



**Speech by Ms Carola Schouten
Deputy Prime Minister
and
Minister of Agriculture, Nature and
Food Quality, The Netherlands**

**At the opening of the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership
Multi-Stakeholder Meeting, Thursday 13th June 2019**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Chocolate has great powers.

The first Europeans in Central America already noticed this when they were offered a mysterious cocoa brew. A mixture that people in South and Central America had been drinking for centuries.

And even now, years later, the special power of chocolate hasn't worn off. You can give chocolate to express love, regret or gratitude. That's why some people say: whatever the problem, chocolate is the solution.

If only it were that easy!

If only chocolate had that much power!

Then we wouldn't have to talk about one of the major problems associated with it. About chocolate's bitter aftertaste.

One of deforestation, poverty and child labour.

Today you've come together to show a different type of power.

The power of cooperation.

Together, you're examining the issues at hand and seeing if you can go the extra mile to solve them.

Can you use new technologies?

Can you win over new allies in the fight against deforestation?

Can you make cocoa, palm oil and soy supply chains more sustainable?

~~

In 2015 the Dutch government launched the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership. It aims to pave the way for deforestation-free and sustainable commodities.

So far, seven European countries have joined the partnership.

That's great. Because there's strength in numbers. But we're not quite there yet.

From the very outset, the Amsterdam Declaration Partnership has focused on scaling up its goals to create European policy. So it's encouraging news that next month the EU will issue a Communication on stepping up action to halt deforestation. This is something I've pushed for as a member of the EU's Agriculture and Fisheries Council.

But change won't happen through governments alone.

And that's why I'm delighted to see so many different groups represented here today, at this fourth meeting of the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership.

Whether you work for a government, for a company, for a knowledge institution or for a civil society organisation, your contribution is meaningful and vital.

This meeting sends out an even more powerful message. Because this year, the producing countries are also represented.

So I'd like to give a special welcome to our guests from Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina.

After all, if we want to enact real change, we have to do it together. As equal partners.

Imagine Europe dictating how Africa, Asia and South America should combat deforestation. That's just not the way things work.

Farmers in producing countries have got to have sustainable economic prospects.

Otherwise, Europe's calls for environmental sustainability would be nothing more than a voice crying in the wilderness.

Last February I was lucky enough to visit Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. There, I saw how consuming and producing countries can join forces.

How Dutch knowledge institutions and private parties work together with local partners. And how climate-smart agriculture can create new prospects for smallholders.

In today's world, our lives are becoming more and more intertwined. In more and more ways. Our problems unite us, so let's share our solutions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our forests are in danger.

Last year, an area of rainforest larger than the city of Utrecht, where we are now, disappeared in Côte d'Ivoire.

The production of commodities like soy, beef, palm oil, coffee and cocoa is responsible for almost 80 per cent of deforestation.

Humanity is feeding itself, and eating away large parts of rainforest.

Forests that have grown over hundreds – if not thousands – of years. And destroyed in a few decades.

If recovery is possible at all, we won't witness it.

Yet we can't live without rainforests.

Rainforests can capture carbon.

Rainforests cool the air.

Rainforests form clouds that water the thirsty land.

That's why they're called rainforests.

This half year, the Netherlands is chairing the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership.

The Netherlands' agricultural sector enjoys a strong reputation worldwide. A reputation that was built by focusing on the highest possible yield at the lowest possible cost.

But we're increasingly aware that this comes at the expense of nature and of farmers' income. This system cannot be sustained.

So we're looking to find a new balance. And we've been gaining more and more experience with a circular-based system.

In this system, we return what we take from the soil. From nature.

Instead of seeking to minimise cost, we need to minimise our inputs of raw materials.

Amsterdam, which gave its name to the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership, is home to the largest cocoa port in the world.

A little known fact, even in the Netherlands.

In fact, the Netherlands is the world's largest cocoa processor after Côte d'Ivoire.

And, after China, the Netherlands is the largest importer of soy.

We're also the largest importer of palm oil in the EU.

As impressive as these facts and figures are, they also fill us with a sense of responsibility.

We play a role in the problems that have arisen worldwide.

And that's why we also want to look for worldwide solutions.

We want to share our agricultural story with the world.

After all, our strongest export product is our agricultural experience, our strength in innovation and our knowledge about sustainability and a circular approach.

We need to work on improving sustainability in the countries that produce soy, cocoa and palm oil.

Both the Netherlands and Europe are well-placed to make a difference, as major consumers of these products.

So we can influence the market, seek cooperation with partners and set sustainability requirements for producers.

These are the benefits of economies of scale.

This day – this week – shows the power of working together.

How much more power would we have if the Amsterdam Declarations Partnership grew even bigger.

Like ripples on the water.

So that we can convince the other major players in the global food market to join us in the fight against deforestation. Players like China, India and the United States.

We want to leave our children and grandchildren a healthy planet with beautiful rainforests. But we also want them to be able to enjoy the wonderful taste of chocolate.

I wish you lots of inspiration and success today.

Thank you.