

2 June 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,  
President of the 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Opening of the Informal Thematic Debate on the Green  
Economy: A Pathway to Sustainable Development**

Madam Deputy Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this General Assembly thematic debate on the green economy. This is a topic of central importance for our own well-being and that of future generations. It is our duty to make a difference. I am therefore particularly pleased to see so many of you here today in this hall for a constructive debate.

The process of preparing for the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held next year, has already provided an opportunity for discussions on the green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, one of the two pillars of the Conference. The workshops and the retreat for Permanent Representatives organized by the Group of Friends of the Green Economy have also allowed Member States to address various aspects of the green economy, such as its impact on employment. The views and comments expressed on these occasions will provide useful material for our debate today.

We can no longer afford to wait to act. Environmental degradation and climate change cannot be reversed overnight. We need only think about the time that it will take to replenish endangered fish stocks or the fact that, even if we managed to halt the increase in sea temperature, the effects of this would still be felt for a long time afterwards. The longer we wait, the harder and more costly it will be to address the environmental challenges that we face. We must also guard against making choices in technology today that would keep us for years to come on a carbon-intensive path. The recent spike in oil prices and the re-evaluation of the risks of nuclear power following the earthquake and tsunami in Japan remind us, should it still be necessary, of the vulnerability of energy supplies and the urgent need to reduce our energy dependence, to develop clean energies and to improve energy efficiency.

The environmental challenges that we are experiencing today are being exacerbated by an increase in the global population, by urbanization and by industrialization. The least advanced economies are developing and new markets are appearing, where a new middle class is enjoying improved living standards. At the global level, poverty has fallen significantly over the past few decades. This is remarkable and welcome. However, building on this outcome and meeting the legitimate aspirations of the poor for better living standards, with our current economic model, will generate pollution and cause our natural resources to be depleted, which is suicidal.

Our development must be equitable and sustainable. It must meet the needs of every generation today without jeopardizing that opportunity for the generations to come. The fundamental question is whether all of us on this planet will be capable of acting wisely and adopting behaviour that will avert a catastrophe.

The green economy offers us a bridge towards development that is sustainable. While there is currently no internationally recognized definition of the green economy, we know its major characteristics: the green economy implies decoupling economic growth from the use of fossil fuels and non-renewable energy sources. Current activities must be made 'greener' and it will be necessary to develop clean technologies and green goods and services.

This seems like an enormous task. However, we know the right direction to take and we know how to get there. The key component is that prices should send the right signals and encourage producers and consumers to adopt environmentally friendly behaviour.

We have a broad range of instruments at our disposal, where approaches based on market mechanisms, such as subsidies, environmental taxes and pollution rights, will play an essential role. However, it will be necessary to eliminate subsidies harmful to the environment, such as those which promote the use of fossil fuels, and to avoid falling into 'green protectionism' and other distortion-creating mechanisms. Market instruments will need to be combined with regulations, standards and measures to stimulate research and development. Consumers will also need to have better information.

The green economy can take different forms, depending on the context of each country, its level of development, and its geographic location in particular. Some will begin by greening their transport infrastructure, others will prefer to promote ecotourism or organic agriculture. There are already numerous examples of green economies under the impetus of governments, the private sector or non-governmental organizations, in both developed and developing countries. These initiatives show that environmental protection and conservation of resources brings economic benefits no matter what the level of development.

This is fundamental. Indeed, for certain countries, combating poverty, food security, health care and basic education and access to safe drinking water remain priority concerns. Fears are voiced that the green economy is just a new conditionality and will hinder these countries' development. The developing countries, whose economies are rich in natural resources and provide many ecological services, would benefit if environmental goods and services were traded for their fair value. Sound ecosystems are also essential in our efforts to combat the risk of natural disasters, which have a disproportionate effect on the poorest. The green economy also offers the possibility of making a leap in technology, and adopting the cleanest technologies directly, without repeating the mistakes of developed countries. The developing countries will realize savings. I mentioned positive examples: let us simply mention the farmers in very remote areas who, because of the mobile telephone, now know market prices or tomorrow's weather forecast.

Most environmental problems cannot be solved by a country acting alone. To promote the green economy, firm commitment and resolute action by the international community are needed, at all levels

of government - local, national, regional and global. All actors must cooperate, whether from the public sector, the private sector or civil society.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me repeat my question: Will we be able to evolve towards a green economy and sustainable development? Will we be able to stop destroying ourselves?

There is resistance to be overcome. Mobilizing the attention of the public and political decision-makers on environmental issues is difficult. The short span of an election cycle allows only the costs of the investments necessary to change the model to be seen. It does not see the longer-term benefits. We should henceforth think differently about this.

Adopting greener economic models is going to require structural changes, with job losses in certain sectors and gains in others. We must take into account the effects of redistribution on the people, in developed countries as well as developing countries.

As I said, in these countries in particular, the green economy gives rise to fears. It is important to address them and to ensure that they can also benefit from the opportunities presented by the green economy.

It is therefore essential that true international cooperation, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, be established. An international framework is needed to facilitate the transfer and financing of the adoption of clean technologies as well as capacity-building of developing countries in the environmental field.

We need a system of environmental governance at the global level that is effective and inclusive. The discussion that will take place concerning the second thematic pillar of the Rio + 20 Conference will be very important in this regard.

For the moment, I hope that our debate will contribute to a better understanding of what the green economy is and that we will have useful material to contribute to the Rio + 20 Conference. The first round table deals with opportunities and challenges and the second with the transition to a green economy. I hope this will provide an opportunity to go beyond set ideas and to have a constructive discussion.

I am happy to be able to count on our excellent panellists, who will share with us their experiences and views on the green economy. At the end of the day, I will formulate some conclusions, which will be available on our Internet site and will serve as a reference document.

Thank you for your attention.