

# **SOPHIE PRIZE CEREMONY JUNE 5TH 2007**

**Today's economic system is at odds with the limits set by nature. Too many decisions are based on short-term profit for a few select groups rather than a moral and fair distribution of the world's resources.**

The purpose of **THE SOPHIE FOUNDATION** is to award an annual international environmental prize of US \$ 100,000 (one hundred thousand US dollar).

For as long as the means allow, **The Sophie Prize** will be awarded to an individual or an organization that, in a pioneering or a particularly creative way, has pointed to alternatives to the present development and put such alternatives into practice.

- ***What kind of change of consciousness is needed?***
- ***What is sustainable wisdom?***
- ***What qualities of life are the most important?***
- ***What important alternative measures must be implemented now?***
- ***What kind of mobilization of people is needed in the "global village"?***

The recipient of **The Sophie Prize** will have found an answer to one or several of the challenging questions above, thereby contributing to setting them on the international agenda. Concerning fair distribution of resources and global environmental and development issues, we will distinguish between what is perceived as attainable in the short run and what is absolutely necessary in the long run. **The Sophie Prize** will honor efforts to promote changes in the world that are necessary in a long-term perspective.

**<http://www.sophieprize.org/>**

## **Speech given by former Prime Minister Göran Persson at the Award of the Sophie Prize**

*Your Eminencies, Excellencies, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen*

*"Who are you?"*

*"Where does the world come from?"*

These are the two questions that begin the story in Jostein Gaardner's fantastic book *"Sophie's World"*.

Using history, philosophical thinkers and scientists, Sophie explores her age and gains insight into how history and the future are connected.

If, just like Sophie in the book, we were to receive a letter today from an unknown sender containing just one question, what would the question be?

Perhaps it would be: *“When will the world end?”*

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For months, the international media have been dominated by the latest research results from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

In the past century, the temperature on Earth has increased by an average of 0.7 degrees.

This is the most dramatic temperature change on Earth in over 1000 years.

Depending on the level of emissions of greenhouse gases, the temperature is expected to rise considerably more in the next century, by around 4 degrees in a worst case scenario.

Global warming is also causing water levels to rise.

Between 1961 and 2003, the level of the oceans rose by 8 centimetres. We see a rise every year.

Rising water levels are already threatening entire communities. Extreme weather is felling forests and wrecking towns and cities. New Orleans is one of the examples we have seen and can remember clearly.

Researchers have stated that, if global warming continues by more than a few degrees, we risk the extinction of 20-30 per cent of the plant and animal species on Earth.

Desertification and a warmer climate will force increasing numbers of people to become refugees, primarily in the poorer parts of the world.

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None of us will be unaffected by this. Globalisation takes on new meaning as we share this threat.

Olof Palme often spoke about our mutual dependence and the need for solidarity in the world.

In his dry prose, he stated: *“This is our world. We depend on it and we are responsible for it.”*

That is exactly right. Together we face the greatest challenge we have ever faced.

We always underestimate the effect of major changes. This is true of politics, markets and science. We see the changes coming, but our ability to assess trends fails in the face of such large changes.

Just consider the reaction to the introduction of new communications technology. I have previously employed a wonderful quotation from the infancy of telephony: *“The telephone is a fantastic invention. I am certain that every town will buy one.”*

The developments that followed were fast and furious and no one dared to predict them.

This is only human. We protect ourselves against incalculable changes and excessively ominous knowledge. But things will happen faster and get worse than we expect today.

All my experience tells me this. Assessments are always based on old ways of thinking, whichever assessments are concerned.

A research report was duly published recently in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) in the US, showing that, at the beginning of the 21st

century, emissions were higher than the UN climate panel expected in its worst case scenario at the turn of the millennium.

In a few years, we will realise that the climate debate we are having today, with emission reduction targets of 20-30 per cent, was completely irrelevant.

We will be discussing reductions of between 70 and 90 per cent. I am totally convinced about this.

So let us not hide the fact that the efforts required will affect our way of life. Let us not pretend that it will be easy. Let us not be lulled into believing we have time. Let us tell the truth. It will hurt. However, doing nothing will hurt more.

I am talking about a different way of life, but not necessarily a worse way of life.

A way of life based on new technologies, new knowledge and research, new transport solutions, new investments and new international cooperation and responsibility.

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How will we deal with the challenges we face?

I believe that we will need serious new cooperation between different parts of the world.

The current Kyoto Protocol was a good start, but a very modest one.

It is not enough for the future.

Let us be honest and realise that we currently lack the institutions able to take on the climate challenge.

Who will make the crucial decisions and ensure that the decisions are followed?

People around the world are beginning to see, in their everyday lives, that developments are rapidly going in the wrong direction.

People such as the Inuits in the Arctic region, the Maasai in Kenya and Northern Tanzania or the population of the low-lying Maldives island group are asking "*why aren't you doing anything?*"

If we cannot answer the question as to who will make the decisions, fundamental harm will be done not only to our living environment but also to people's confidence in democracy.

Reformation of the UN takes on a whole new meaning in this context. And it presents us with an opportunity.

The UN was born in the wake of the Second World War. The Cold War was beginning. That war is now over as well. The UN must be reformed. At the same time, there seems to be little desire to implement reforms. Everyone is looking after their own interests. Few are looking towards their common responsibility.

With a challenge as fundamental and decisive as global warming on the agenda, the UN has a new, bigger role to play. In a few years, everything else may appear virtually irrelevant compared with climate change.

Climate change is the global security threat of our age. However, the current UN Security Council is not able to deal with it. Therefore, it will be necessary to create a new structure for it.

What develops after Kyoto can, therefore, become the new international order.

Paradoxically, this may be the UN's big opportunity. If we are able to tackle this, there is an opportunity to restore the multilateral system, our way of managing global problems democratically.

If we fail, it will not only represent the decline of the UN but also a depressing development in which common global efforts will not take place.

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Many governments are saying that climate change is a global issue. This is a good starting point. But it obviously does not mean that national efforts are not required. On the contrary, someone must take the lead and show the way. Show that it is possible. *The challenge is global, but an important part of the response and the solution is local.*

The countries, regions, companies and local authorities who take the lead and show the way send out a signal that it is right to take responsibility. Don't wait for others. Do something. Those who come too late, as Michail Gorbatjov said, will be punished by history.

*Where are the examples of how changes can be implemented?*

*Where is the most effective technology?*

*What do the best energy solutions look like? Which are the models with the lowest energy consumption?*

*What do the new, cleaner production methods look like?*

*How can consumers help?*

*What can I do*

The answers to such questions will come from individual countries, regions, companies and private individuals around the world. From those who have taken the lead.

This has been my basic thesis for all the years I have worked on the change work in Sweden: the one who takes the lead in the change required will also create the long-term conditions for a better way of life - sustainable growth for individuals and society.

This is the only way to create new jobs, welfare and fair distribution in the future.

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Radical programmes for enhancing energy efficiency, research, investments in environmental technology and economic means of control have set the tone of Swedish politics for many years. Local commitment has been stimulated.

The results have not been slow coming.

Since 1990, Swedish GDP has increased by more than 40 per cent while emissions

have fallen around seven per cent.

In the absence of policies and measures instigated, emissions would be up to 20 per cent higher in 2010 than they are predicted to be.

One of the most crucial reform programmes for Swedish environmental work and one of the main reasons why we were able to achieve these results was the local investment programmes (LIPs).

These programmes were implemented at a time when the Swedish economy was at rock bottom. All areas of society faced savings apart from LIPs.

While the LIPs were in use, investments amounted to nearly SEK 30 billion, if we include local co-financing.

The effects intended were reduced impact on the environment, more efficient use of energy and other natural resources, increased use of renewable raw materials, increased reuse, recycling and recovery, greater biodiversity, better functioning plant nutrient cycles and higher employment.

We are well on the way to quintupling production from wind energy by 2010, and there is great untapped potential.

In 1996, a few cars in Sweden ran on bio fuel. Today, every tenth new car sold is a green car.

The list could be much longer!

Last summer, I launched the target of ending Sweden's dependence on oil, gas and coal by 2020, and a broad-based expert council, The Commission on Oil Independence, was appointed to review the measures necessary to achieve the new policy target.

The Commission on Oil Independence's very ambitious targets were ultimately:

- The road transport sector must reduce oil use by 40-50 per cent by means of efficiency enhancement and new fuels
- Homes and business premises must, in principle, be heated without oil
- Industry must reduce its oil use by 25-40 per cent.

These targets were established consensually by a commission consisting of representatives of the automotive industry, environmental interests, farmers and workers, scientists and politicians.

I reiterate: the targets may seem radical today, but that which we have created consensually today will seem an embarrassingly low level of ambition in a few years.

However, you cannot credibly argue for change internationally unless you have done your homework. You have to start somewhere.

The countries that have created wealth based on the extraction of the oil and gas that are at the core of the climate change problem have a particular moral responsibility.

Therefore, the raised ambitions of the Norwegian Government, expressed in new targets for its climate policy, are a clear and important signal.

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Perhaps the clearest message from the UN IPCC is that we must dare to tax carbon dioxide. According to all international research, this is an effective way of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

According to the UN IPCC, a big increase in the price of carbon dioxide can push the content of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere down to a level that can prevent serious future climate change.

The market economy often prides itself on being good at handling scarcity. When there is a shortage of a product, the price rises and efforts are made to find a substitute.

But the environment has no such price. A shortage of the environment has no substitute. When will environmental pollution have an effect on the price?

With the current economic system, the answer is “always too late”.

I am never the less a believer in economic means of control. At the same time, I would warn against overconfidence in the market and its forces. The market is a good servant but a wretched master. It has to be controlled.

I believe in an international system for emission trading. But there is a risk. It will give the richest countries of the world a possibility to buy their way out, without changing lifestyle. The discussion about climate change must always include the fundamental issue of eradicating poverty. Everyone has to change lifestyle, not only the poor.

Strong policies and a higher price on carbon dioxide will lead to more environmentally-friendly alternatives being profitable

What is needed is political leadership ready to make the crucial decisions.

*“The danger zone,”* said a British scientist a few years ago, *“is not something that lies in the future. We are in it now”*.

Nor is the danger zone in another country or another part of the world. We all live in the middle of it.

So let us consolidate the knowledge we have and use all the research and technology we have at our disposal to take action.

As you say with your 10th anniversary motto, it is time to go *“From know how – to do now”*.

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By way of conclusion, let me read a few more lines from Sophie’s World, which I started with:

*“For many people, the world is as hard to understand as a magic trick in which the magician pulls a rabbit out of a top hat which was empty a moment before. Where the rabbits are concerned, we understand that the magician must have tricked us.*

*And we want to know how he did it. Where the world is concerned, it is different. We know that the world is not an illusion or something imaginary because we walk around on the Earth and are part of it. In fact, we are the white rabbit that is pulled out of the top hat."*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Like Sophie and like many philosophers here on Earth, we can ponder how it all began and how we humans got here  
Today it is perhaps more relevant to ponder how we can prevent a situation in which we will soon no longer be able to live here on Earth.  
This is no less philosophical and definitely requires thought.  
Whether by magic or not, we have been able to live here together.  
We have done this in a way that will soon have wrecked the conditions for life for future generations.  
This is a big responsibility for one person to bear.

Luckily there are a huge number of us.

Let us assume our common responsibility for the Earth we have inherited.

Thank you very much for awarding me the Sophie Foundation's prize and thank you for listening.

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