



GGKP Office Launch, Geneva, Wednesday, 22.1.2014
Welcome and Key Note: Green Economy and Green Growth: Passing Fad or Future Paradigm?
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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to **welcome** you to Geneva for this special Green Growth Knowledge Platform event.

You are here because you are interested in green growth and a green economy. The government or institution you work for is concerned about the long-term prospects of the economy or the proper functioning of ecosystems, or most likely both. Perhaps you are personally interested in this intersection that occurs at various levels as a result of interactions between **the ecological and economic system**.

Thanks to economic growth in the last few decades, hundreds of millions of people have been freed from poverty. That is quite an achievement.

But this economic growth has also had the effect of putting greater pressure on the world's natural resources. This is because the continuous economic growth has **exceeded planetary boundaries**. Considering our ecological footprint, humanity seems to think it can go about its business and live as if it had a second planet in reserve. This becomes very clear when you look at global greenhouse gas emission levels or biodiversity loss. Right now, natural resources are already being consumed at levels that significantly exceed their natural carrying capacity in these areas.

When viewed at **the national level**, a clear picture emerges for Switzerland: the Swiss population consumes roughly three times the global average of available resources per capita. Since the 80s, the Swiss economy has been accumulating ecological deficits. Due to the importation of raw materials and goods, approximately 60% of the aggregate environmental impact of Swiss consumption occurs abroad.

We have been over-exploiting our planet for decades. And where is the **trend** pointing? One important driver of the over-exploitation of natural resources is global **population growth**. Projections state that the world's population will grow by nearly 30 per cent by 2050. Instead of today's 7 billion, planet Earth will need to play host to

around 9 billion people. Generally speaking, standard of living, buying power and consumption are all on the rise. Likewise, the volume of the global economy will also increase significantly by 2050.

The **goal** is clear: we have to make it possible for four times as many people to enjoy a high standard of living with half the resource consumption. This is a huge challenge. Many international organisations have asked themselves the question of what the world will look like in the year 2050 if we do not take firm measures to steer these demographic and economic trends in a more environmentally-friendly direction. In answer to this question, experts tell us that there will be destabilising climate change, species will go extinct, water will become scarce and human health will be adversely affected.

These warnings are being heard by governments. At the **Rio+20** Conference in June 2012, the international community put the green economy challenge at the top of the political agenda. The attending non-governmental organisations and the private sector agreed that promoting a green economy is of critical importance. We know that the economic system can only function in the long term as a green economy, within physical boundaries. This is what we have to achieve. A green economy is a *necessity*. The current economic system, both globally and in Switzerland, is not sustainable because it over-exploits the natural bases on which it is built.

Many **initiatives are underway** because “business as usual” is no longer an alternative. For example, the EU has a Roadmap for a Resource-Efficient Europe and many countries are developing national strategies and action plans for a green economy. Many international organisations, in particular those present here today, are pioneers in the work for a green economy. Since the Rio Conference, many international green growth and green economy initiatives have been created.

Even Switzerland's Federal Council wants to transform the **Swiss economy** into a green economy. That is why it mandated the administration to take action along those lines back in 2010. Since then, we have begun to implement the Cleantech Master Plan and continued to develop environmental information on products. We revised the CO2 Act and the Spatial Planning Act and have a new agriculture policy that promotes more environmentally-friendly activities in the agriculture industry.

Last year, the Federal Council also decided to revise the Environment Protection Act (EPA) and adopted a Green Economy Action Plan. The revised Act introduces a paradigm shift in that it enshrines long-term improvements in efficiency for all

resources and explicitly takes into account the environmental impacts generated abroad. Our aim is to achieve this goal step by step through continuous improvements. One key area that will be subject to regulation is waste and raw materials, where steps will be taken to establish a circular economy. The second area is consumption and production. If voluntary measures do not result in any environmental progress in this area, the Federal Council can be granted powers to create ecological transparency. A third area of focus is Switzerland's international commitment, which will be intensified in the area of the green economy. The transition to a green economy is a long-term process that will progress step by step and be predictable for the economy. That is why the Federal Council favours dialogue. And it intends to achieve the goals through voluntary measures, wherever possible. The Federal Council should submit the dispatch for the revision of the Act to parliament sometime in the next few months. As you can see, this is just the beginning. But Switzerland is on its way.

Switzerland and the international community will be working on the transition to a green economy for decades. We have to change production and consumption patterns and develop technologies. We need objective information, sound knowledge and innovation. We also need mechanisms to share our experiences because green economic policies are implemented differently from country to country. **We expect the GGKP to be a platform for these processes. We are convinced that it will help build a solid knowledge base for a green economy.** Various actors will need the platform not only to share knowledge but also to identify and utilise potential synergies. The GGKP will also help shape and influence the international research agenda in the area of the green economy.

The GGKP is already connecting and integrating the experiences and activities of institutions and governments and thus demonstrating why the green economy involves a paradigm shift.

I am very pleased that we are launching the Green Growth Knowledge Platform's office today. I am also really pleased that the founding members are represented here. They are taking the reigns of developing and supplying knowledge for the green economy. In doing so, they are enabling and helping the green economy to become a mainstream concept in various policy areas. Switzerland is proud to be able to support them in their work. **Geneva** is a logical location for the platform's office because the various institutions that are relevant to and involved in the green economy form a Green Economy Cluster here. They cooperate with and complement

each other, mutually benefit from the work and spur each other on in the interest of gradually getting closer to achieving the goal of a green economy. UNEP with its Economic and Trade Branch, IPCC, WTO, ILO, IISD, UNCTAD, UNECE, WIPO, WBCSD, and WWF are some examples of these organisations. Geneva and Switzerland also host think tanks and scientific institutions that also make important contributions. The Green Growth Knowledge Platform will benefit from this cluster. At the same time, the Green Economy Cluster in Geneva will be strengthened even more by the addition of the GGKP. In-depth knowledge of the changes that need to be made to achieve a green economy and the appropriate instruments to gain this knowledge are not only essential to the work of these institutions, they are also important for planning security in the private sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, the economy will not be able to function over the long term in its current form, and we will not be able to lead normal lives, if we do not develop and implement a green economy. We can and should develop our economy, but not “on credit”. In other words, we have to consider the natural limits of the environment as part of our economic growth. After all, the basis on which we enjoy and maintain a high quality of life is valuable and fragile. Natural resources and functioning ecosystems are the foundations of long-term prosperity and a high quality of life. **Only an economic system that is informed of the interactions between the economy and the environment is viable. Only a green economy can make it possible to achieve and maintain a high quality of life. This is not merely some fashionable trend. These are accepted facts. The transition to a green economy is already underway.**