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Sustainable Business in North Rhine-Westphalia

On the occasion of the
International Opening of the UNEP/Wuppertal Institute Collaboration
Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production

November 22, 2006

Huppertsberg Schnürriemen-Fabrik,
Hagenauer Strasse 30, 40107 Wuppertal

The spoken word is binding.

Dear Mr. Hoballah,
Dear Professor Henniscke,
Dear Mr. Kuhndt,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you in the name of the Government of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia on the occasion of the international opening of the UNEP/Wuppertal Institute Collaboration Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production. The place of this event is deeply symbolic: Wuppertal is the birthplace of Johannes Rau, the former President of Germany and Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia. It was always his approach to look for what connects people. And today, we have come together in a former factory for shoelaces. And shoelaces are, I think, a very nice symbol for what connects us.

The site of the Collaboration Centre in a former shoelace factory and in the City of Wuppertal which — with its famous, almost historic "Schwebebahn" (suspension railway) — also symbolizes the structural changes in this State that was formerly a purely industrial centre. North Rhine-Westphalia used to be the heart of Germany's heavy industry. Today, it is an area that is future-oriented, with a mix of industry and services. This development is especially significant to the Emscher River area of the Ruhr Region. Once the large pillars of the coal conveyor belts characterized its landscape and the Emscher River had degenerated into a sewer. But today, there are technology firms and new business centres and the Emscher River ecosystem has been restored.

If North Rhine-Westphalia were an independent country, it would be the 15th largest economy globally — above even Russia and the Netherlands. With a gross national product (GNP) of about 481 billion euros in 2004, North Rhine-Westphalia is Germany's most successful State. Over five percent of the entire economic activity of the entire EU was achieved in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Despite — or perhaps precisely because of — these changes, North Rhine-Westphalia continues to be an internationally significant region. For example, 23

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of the 50 top-performing German companies are based in NRW, among them corporations such as Bayer, Bertelsmann, and Thyssen-Krupp. At the same time, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have a strong influence on the State's economy: approximately 723,000 SMEs are settled in NRW.

Therefore, it is a perfect complement to this development that the CSCP was established in our State. An additional argument for the Wuppertal location was that it is home to the Wuppertal Institute, a top-level facility for sustainable ideas and innovation. That is why we did not hesitate to support — both politically and financially by co-financing of 450,000.00 euros — its construction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our experience with structural changes shows that sustainable thinking and action are necessary. If we combine economic, social, and ecological aspects equitably, we are in a much better position to solve both today's problems and the problems that will occur in the future. It's a well-known fact that this approach can provide many ideas, and it is the task of the CSCP to make this approach even more dynamic. That is why it is completely appropriate to characterize the work to be done here as an "idea factory."

The original idea to create the CSCP traces back to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (2002). This was where the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation was decided upon, a plan that supports measures promoting economic growth without ecologically negative consequences. The crux is a transition to production and consumption patterns that are sustainable. In order to accelerate this transition, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation also approved the development of a 10-year framework of programs to promote sustainable consumption and production. This framework of programs will be developed and implemented within the scope of the so-called Marrakech Process. The CSCP will support the Marrakech Process as far as both research and the implementation of actual projects are concerned. In particular, this will strengthen opportunities for so-called developing countries.

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NRW is committed to the goals of the process under the Marrakech Process, and we see primarily small and medium-sized enterprises as our partners. It is generally these companies where sustainable ideas and approaches can achieve positive effects on the labour market. As an example of the work we are doing, I would like to mention the Efficiency Agency. While many large corporations — in particular those that act on the global market — have already made intensive efforts to increase resource efficiency, it is primarily SMEs that frequently do not have the necessary research and development capacity, the administrative staff units, and so forth. However, the importance of economic and ecological modernization for SMEs must not be underestimated. In order to overcome these obstacles, in 1998 we established the *Efficiency Agency NRW* as an agency to specifically advise and consult with small and medium-sized enterprises.

The most important field of activity of the Efficiency Agency is to provide consulting tools for SMEs. The *PIUS Check* is a cost-effective and accessible consulting and evaluation program that records the relevant material flows and current levels of production technology. Subsequently, it illustrates possible improvements in production that have a positive effect on resource efficiency. In order to put sustainability into practice not only in the area of production but also in the creation and usage of products the Efficiency Agency has developed yet another consulting instrument, the *JUMP Tool*, which supports companies in the development of new products using environmentally-friendly product design and production processes.

It is not only the engineers who are important for sustainable economic development but also the management experts. That is why we have developed a tool for resource cost accounting (*RKR*). It is an expansion of existing planning and cost accounting systems that is able to collect data on potential for cost reductions with regard to resource use. With the *Eco-Efficiency Check for Trades*, the Efficiency Agency is offering an instrument that is specifically directed to the trades and small industry companies; it rounds off the "clean production" services on offer.

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The ideas of the Efficiency Agency have provoked interest worldwide, and we have presented them already in China, Japan and several other European Countries. The Wuppertal Institute already co-operated on several occasions with the *NRW Efficiency Agency*. It would also be interesting to share the experiences with the UNEP Collaborating Centre.

With the "ECOPROFIT" initiative, we are offering small and medium-sized enterprises an additional environmental management tool. "ECOPROFIT" stands for "Ecological Project for Integrated Environmental Technology," and its mission is to promote corporate environmental protection programs. The participating companies are developing practical concepts to lower energy and water use and reduce waste together with experts, as well as municipalities and trade associations. This enables them not only to profit financially by preserving resources but also to bolster their image as environmentally friendly companies.

A new project within the spirit of the Marrakech Process is the "Eco Industrial Park" idea. For example, the Hermann van Veen Foundation Germany is planning a recreation facility, the Alfred Jodocus Kwak House, a 32,000 square meter lakefront recreation facility for families with children who are in extreme situations — either socially or with regard to their health.

In the city of Petershagen, an already existing area designated for use by industries and trades has been reconfigured in a sustainable way. The city has developed a land use plan for the approximately 12 hectare industrial area using ecological criteria. The Kleve District has developed the idea of a "Virtual Property Pool." Acting in the spirit of sustainability, instead of opening up new industrial properties, several municipalities of the District are planning to jointly manage property already earmarked for industries and trades to prevent unnecessary encroachment upon nature and the surrounding landscape.

Because North Rhine-Westphalia places a high priority on sustainable development we are also actively working with the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development, abbreviated "nrg4SD". This

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network was also established in Johannesburg, where the foundation for the Marrakech Process was laid. The goal of the "nrg4SD" Network is to provide sub-national regions a clear voice, to move the idea of sustainability forward, and to look for joint solutions to common problems. For us, the focus is on the development of joint strategies in energy and climate protection policies. The preconditions in NRW are especially favourable with regard to this particular issue because the UN Climate Change Secretariat has had its headquarters in Bonn since 1996.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you see, NRW is committed to the goals of the Marrakech Process. Sustainable production and consumption create an important loop — to use the shoelace metaphor again — between economic and ecological interests. Dear Professor Henniske and dear Mr. Kuhndt, we hope that your research activities will also provide important impulses and inspiration to our practical tasks.

In the name of the State Government, I again want to wish you a great deal of success and I am looking forward to an excellent collaboration that will unite us in this effort.

Thank you very much.