



Thursday 8th December 2011

JOKE SCHAUVLIEGE

VLAAMS MINISTER VAN LEEFMILIEU, NATUUR EN CULTUUR

Intervention Minister Schauvliege at the Rio Pavilion (closing session)

8 December, Durban – UNFCCC COP 17

Honorable participants,
ladies and gentlemen,

It's an honor to be here at the Rio Pavilion in Durban and to engage in this closing debate.

As minister for the Environment, Nature and Culture I would like to highlight **the relation between sustainability issues and the cultural sector.**

Culture is one of the most important engines of society. What we do, is very often culturally determined. So when we strive for a sustainable society, culture plays a fundamental role in it.

As minister, I introduced **“eco-culture” as one of my main strategic targets**. I established a workshop of experts from the wider cultural sector that identified three breakthroughs in relation to the environment, for example raising CO₂ awareness by 2020 and increasing the conscious handling of water, waste and materials.

The strength of the cultural sector lies undoubtedly in its creativity.

Recently, the Flemish government provided support by contracting an expert in transition management. A few weeks ago, I organized a discussion day "From Thinking to Doing". The broad participation shows that the cultural sector is aware of the urgency to protect the environment and of their own important role in order to achieve a turnaround. This is really a challenging issue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

From my responsibility as Minister for Environment, I also give subsidies to projects in the cultural sector that focus on environmental education.

One such a project is called – in Dutch – *‘Jonge Sla’* (literally translated: ‘Young Lettuce’). It is a bottom-up project that has grown from the professional arts sector and supports organizations to act in a more sustainable way. Many organizations show a willingness to reduce their ecological footprint, but do not know where and how to

start. This project provides them tools and creates a platform where best practices can be exchanged.

Another example is a festival called '*Sideways*', scheduled for the summer of 2012. I support this project because it is an interesting example of a joint initiative of an environmental ngo, a visual arts centre and an artist collective. '*Sideways*' focuses on the importance of slow roads by creating an art trail along a network of footpaths. This art trail, called "pathscapes", provides serenity and at the same time a transport alternative.

Dear participants,

The planet's natural ecosystems and - in particular - biodiversity are key assets for economic growth, human well-being and a building block for culture. Ecosystem services – such as fresh water, soil production, pollination or coastal protection – provide the "natural infrastructure" essential to sustainable growth and poverty eradication. We have to recognize the values of biodiversity and ecosystems and make best use of the socio-cultural sector to pass this message through a broader public in order to reduce our ecological footprint.

In this regard biodiversity should be addressed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), especially the

implementation of the agreements reached at CBD COP 10 in Nagoya last year and how they can contribute to greening our economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, one of the theme's of the conference. Because, indeed, the future does not wait.

As George Orwell once wrote: "If a man cannot enjoy the return of spring, why should he be happy in a labour-saving Utopia? (...) I think that by retaining one's childhood love of such things as trees, fishes, butterflies and...toads, one makes a peaceful and decent future a little more probable." (in his essay "*Some Thoughts on the Common Toad*" - 1946)

Thank you.

Joke Schauvliege

Flemish Minister for Environment, Nature & Culture