

Opening Remarks by Bas de Leeuw, Managing Director of the World Resources Forum

UNECE Symposium on the Availability of Raw Materials from Secondary Sources

Geneva, 24 April 2018

Mr/Mrs Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends and Colleagues,

1. It gives me great pleasure to **welcome you here in Geneva** at the UNECE Resource Management Week, to the Symposium on the Availability of Raw Materials from Secondary Sources, and to this afternoon's **Special Workshop on Waste Valorization and Critical Raw Materials**. I want to thank you all for participating in this event, and I want to thank the organisers for bringing us all here.
2. As you know this event is a follow up to the Workshop on Strategic Raw Materials and Sustainable Development, that was part of the World Resources Forum, held in October last year, organized by our colleagues of ESM, the Entwicklungsfonds Seltene Metalle, the United Nations Economic Committee for Europe and the EIT Raw Materials.
3. In fact, the last time we were here in Geneva with our World Resources Forum was today exactly half a year ago. It was on October 24, and that date also happens to be international UN Day. That was maybe not a coincidence. Being here in Geneva – **the Swiss UN Capital** - has this great benefit of having all our partners of the extended UN family at walking distance.
4. Today we are in the middle of the **UNECE Resource Management Week**. We hope to bring our important task – which is developing a global agenda on strategies for the availability of secondary raw materials - some important steps further. At meetings like this we happen to meet everybody we want to meet, right here and now. We have a similar good experience at the **Raw Materials Week**, organized by the EC in Brussels, and of course also at our own **World Resources Forum**. The next WRF will be held in Antwerp, the port of Belgium. You are welcome to join us in February 2019; the conference will be fully devoted to the Circular Economy, on a global scale.
5. Many platforms exist in the world on resources and raw materials, and in fact the challenge is to connect all good initiatives in such a way that the common impact multiplies. This is the main conclusion of our two-year **FORAM** project, in which we at the request of the EC are looking at the feasibility of a World Forum on Raw Materials. Our pilot event will be organized this year, in Nancy, France, on 27 June. If you feel like participating just know that we still accept registrations this month.

About the Critical Importance of Knowledge

6. This afternoon we will talk about improving our knowledge about secondary raw materials. Ultimately, we want to know how much materials we have, now and in the future, not only in the ground, but also in our so called **“urban mines”**: the materials captured in products which could be recovered and reused once the products are at the end of their lifetime. It is a topic that I know from my former function as Secretary of the UN’s International Resource Panel (IRP), where one of our Panel Members, Tom Graedel, started to put this issue on the agenda more than a decade ago. A lot has been done ever since, and the topic has certainly moved from its initial stage of recognition towards full integration into existing frameworks.
7. Good and reliable information is important. As one of our speakers at the World Resources Forum once said: **“You cannot manage what you cannot measure.”** You need information to make decisions about investments and policies. It is like ourselves, when we think about the wallet we carry with us. We need to know how much is in it, to decide about buying an ice cream today or keep saving for new shoes. It is the same for governments, industries, financial institutions and society at large: we all need to know what is in our wallet. And this is exactly what you are working on today: getting the data right, sharing your research results, and improving collaboration.
8. In particular for critical raw materials this is of course ... critical. We need those materials for addressing issues such as climate change and managing our fresh water resources, protecting our soil, and for increasing agricultural productivity. For critical materials we most urgently need the best knowledge we can get, and the best policies and investments. If we fail, then we are making our lives difficult, since we may have to slow down technological progress that we need to make this world a better place. Moreover, as we know, **this - our global resource base - is a very complex wallet**. Many actors are having their fingers in it. So, governance is important as well; finding ways and means of collectively managing the raw materials in such a way that we all can buy our ice creams but also keep our options open for our future.
9. When we talk about knowledge, then we do not only talk about quantities and prices. We do take the **environmental and social dimensions** into account as well. Today, this does not need much explanation. All actors in the chain are eager to keep the social license to operate. They are aware that both in primary and secondary materials extraction processes human beings are involved. These are people like you and me, they are fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, and they want to make a living for their children and themselves. Sometimes they are forced to work in hazardous conditions, without proper health protection, against embarrassing wages, without any rights, without dignity. There is no reason to let that situation exist.
10. I am very pleased with the results of our **Sustainable Recycling Industries** program. Through this program, which is supported by the Swiss government, we have worked hand in hand with the Swiss Laboratory for Materials Science and Technology Empa, and with many partners from industry, governments and research in Europe and beyond, to establish guidelines for the sustainable management of secondary raw materials. We have built it on real life experiences

through working together with partners in Ghana, Colombia, Peru, Egypt and India. These so called IWA Guidance Principles (ISO International Workshop Agreement) were presented, here in Geneva, last year at the COP of the Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions. With this the global ICT industry has a state-of-the art tool for traceability at hand, and that facilitates the use of secondary materials tremendously. And the quality of life of those workers in developing countries will improve, now that more and more countries are integrating the knowledge into their national policy frameworks.

The Role of Information in Society is Changing

11. Good and reliable knowledge is crucial for managing our materials in a sustainable and responsible way, for making informed decisions about policies and investments, and for accelerating the change to a closed loop circular economy. And you are working on that today. However, let us zoom out from our daily work just a moment and **let us look at the broader picture**. Is information sufficient to bring about the required change? What is needed to make sure that our knowledge will be used?
12. We live in times of great changes. The **role of information in decision-making processes** is rapidly changing. In the early days it was rather clear: scientists would do their research, report about problems and solutions, and decision-makers would sooner or later respond with action. Nowadays it looks like information and scientific facts are getting another appreciation. First of all, because there is information everywhere. And everybody in the world has access to it. It is not always clear where it is coming from, and what quality it has. And so it happens that so called *fake news* can influence decision-making processes. Or high-quality scientific work, such as gathered by intergovernmental scientific panels, can be debated for many years, in the meantime slowing down the necessary transition towards adequate resource and energy systems.
13. It seems that even if the correct information is widely available, then still not always proper action is taken. As a result, we can witness that our society, which becomes more and more complex, has **more and more difficulties to protect itself** - its individuals - from life-threatening dangers. Climate change is only one example.
14. Remember the old days? On beautiful summer days like this, you would lie outside, stretched out on your back in the park or on the beach and you would look up to the sky. Looking at the clouds, you would imagine what forms you see: clouds shaped like a giant elephant, a heart, a face ... But nowadays, when you look up, all of a sudden you might see something else. Something is approaching. Is it a bird? Is it a plane? It's a drone! And you do not know for sure that the thing will not take a photo, shoot a video or drop a bomb. So who gave the permission to fly these drones that potentially can do so much good but also so much harm? And who is controlling the development of artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons? **It takes a lot of time for society to understand what is going on**. Climate change, smoking, cellphone radiation, pesticides, micro-plastics ... the list is long. Perhaps a new balance needs to be found between

technological progress and the protection of our health, our ecosystem and even the survival of our species. I believe we need a shortcut between scientific results and preventive action.

15. In the most recent **report to the Club of Rome, “Come on!”**, written by its Vice-Presidents Von Weizsaecker and Wijkman, the need for finding new balances is described. In fact, the very history of the Club itself, founded in 1968 and this year celebrating its 50th anniversary, is witness to the inertia of society in adequately handling scientific information. The Limits to Growth, first presented in the famous report from 1972, are today closer than ever, despite the hundreds of reports by other scientists and think tanks that followed. The time to smoothly make a transformation towards different consumption and production patterns has already passed many years ago.
16. Solid information needs to go hand in hand with good governance. Apparently, decision-makers in governments, businesses but also in households are **not always sufficiently motivated to take up the challenge**. In my former function as Secretary of the IRP I once compared this with a visit to a medical doctor. Imagine you don't feel well, you have a little pain here, and a headache there, and you're worried that something important may be wrong with your health. So you visit your doctor. He or she examines you, and then tells you the bad and the good news. The bad news is that indeed there is something wrong, but the good news is that you can cure it and that you can prevent worse things from happening with only a few lifestyle changes. But instead of listening you walk away. Not very clever, he? Yet, this is sometimes the response of policymakers to reports of scientific panels, who they created themselves to advise them.

How we Need to Take Action to Make Sure that our Knowledge Gets Really Used

17. *“Keep it simple and personal”*, is usually what you hear from social scientists, as the success factor for real change. Or *“sell the sizzle not the sausage”* as one of our speakers recommended last year. Well, maybe scientists should perhaps consider doing exactly that: focus on the simple and personal recommendations in their reports. There are usually hundreds of recommendations for all stakeholders involved. So why would anyone act? And perhaps **some scientists can perhaps even become activists themselves**. Activists who do not accept it if their reports are being put on the shelf. Scientific activists taking to the street to demand answers to their reports. Well, before you get Monty Python-ish scenes in your mind of researchers in lab coats marching through the streets, waving their reports – and their beards maybe - there are of course various formats for being an activist. And not everybody needs to do it, perhaps just a small fraction of frontrunners who dare to be loud, dare to be passionate and dare to be persistent.
18. System thinking teaches us that in each complex system there are **leverage points**. If you act there, then it has the greatest impact on the whole system. Well, perhaps after having produced all recommendations for all stakeholders, one could try and find just one or two big leverage points and focus all attention to getting these done. System thinking is zooming out, to understand the relationships, the interdependencies, but then it is zooming in again. The late

Donella Meadows called this “*dancing with systems*”.

19. And finally, social scientists should help us to **find the trigger in the behavior of individuals** working for governments and companies. What is it that hinders the full application of common sense recommendations? If the answer is that these are short-term economic, financial and political interests, resistance to change, vested interests, then these obstacles need to be studied rather than be taken for granted.

Starting the Work

20. To conclude: I have zoomed out very far, let us now zoom in again and start this workshop. Providing information, strengthening knowledge, getting the data right and working together is more important than ever. You cannot manage what you cannot measure.
21. This workshop will look at the important question of how to turn waste into resources and opportunities. The United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC), is very important for that. Through your work we will improve knowledge on the future availability of secondary raw materials. This is urgently needed for material sourcing strategies in the EU and all other regions. We at the World Resources Forum support your work and we are certain that it will **accelerate progress towards a circular economy**.