



PERMANENT MISSION OF HUNGARY
TO THE UNITED NATIONS



Finland to the UN Security Council in 2013–2014



GOVERNO DE
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MINISTRY FOR AGRICULTURE,
SEA, ENVIRONMENT
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Danish Ministry
of the Environment



Permanent Mission
of the Republic of Tajikistan
to the United Nations

Broad support for a global goal on water during the side event at the Permanent Mission of Finland to the UN, 26 April 2012

Water is an indispensable part of life. Water and sanitation are core features of sustainable development. A global goal on water enjoys broad support. The goal should encompass the three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced and intertwined way. The upcoming Rio+20 Conference is the place and time to take action and decide upon such a goal. Content takes precedence over process.

It was in this spirit that discussions on a global goal on water were held at the side-event organized by the Permanent Mission of Finland and Hungary with the participation of the Environment Minister of Denmark in New York 26 April 2012.

The Permanent Representative of Finland Jarmo Viinanen, in welcoming the Minister and participants to the side-event, noted that the aim of the discussions was to bring to the fore the state of affairs on developing a goal on water and to discuss the content of such a goal.

In her opening speech, the Danish Minister for the Environment and president of the EU Council of ministers for the Environment Ida Auken said that the negotiations for Rio+20 need to become concrete and result-oriented. Focus should be on content and clear goal- and target setting. Permanent Representative of Hungary Csaba Kőrösi underlined that the need for goal on water with targets on economic, social and environmental aspects was also the clear conclusion of the work that has been carried out by more than 70 participating countries in the 'Group of the Friends of Water for Rio+20', an initiative taken by Finland, Thailand, Tajikistan and Hungary.

The Danish minister stressed that much in the same way as the DNA is built, so are the three dimensions of sustainable development intertwined. Sustainability cannot be reached without all three. A global goal on water should therefore fully integrate all three dimensions of sustainable development; be universal, yet adaptable, taking into account the need to apply different approaches; be easy to communicate - not too long; be supported by concrete targets, indicators and actions and not in any way contradict, but supplement the Millennium Development Goal (MDG).

The purpose of such a goal should be to ensure that water is managed for sustainable development, integrating all three dimensions of sustainable development:

- The social (access to water and sanitation)
- The environmental (water quality, water ecosystem preservation)
- And the economic dimension (water efficiency)

She proposed a wording of the goal to be formulated as the following: *"To ensure universal access to drinking water and sanitation, and sustainable water use through integrated water resource management, and increased resource efficiency"*,

The Minister's message was emphatically supported by Paula Caballero, Director for Economic and Environmental Affairs at Colombia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She stated full support for a goal on water. She did, however express concern that by Rio+20 we will not be able to agree to targets to underpin the goal. We should, however, seek to actually articulate these goals and not have agreement only on thematic areas, such as "water" or "oceans". She also mentioned thinking on a target on reduced health risks from water-related diseases as a fourth dimension, in order to make the link to the sanitation and supply issues explicit.

Many participants referred to the unfinished agenda on providing access to clean water, from the social development angle. Nepal's ambassador to the UN Gyan Chandra Acharya and chair of the Least Developed Countries stressed the need to put in place mechanisms to ensure enforcement of a goal on water. He also noted that in achieving the goals, there are disparities not only between countries, but also within countries. The link between access to water and water efficiency was highlighted whereas some participants also brought up the need for environmental activities to reduce health risks. Other concrete suggestions for targets included setting up a national policy for collecting, treating and reusing urban and industrial wastewater as well as setting a global monitoring mechanism to measure wastewater collection and treatment. Water-related disasters were also highlighted; disaster risk reduction might however be better addressed as a cross-cutting issue.

Not only did the side event show emerging consensus on reaching a global goal on water, it also gave a strong signal that this should be done in Rio+20 in June. Minister Ida Auken as well as the organisers of the meeting were encouraged by the strong support for a goal on water to emerge as one of the results from Rio. The side-event ended on this optimistic note.

Summing up:

- A global, universal goal should encompass all three dimensions of sustainable development in a balanced and intertwined way
- An SDG is not a goal solely about the environmental dimension of sustainable development
- It is, however, about preserving nature's resource base on which social and economic development depends
- Negotiators should focus more on content of such a goal than the process and setting for it
- The goal should be clear and simple so that it may be easily conveyed and explained
- SDG/MDG are complimentary processes and supplement each other
- The link with the MDGs is unquestioned. But the crafting of the 2015 development agenda should not detract from the urgent need to agree on this in Rio
- Support to the nexus approach but a goal should take its point of entry in a resource approach: one goal on water, one goal on energy one goal on food security instead of one big bang

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