



First of all, I would like to extend you my warmest and most sincere **welcome** to our land, Euskal Herria, the country of the Basque people. We are truly honoured to have a group of people like you with us today, committed to protecting the environment on a global scale. It is surely a unique heritage in the sense that the environment is not only essential and irreplaceable, but also because we all share one world.

The work of preparing the next **Global Environment Outlook (GEO)** report is a vital task, especially for those who, on one level or another, have political responsibilities with regard to the environmental. As we all know, **without good information, it is impossible to make a correct diagnosis.** And, similar to the field of medicine, **there can be no solution to a problem if we cannot first produce a general X-ray of the situation.** We may be able to alleviate the symptoms for a short while, but only with a proper diagnosis can we adopt the measures necessary to save the life of our patient, in this case the planet Earth. For this reason I think that the GEO, which at the end of the day is all of you, is so vital.



Coherent with the conviction that the environment is a key issue, as Minister for the Environment and Regional Planning for the Basque Government, it is my job to briefly read the **x-ray of the Basque Country** for you. Every three years our Government publishes a report on the State of the Environment, which provides an in-depth analysis of the situation of our environmental assets. Two additional reports are also published on a yearly basis: the 22 Environmental Indicators Report and the Sustainability Report. In tune with the Global Environment Outlook, all of these documents provide us with a clear diagnosis on the evolution of our country in terms of the environment and sustainable development.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL X-RAY OF THE BASQUE AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY (BAC)**

With cautious satisfaction, I must say that this year's reports show a **clear improvement in the state of the environment in the BAC.**



In recent years the BAC has defined and drawn up its environmental policy by including the objectives and commitments emanating from the **Basque Sustainable Development Strategy 2002-2020** in the short-term Environmental Framework Programme **2002-2006**, which is now coming to an end. And according to the Sustainability Report, we have done so with a **clearly positive and hopeful outcome**.

Therefore, **the improved state of the environment in our community has extended to all areas**: water quality, overall air quality, recovery of degraded soils, urban waste management, hazardous industrial waste management, expanded system of natural protected areas, etc.

In fact, over the last four years, **81% of the environmental commitments** made are in an advanced stage of development, either fully implemented or moving in a positive direction. The next step is to analyse the affect of these commitments on the environment and, depending on the outcome, arrange them in order of importance.



At the same time the foundations have been laid to move forward in **integrating environmental considerations into all of the policies**, plans and programmes that have been implemented by the Basque Government. Our next challenge is to coordinate all of these actions.

We have also made notable progress in drawing together **information and participation process** involving social and economic stakeholders, with special mention given to the development and implementation of Local Agenda 21.

Nevertheless, despite the positive overall balance, we are aware that there are still significant **weak points** that need to be addressed in the forthcoming years. Among them are:

- **air pollution** (both environmental and acoustic), in particular, the emission of particles associated with land transport



- **artificialization of the land**, which undermines one of our most relevant and scarce natural resources and in the face of which our towns and cities must reconcile the different land use designations.

- increasing **generation of urban waste** which calls into question our own system of consumerism

- and, of course, the deficient control of **greenhouse gas emissions** which effect climate change.

In other words, worded like a newspaper headline: **all of our efforts in moving forward** (and I'm talking here about the efforts made by our institutions, companies and society in general), **are pushed backward with our lifestyle**. We're using energy more efficiently, becoming more and more energy hungry everyday. We're recycling more and doing a better job of it, but we continue to generate increasing amounts of waste. We're preserving our land by created protected spaces (which in our region account for almost 25 a quarter of our territory), but we are occupying more and more natural lands. And the list goes on.



## FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME 2007-2010

In this context, and as the Environmental Framework Programme 2002-2006 comes to a close, we are now putting the final touches on the new **Environmental Framework Programme 2007-2010**. Based on a process of social participation, the new programme will act as a guide for drawing up environmental policy in the upcoming years. It is, in a sense, our **environmental road map**.

It is a plan for action designed to vitalise our determination to protect the environment. We are a country which is moving toward a new concept in development, one which must be able to lay the foundations so that in 2020 we can hand over to the next generation an Euskadi in which the main environmental issues of today have been resolved.



Our aim by the year 2020 is to make our country **one of the leading regions of Europe** in the struggle against such global phenomena as climate change; known for our concern for environmental quality of its people and cities; and for having a balanced territory and protected biodiversity. In short, we want to spearhead the global campaign for environmental sustainability.

To this end, our action will be founded on **four basic pillars**, already shaped into what will soon be presented as a draft version of our Action Plan 2007-2010.

The first pillar is to ensure the future, take action against **climate change** and prepare ourselves for its consequences. With particular focus on this point, the **Basque Office of Climate Change** is in charge of putting the final touches on the diagnosis which will allow us to formulate the concrete measures to be included in the **Basque Plan against Climate Change**. The mission of this plan is to reduce GHG emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change.



The second pillar for the medium term is to **reinforce our natural assets and protect our biodiversity**, preserving the territory and natural wealth from a strong sustainability perspective.

The third pillar is **to improve the environmental quality of our cities** as a key to preserving the quality of life of our people.

In fourth place, we must move toward **environmentally sustainable consumption and production**, promoting corporate competitiveness by making good use of the environment.

The work we carry out around these major pillars of action will help us go down the road we have laid out. It is a road paved in sustainability, which as a public administration we understand will call for **two major commitments**.



The first is aimed at developing countries and involves the **Basque society assuming its quota of environmental responsibility on an international level.** This includes our participation as co-president of the “*Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development*”; collaboration agreements drawn up with Latin American countries; initiatives for offsetting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions through reforestation in countries such as Kenya, under the auspices of the Green Belt Movement foundation started by Nobel Peace Prize-winner Wangari Maathai, who recently honoured us by visiting Euskadi as a guest of the Basque Department of the Environment and Regional Planning, and who, I must say, left a deep impression on all of us.

The second commitment we must assume as a public authority is to strive for **excellence in governance.** This is the “good government” Professor Maathai so eloquently referred to, which sees environmental policy as a contract with society based on transparency and participation, and geared towards results; a government that accounts for its actions, and to a large extent, ensures coherence between



all public policies, plans and programmes, and integrates environmental concerns into them all.

Aware of the transversality or horizontality of the environment, it is absolutely essential for us to be capable of creating powerful coordination and integration mechanisms within our institutions so that **environmental considerations are systematically integrated in the design and implementation of all policies**. The most important of are the major policies related to energy, science and technology, infrastructures and transport, as well as economic promotion and corporate competitiveness. For the most part, these are what will determine our environmental assets and liabilities of the future.

In other words: we have to be fully aware that **human beings and environmental quality** are the two essential ingredients of the society we want to build in the 21st century.



## COROLLARY

I mentioned before that the presence of **Nobel Peace Laureate Maathai** left a lasting mark on all of us. And I think it was not only on a personal level; we felt encouraged when we realised that we were on the right path, and that we shared so many values worth fighting for. We shared the conviction that the kind of **development** that exacerbates inequality cannot be, and certainly does not deserve to be, a lasting model. We agreed that there is no room in the 21st century for a model of development that does not protect a region's **environmental assets**. We feel, as she does, that **knowledge** must be the essential foundation on which to design good environmental policies, as we are trying to do in our country with the help of academicians and specialists. We are united by the belief that we must always applying the increasingly popular and universally accepted principal of "**think globally, act locally**".

And although it may at times be a rather inconvenient boomerang for us, we also subscribe her affirmation that **the state of the environment in any place is no more than the reflection of the way the government operates**



**in any given place, and that without a good government, there cannot be peace.**

I'll finish now, but not without **thanking you again** for being here with us in Euskal Herria. As I said before, I have no doubt that the work all of you do will be tremendously valuable and beneficial to humanity as a whole. And in the words from the legendary Michael Curtiz film, "I think this is the beginning of a long friendship. Thank you very much.