

**Speech by Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey, head of the
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)**

on the occasion of the

christening of the Sun21 solar boat

in association with the project

TRANSATLANTIC21

Basel, 16 October 2006

[N.B.: The spoken speech takes precedence!]

Representative of the cantonal government,
ladies and gentlemen,
citizens of Basel, dear guests,

I am delighted to be here in Basel today and am honoured to have been asked to officially christen the Sun21 solar boat. This boat and the people who have built her and will sail her across the Atlantic are symbols of a Swiss nation that is open-minded and competitive. They are symbols of a country that values research, education and state-of-the-art technologies. They are also a symbol of sustainable development in Switzerland.

The French author Antoine de Saint-Exupery once wrote: “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we are borrowing it from our children.” Sustainable development demands a long-term perspective and a global vision.

Many of us may be wondering how we can make the global community, with its shared destiny, wake up to its responsibilities and take the consequences of its actions seriously. For my part, I am convinced that we do have the means to intervene on behalf of our blue planet in order to avoid the inter-galactic transportation scheme that Stephen Hawking has proposed. He believes that, ultimately, humanity has only one chance of survival, and that is to leave the Earth and to move to other galaxies to find new habitats.

We have initiated the debate about the comparative advantages of renewable and fossil fuels in good time, even though our privileged location in the middle of the Alps means that we are able to produce 60 percent of our electricity using non-polluting hydropower. Our neighbours are not so lucky – they generate most of their electricity from coal, oil, natural gas or nuclear power. Nevertheless, we must not delude ourselves by thinking that we are immune to energy crises, because fossil fuels still supply 70 percent of our energy needs.

Today's fossil fuel-dependent society has been 150 years in the making. In little more than a century, crude oil has become one of the most traded goods on the planet - some people have compared it to a drug - and one of the most important causes of violent conflicts.

There are many theories about how long our crude oil supplies will last. The most successful prediction was made by the American oil geologist Marion King Hubbert, who prophesied in 1956 that American crude oil production would peak in 1970, and then decline.

Some experts predict that the production of crude oil will carry on increasing until around 2010. After that, the output from new oil fields will no longer be able to compensate for the decline of the old oil fields, and certainly could not cope with any further growth.

Efforts to predict the exact timing of the peak in crude oil production may be of interest to academics, but the real problem starts with the destabilisation of oil prices. This is already happening now. Price stability can only exist when there is a sufficient number of refineries available and when there is an adequate surplus of oil. This is not the case at the present time.

Oil will continue to flow for another 75 to 100 years – but in ever decreasing quantities. It is crucially important to understand that the price elasticity of demand no longer works in the same way as in other markets. Higher prices do not inevitably accelerate and increase oil production. By 1970, it had already become clear that higher prices led to increased drilling but did not necessarily lead to the discovery of a greater number of new oil fields. And we will not solve this problem by endless drilling or by waging war.

Be that as it may, the exploitation of fossil energy carriers continues to be a cause and a focus of wars. Chechnya, the East African Lakes region, Angola and Sudan are textbook examples of this. In most wars fought over natural resources, it is the civilian populations who suffer most. Unfortunately, the most vulnerable - the women and children - are the first victims.

Imports of crude oil represent a heavy burden for many developing countries. They eat into the currency reserves that they have built up from exporting goods under difficult conditions, and so deprive these countries of the opportunity to import the technical and medical products that could help them to progress socially and economically. Oil imports also increase foreign debts and are frequently a reason for the widespread corruption amongst the local elite classes. The oil often does not benefit the majority of the population; it goes primarily to industry, the transport sector and cities, whilst numerous rural areas away from the main routes are not even connected to the electricity supply and sometimes receive no fuel. If the countries in the southern hemisphere convert exclusively to conventional energy, migration into cities will increase still further. This can only be stopped or reversed by the use of renewable energy sources, as these promote independence and decentralisation.

As it is, fossil fuels on their own will not be able to satisfy the energy demands of the southern hemisphere anyway. Two billion people still have no access to any form of conventional energy. In most cases, this means polluted water, diseases, high infant mortality rates, no social welfare, no schools and no healthcare.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our constitution states that the federal government and the cantons must strive for "a permanently balanced relationship between nature and its capacity for self-renewal on the one hand, and the demands made on it by people on the other". Your project – the solar boat Sun 21 – shows us the way forward; because it is truly an excellent example of how this clause in the constitution should be put into practice. Your project demonstrates how to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency. It is an inspiration for tomorrow's transport systems. And it opens up the way for transferring the technology you are now using to other areas such as housing or agriculture.

Sustainability is not simply a buzzword. Sustainability is a dictate of reason and global solidarity. The increased number of droughts, floods and tropical storms are hitting the populations of developing countries the hardest. But climate change is making itself felt in Switzerland too. We can expect more extreme occurrences such as flooding and heatwaves and, in lower altitude areas, snowfall will become less frequent.

This illustrates that even events and processes that seem very distant can have a very direct bearing on our life, our security and our prosperity here in Switzerland. We know perfectly well that a purely national model showing Switzerland to be an exceptional case and allowing our country to escape globalisation and live in splendid isolation is neither desirable nor possible.

The world is changing at an astonishing speed. Today, our security and our prosperity are threatened less by any possible military offensive carried out by a malevolent neighbour than by environmental disasters, international terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, epidemics and civil wars. International cooperation is needed to find a solution to these problems.

For this reason, Switzerland must be involved at an international level; we must invest in the future of the planet and play our part in finding solutions to the problems we face. Switzerland relies upon sound international cooperation to take care of its political, economic and environmental interests within a global context.

We are a small country. With no colonial past or hidden agendas, we have a certain credibility in the world. We also have economic and financial influence. And we have developed and refined important tools such as democracy, pluralism, tolerance and integration. These are very useful not only in promoting values but also in reconciling opposing visions of the world and participating constructively in the search for collective solutions. We are therefore most certainly in a position to do something for the international community. And this is exactly what many countries expect from us.

We have the opportunity to prove this on November 26 at the upcoming referendum on the Eastern Europe Cooperation Act and the related payment of one billion Swiss Francs to the ten new EU member states. This referendum is a test of our readiness to continue working bilaterally with our European neighbours. It has a direct impact on our future place within Europe. It is vital for us to say yes. We must not distance ourselves from the European dynamic, as this is our country's best guarantee of security and sustainable development. Environmental problems are no respecters of national borders. Key concerns such as environmental protection and support for renewable energies can only be progressed long-term by working regionally and globally. Our contribution to the new EU states should also be viewed in this context. Switzerland's contribution will pave the way for the success of the bilateral approach and safeguard access to the EU internal market. In supporting specific projects in the new EU member states in the fields of environment, research and education, we are also contributing towards sustainable development in Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We want to, and we can, make a positive contribution to the development of our constantly changing world. If we fail to actively participate, we not only show a lack of solidarity, but we must also passively accept solutions without having had our say or contributing our views. This is why I find your project, the sun21 solar boat, so important, because it demonstrates that sustainable development is feasible, and therefore sets an example to others.

Dear crew of the sun21 solar boat,

You are realising a dream - the dream of crossing the Atlantic for the first time in history with a solar boat, powered solely by the light of the sun, without a drop of fuel. You will generate confidence in a key technology of the future. You are - and I congratulate you for it - courageous pioneers!

You stand alongside a long and proud line of pioneers who have crossed the Atlantic before you. At this point, let us not forget the fact that, between 1821 and 1920 alone, around a quarter of a million Swiss made this journey across the Atlantic.

In those days, it was a dangerous journey. Ships frequently sank. Prior to 1825, many died from illness during the journey. Many of these people didn't emigrate because they wanted to, but because they had to. They were what many today would disparagingly and short-sightedly call economic refugees.

But these people also had spirit in abundance. In search of a new and better future, they gave up their homeland and left their families and friends behind. The Swiss who crossed the Atlantic then were ambassadors for our country. These people played their part in building the United States.

You and your boat are also ambassadors for Switzerland. You are representing a Swiss nation that we can be proud of. It is interesting that this solar boat is a joint venture of the peoples of the French-speaking and the German-speaking regions of Switzerland. I think it is wonderful how this project has given fresh stimulus to the traditional links of friendship between the French-speaking part of Switzerland and Basel. You have set a fine example for everyone living and working successfully in partnership across the language barriers.

At the beginning of May 2007, you will land in New York, a major world city that has welcomed millions of visitors before you. New York is the gateway to a country that is still the land of opportunity for many. The fact that you are arriving in New York is important in two ways.

Firstly, there are important pressure groups in the USA who are committed to sustainable development and who recognised the importance of environmental protection a long time ago. Your arrival in New York will therefore be a no doubt heralded signal that it is both possible and worthwhile to adopt a forward-thinking approach to energy and the resources of our planet.

Secondly, the USA remains the world centre for research and development. This year's Nobel Prize awards are a case in point. In the USA the technologies of the future are being successfully developed at breakneck speed. But Switzerland also has a great deal to offer here. Our research facilities are state-of-the-art and they enjoy close relationships with international partners. The Sun21 solar boat tells the USA - and the world - that Switzerland is an ideal place in which to undertake research and a first-rate partner for scientific collaboration.

Dear crew of the sun21 solar boat,

You are about to embark on a great adventure. I will be following your journey with great interest and you can rely on my support. I am proud of the way you are representing our country and I want to thank you for doing so. I wish you every success, and a safe voyage!

Thank you!