Landfill is no longer a primary method for the disposal of waste. As I already mentioned, an increasing proportion of waste is treated to recover energy and materials and enable reuse. Rules and routines have been established which set out how hazardous waste is to be dealt with.

(A quick historical back cast of national policy instruments in Sweden:

In the 90:s we implemented:

- Municipal waste management plans.
- Producer’s responsibility.
- Gave funding for Investment programs on the local level to stimulate new environmental technologies and cooperation between different actors.

In 2000 we implemented a tax on waste to landfills.

In 2001 the Parliament passed a Strategy for resource efficient and toxic-free material cycles.

In 2002/2005 we implemented a Landfill ban for combustible/organic waste.

In 2005 National environmental goals.

In 2009 Policy instruments for the use of biogas.

In 2012 New environmental targets for resource efficiency in the waste area (food waste and building waste.)

Establishing systems for sustainable waste management and the effective natural resource management represents a major challenge given rising levels of consumption and cross-border global trade.

To a greater extent than previous we must emphasis on the need to reduce the quantity and hazardous nature of waste through *preventing its generation in the first place*.

This is an area that is supported by the *EU's waste hierarchy*, which gives preventive work the highest priority. Experience shows that the most effective way of reducing resource consumption and environmental impact is to prevent the waste *from being generated in the first place*.

Although recycling restores resources, it can only compensate for a minor proportion of the resources that are consumed and the environmental impact that arises in connection with the manufacture of new products.

Pursuant to a EU Directive in November 2008 on waste, the competent authority of each Member State is required to establish a waste plan. The waste plan must be evaluated every six years and revised as necessary. The Swedish waste plan was adopted by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency in May 2012. A wide-ranging dialogue with actors within waste management, research institutions and experts within various authorities forms the basis for the proposed measures in the plan.

The plan sets out a number of priority areas where measures are needed. The environmental impact of the waste flows and the potential for improvement guided the selection of areas. Descriptions of objectives and the measures that can be implemented by various actors are presented.

In December this year the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency will present the second part of the waste plan – a preventive waste program.

Sound chemicals management

To us, sound management of chemicals, especially how it is related to the waste flows, is one of our main environmental priorities both nationally and internationally.

A year ago we launched a global initiative for 8 years and 8 actions towards the 2020 goal of Sound chemicals management. To us it was especially important to set high policy ambitions

but we all know that it will not make any difference without a serious and increased focus on implementation, in Sweden, in the EU and in all parts of the world.

Why do I bring up Sound chemicals management as a major topic during my intervention at this conference on sustainable waste management? Well, on a more egoistic level, we know that we live in a place where many of the substances produced in other parts of the world finds their way through air currents to northern latitudes and un-proportionally affect the environment and health of the population in Sweden and the region. The substances regulated by the Stockholm convention (POPS) were long referred to as “travellers without passport” and Sweden and other Nordic countries are one of their favourite final destinations. However, the problem is quite more serious than this. Today, chemicals are not just travelling by air or water but also through products. Moving products around the world is the same as moving chemicals from the country where a TV is produced, to a country where it is used, to where it finally becomes waste. Sweden imports many of our day-to-day commodities and therefore a child or a pregnant woman in our country is dependent on the choices made when manufacturing that toy or TV somewhere else in the world. Today, many large manufacturing countries lack the basic elements of chemicals legislation.

On a national level Sweden has developed 16 environmental quality objectives. One of these concerns chemicals and is about creating *a non-toxic environment*. The objective has become a driving force in the work for a sound chemicals management. Through it, Sweden has set clear policy guidance that enables us to prioritize and focus our efforts nationally and internationally. Equally important is the division of responsibility between government and industry. While the government develops the law and policy, it is and always has to be the responsibility of industry to know what substances are used in the products they put on the market, as well as the risks they may cause on human and environment.

Sound Management of Chemicals is essential if we are to achieve sustainable development, including eradication of poverty, and the elevation and maintenance of living standards in all parts of the world. Toxic exposures both at home and at workplaces are often associated with poverty, as the poorest are frequently those left without the information, education or protection equipment needed to use chemicals safely. Some toxins cause intellectual impairment, which affects the capacity for sustainable economic development. Poorly

managed industry, including the informal sector, is a direct impediment to sustainable development.

No country, or any single sector can manage the global challenges for sound chemicals management on their own. We need to work together, through legal frameworks but also through partnerships. While there are still many areas we lack data, it is important to act upon the knowledge we do have. Prevention and precaution principles are key for Sweden in developing the chemicals policy. Through on-going research and through the work undertaken in the frame of the Reach regulation, much information is already available. However the awareness among consumers, among decision makers, among you and me about the challenges and risks that chemicals can cause if not handled safely is lacking. UNEP has recently also presented a cost of inaction study and it is based on this knowledge we need to take action and to make sound chemicals management a more integral part of Sustainable development.

To conclude

From the Swedish side, we very much would like this conference to discuss how we better can cooperate in finding and applying solutions for resource efficiency and chemicals management. We would very much like this conference to agree on the necessity of addressing these issues and by working together over local, national and regional borders. From the Swedish side, we are more than willing to cooperate with other countries and to share our experiences when it comes to policies and technical solutions. Sweden has shown that it is more economically sustainable to act now than to stay at the wayside and wait for future actions. Inaction and unwillingness to move will cost a lot in the future while changing now for the better will be quite cost-effective. There are good benefits of acting and of acting now.

I am convinced that today's challenges represent tomorrow's opportunities - if we use them! Opportunities for new ways of thinking, or new and creative solutions and incentives as well as new technological solutions. The importance of finding new ways of thinking and new avenues for research has been described in a brilliant way by a researcher as: "A humming-bird can fly 845 km with 2.5 grams of nectar as fuel. If research can solve that riddle, we may also have solved world energy problems."

Thank you for your attention!

