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High-level event on the Millennium Development Goals, Environmental Sustainability

Statement

by

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Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria

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Mr. Secretary General,

Mr. President of the General Assembly,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to address this forum on the relevance of environmental sustainability, a key Millennium Development Goal.

This summit comes at a crucial juncture for the MDG process. Climate change, the international food crisis and the crisis of the financial markets exacerbates an already difficult struggle to attain the MDGs by 2015.

MDG 7 on environmental sustainability is an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it as poverty and environmental issues are closely linked. We have to make progress simultaneously on environmental sustainability and on poverty eradication.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Unfortunately, environmental degradation including deforestation and depletion of fresh water resources is still going on at a breathtaking speed worldwide.

In addition, degradation of the environment reinforces the negative effects of climate change, a growing concern for all of us but a particular threat to many countries. While glaciers are melting, small island states are confronted with rising sea levels, floods, hurricanes, and other weather phenomena. Other regions are facing draught, increased land degradation and desertification. It is imperative that we help those countries most affected by climate change to adapt to its negative effects.

In this context, the widespread lack of affordable access to clean modern energy services is particularly worrisome. Sustainable energy systems are a prerequisite for the attainment of the MDGs and for reducing greenhouse gas emissions thereby stabilizing the global climate. A technological revolution similar to the one that took place in the communication sector is needed. Clean and affordable energy production from renewable sources is possible and necessary. Renewable energy contributes to sustainability as well as to the fight against climate change and reduces ensures independent energy supply.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, as Heads of State and Government, have a particular responsibility to urgently act now and to ensure environmental sustainability. I am fully convinced that rapid integration of sustainable development principles into national strategies is a

decisive step towards reaching the MDGs. In this context, I welcome that more than 80 countries have already implemented national sustainable development strategies on the basis of broad participation of all stakeholders. Broad public participation, including the poor and marginalized, in decision-making and implementation is crucial to making progress towards environmental sustainability and sustainable development.

Contributing to ensure environmental sustainability in its priority partner countries – in particular in sub-Saharan Africa - is of paramount importance for the Austrian Development Cooperation: As the poorest countries are worst affected by environmental destruction and the depletion of natural resources, Austria is focussing its bilateral aid on the sectors of energy, water/sanitation and rural development. Three quarters of the poor worldwide live in rural areas and earn their living from agriculture. The shortage of essential resources is an eminent threat to the preservation of their livelihood. Preserving the environment and conserving vital natural resources is therefore a fundamental principle in every activity and project financed by Austria. We allocate about one third of the funds for bilateral programmes and projects for the purpose of sustainable management of natural resources and submit every project to an environmental appraisal. We are engaged in active multilateral cooperation, in particular with small island States, on renewable energy and energy efficiency. We will actively liaise with partner countries on the future of the international regime to combat climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me stress at this point the importance of the global environmental accords, in particular the so-called three Rio conventions on biodiversity, climate change and desertification, which bear witness of the determination of the international community to act together against the destruction of environment and to advance sustainable development. In this context, Austria - host country to UNIDO and to six other international agencies with energy mandates – strongly supports the organization’s work in the field of renewable energy sources/energy efficiency, industrial energy efficiency/climate change and cleaner and sustainable production with a view to preserve the environment and the world’s limited resources.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our eighth Millennium pledge was that we would “develop a global partnership for development”. We have come some way to realize this goal. Austria will do its utmost to fulfill its responsibilities. The test of our claim to be committed to this pledge is progress in effectively implementing the remaining seven substantial MDGs, and in particular MDG 7.

Thank you for your attention.