



Statement written and given by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Senior Adviser on Governance for Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, to the Council of Europe, the GA of INGOs

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Good morning – let me thank the organisers for having invited me to this short meeting where the upcoming Stockholm+50 conference is one of the items.

My name is Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, I am a Norwegian national. I was in Stockholm in 1972, working as an intern for the Maurice Strong team, and have stayed with the environment since then. I am the senior adviser on governance for Stakeholder Forum, a global NGO network.

This year, 50 years will have elapsed since the environment was placed firmly on the global agenda.

50 years ago, the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment ended in what may be referred to as political euphoria. Those of us who were there, felt we had accomplished something important, and the world would be progressing towards a better future.

Today, 50 years later, the world with its environment is in greater peril than it has ever been in the history of humanity.

Propagated by short term interests and motivated by material wealth, decision makers in politics and the private sector, consistently ignoring easy-to-understand warnings from scientists, have driven the world forward in unsustainable ways and paid only lip service to the need for dramatically changing direction. This egregious disregard for these warnings, have led to a global pandemic of dimensions that almost exceed our fantasies. In addition, a continuing and steady current of well-researched reports identify and address environment problems that are not being solved. We just got yet another climate report from IPCC.

In addition, an aggressive war by Russia is going on in Ukraine with devastating consequences for humans and for the environment.

Many a pessimist predicts a disastrous future if we cannot turn these negative trends.

Commemorating a global disaster seems out of place. But no time seems more appropriate to turn a paralysing pessimism into positive actions, than now. No time and place seem more opportune to do so, than at Stockholm + 50 in June this year (2022).

Fifty years ago, participants at the Stockholm conference had every reason to feel optimistic. And today, 50 years later of global work for the environment can showcase many successes, all also in the context of what may be called the Stockholm Legacy:

- The conference in 1972 agreed to establish a global organisation to deal exclusively with the environment, the UN Environment Programme, UNEP, was born.
- A global institutional home for environmental law and environmental rights had been created.
- We also saw the beginning of good environmental governance, when the 1972 Stockholm Conference allowed civil society and NGOs to address the official plenary on a regular, daily basis, thus establishing a precedent that changed all subsequent UN conferences forever allowing greater participation from non-state stakeholders, not only in UN meetings, but in intergovernmental meetings. An important contribution to global democracy had been made.
- An institution to connect science with the environment had been created which also resulted in developing environmental policies. We also saw the development of environmental assessment and management as a result.
- Environmental diplomacy began.

50 years ago, there was little awareness of environmental issues. Today millions in all countries know about and are concerned about the global environment because of UNEP's work.

The conference 50 years ago changed the direction of politics and development in many ways – it began research that led to a growing understanding and decisions on climate issues, on the ozone issues, on the plight of the oceans, intensified research and understanding of biodiversity, focussed on the danger of chemicals, globalised ideas and understanding of ecosystems and biodiversity and pushed forward environmental law making.

Making sure all this is continued with increased resources is a must and should be one of the commitments made this year in Stockholm.

The title of the Stockholm conference this year invites all to be carefully optimistic, but also points to the seriousness we face – a common responsibility to reorganise ourselves.

We do not need new plans, there are enough of them, though some are still woefully inadequate.

We can use the conference to focus on solutions and implementations of all these plans. We can make Stockholm + 50 into an environment festival to celebrate progress, analyse and solve challenges and act positively.

The Stockholm conference will discuss issues relating to how to proceed forward in a greener and more sustainable way. It is a golden opportunity to plan and reset society on all accounts after the devastating pandemic. But we must also remember that the environment is more than sustainable development and more than the climate. Letting the talk on sustainable development be synonymous with environment will undermine the understanding of environmental issues. Mainstreaming will result in “away-streaming”.

Countries should commit to increasing the financial support to a new UNEP, a UN Specialized Agency for the Environment –

And to identify new issues – that are already on the agenda but that have not yet been integrated in policies:

Ecocide, strengthen environmental law with real and binding commitments, protect environmental defenders, safeguard the participation of civil society in decision making processes which is being threatened every day.

This year in June, we can organise a game-changing conference and boost implementation, going forward greener and better with rights for all.

We have come far – but not far enough. As a historian I will state that we have come a long way in a short period of time. As an environmentalist I will emphatically state that we have not come far enough.

We can progress, but only if we have the courage, political will, the resources and mutual trust to create a healthy planet for all.

Thank you for your attention

Jan-Gustav Strandenaes
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