



Key note speech at the session on education for sustainable development, Belgrade Ministerial Conference 10 October 2007

- State Secretary Åsa-Britt Karlsson, Sweden

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

For the first time in UNECE history, ministers for education and environment are joining for a UNECE ministerial conference, which underlines the important role education has in sustainable development.

Since the Rio conference, the awareness that learning is central to sustainable development has emerged, a fact that has been underlined by the launch of the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable development (2005-2014).

We are now a good way into the third year of the decade and we recall the hopes for the role of education in our efforts to achieve sustainable development as expressed so clearly by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan prior to Johannesburg 2002;

“Education at all levels is a key to sustainable development. Education should provide students with the

skills, perspectives, values and knowledge to live sustainably in their communities. It should be interdisciplinary, integrating concepts and analytical tools from a variety of disciplines.”

Ever since the launch of the Baltic 21 Education Agenda in January 2002, Sweden has taken an active role in the field of education for sustainable development, trying to push the international agenda forward.

Sweden has been active in promoting education for sustainable development within the framework of the Nordic Council and through the work of revising the Nordic strategy for sustainable development.

In accordance with Sweden’s initiative at the World Summit in Johannesburg, an international consultation on education for sustainable development was held in Gothenburg, 2004. I could mention that an international follow-up conference may be held in Gothenburg, during 2008.

Together with Russia, Sweden has been a leader in the process of developing the UNECE strategy for education for sustainable development. The strategy, based on the principles and experiences of the Baltic 21 Education Sector, was taken at the high level meeting in Vilnius in March 2005. We are very much looking forward to hearing the report by the Netherlands about the positive steps that

have been taken regarding the implementation of the Strategy.

In relation to this I am proud to say that Sweden is also one of the few UNECE member countries that has already reported both on the 2007 and the 2010 indicators.

It is often stated that many actors have a responsibility regarding education for sustainable development; business, NGOs, academia etc., but it is also very important that governments take their responsibility using available means.

On the 1 February 2006 an edition to the national act on Higher education was passed. Sustainable development will be included in the all-embracing goal regarding education in the Higher Education Act. This means that the universities should “promote sustainable development which means that present and future generations will be assured a healthy environment, economic and social welfare and justice”.

In order to strengthen co-operation and deepen the analysis of issues related to sustainable development, the Swedish Government has set up an advisory Commission on Sustainable Development.

The Commission will comprise a broad spectrum of representatives from the business sector, NGO:s, research community and politicians.

The Commission's work will be action-oriented and focus on themes identified as essential for creating the conditions for sustainable development. Of particular interest are areas in which Sweden can develop internationally competitive concepts, technologies and services and thereby also contribute to global sustainable development.

Education and research are given important roles by the Commission.

I would also like to mention that on the Council of Baltic Sea States high level meeting in Riga last month, it was stated that the Baltic Sea Region Baltic 21 will continue to develop new strategic projects with an aim to increase the role of education institutions in promoting sustainable development, which would constitute an excellent basis for an upcoming mid-term review of the decade.

Finally, Sweden will continue to be an active international actor emphasising the importance of education in achieving sustainable development and it is my wish, representing the Ministry of the Environment, that the fact that our colleagues from the Ministry of Education are invited to be part of this ministerial conference, is not a one time occasion, but rather on-going.

Thank you for your attention.