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Pioneering spirit

If renewable energy has failed to excite more than marginal interest, it is because the concept is still linked in the public's mind with a prohibitive price and limitations in both comfort and mobility. This is the bias that has to be overcome because nobody is willing to give up living standards, even if the planet ends up paying the price. Our grandchildren will no doubt make their adjustments to living a life without oil but, for the present, we have to deal with the fact that human beings are generally more motivated by their own interests in the short term than the long-term interests of their species or the environment.

But since human nature doesn't change much, we can try to take advantage of its habits. We can try to generate consumer-taste appeal for sustainable development in general and renewable energy in particular. We can show that a big new market loaded with opportunity is at the door for investors acute enough to hear it knocking. We can invoke the scientific dynamic, cultivate pioneering spirit, acclaim a



Bertrand Piccard

The 46-year-old psychiatrist and aviator made the first non-stop balloon flight around the world. Now he's planning to do the same in a solar plane – in several stages. *"Like Solar Impulse's pilot, we only have a limited supply of energy at our disposal. If we realise this too late, we will crash before the end of our journey."*

new mind-set – one that will earn users of renewable energy an admiring tip of society's hat. It cannot be a case of twisting the public's arm to get on the road mapped out by Rio, Kyoto or Bonn, but rather of saluting those who invent or use new technologies sensitive to the environment. Before long, it could become socially old fashioned and also flatly unpopular to guzzle fuel, unnecessarily heat and cool public or private interiors and buy materials that can't be recycled.

Until now, renewable energy, often ideologically the preserve of small minority political groupings, hasn't had the lift of skilled marketing and promotion in winning public acceptance. It is with that in mind that I have launched, with the Solar Impulse team and in partnership with the EPFL (Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne), a project to circle the world in a sun-powered aircraft.

People find bold adventure fascinating. They respond to the same dream that drives pioneers and explorers. Solar Impulse seeks to mobilize exactly that – the spirit of adventure dormant in all human nature. Once awakened, we will seek to enlist its support of technologies that enable sustainable development and its commitment to renewable energy. Our plane is a symbol. I don't mean that anyone in the future is likely to be piloting 300 people in a solar aeroplane, I mean that this is a symbol of good sense that should be common to us all. After all, are we not each of us, like Solar Impulse's pilot, subject to energy limits? Otherwise, we too will crash before the end of the journey.

I invite those of you who welcome these sentiments to visit www.solar-impulse.com.

Dr Bertrand Piccard

swiss energy

EDITORIAL

Dear reader



From 1 to 4 June, 2004, Germany will host the International Conference on Renewable Energy 2004, as announced by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002 in Johannesburg. The conference – renewables 2004 – will chart the way towards an expansion of renewable energies worldwide, responding to the call of the Johannesburg summit for the global development of renewable energy.

Historically, Switzerland's longest-serving and most important source of renewable energy has been hydropower. Other renewables including solar, wood, biomass, wind, geothermal and ambient heat, also play an increasingly important role in Switzerland. There are considerable research efforts directed towards the further development of these technologies.

This special issue of the energy extra magazine, a bi-monthly publication for the general public issued by the Swiss Federal Office of Energy, will provide you with an overview of Swiss renewable energy policy and will illustrate some of our country's recent developments and practical approaches in this field.

Marianne Zünd

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Berne

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