

**Speech by Benoist Apparu,
Minister for Housing**

**Signature of the Memorandum of Understanding
regarding the Solar Decathlon to be held in France**

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

Mr. Ambassador,

Mr. Mayor, François de Mazières,

Ms. President, Catherine Pegard,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly pleased to be with you today to sign the Solar Decathlon Memorandum of Understanding, a moment that some of you have been eagerly anticipating for a long time.

Personally, I have been waiting exactly 21 months, since I visited the Solar Decathlon village in Madrid on June 21, 2010.

I am thrilled that today, on March 21, what was once only the dream of holding the Solar Decathlon in France is becoming a reality.

> **What is the Solar Decathlon?**

It is a competition that challenges twenty collegiate teams from different countries to design and build life-size houses that are run on solar power and must be autonomous. The teams are judged on ten events, which is why the event is called the “Solar Decathlon.”

But the Decathlon also is and must remain a free public event, open to all, that enables everyone to see for himself what tomorrow's homes could look like.

In other words, it is both a high-level scientific competition that results in the completion of a real project, and a popular celebration. The competition is designed to kindle enthusiasm and optimism with its focus on youth, the future of our world, and new technologies.

>It's an international competition, yes, but it is also **a wonderful opportunity for schools and companies in the host country to display and share their expertise.**

I am counting on our companies, regardless of their size, to realize the benefits they can reap by helping organize an event like this, and I know that Mr. Pelletier will encourage them. Of course, companies in the construction sector cannot and should not be the only ones to get involved.

> I would also like to remind you of the backdrop against which this event is being organized in France, which makes it a particularly appropriate location. **For years now, our country has been deeply committed to changing the energy used in our homes. Buildings have been undergoing an unprecedented transformation as we implement the objectives of the Grenelle Environment Forum.**

The construction sector is the most energy-hungry sector in our country, consuming more than 40% of all final energy and generating nearly a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions.

Realizing this, the government adopted a sweeping program designed to:

- achieve general application of the **low energy consumption building (BBC)** standard **by 2012** and the **positive energy building (BePos)** standard **by 2020**;

- **reduce energy consumption in existing buildings by at least 38% by 2020** and, to that end, carry out an ambitious thermal and energy renovation program on buildings, at a pace of 400,000 homes per year starting in 2013;

 - renovate all of our **public housing**;

 - begin to **renovate government buildings** and buildings housing public institutions;

 - **offer support to professionals in the sector** for recruiting, training, qualification, and development of the related industries.

The road map, which extends to 2020, was drawn up as part of the **Grenelle Building Plan**. It brings together all those involved in preparing and implementing this public policy, which affects 3,500,000 assets. **Let me applaud the efforts by Mr. Philippe Pelletier, the chairman of the Strategic Committee**, and by all those involved in the Building Plan offices and task forces. The Building Plan has already produced many results.

Under the post-Grenelle Building Plan:

✓ In new construction, **energy consumption has been slashed by two-thirds, and operators already have a head start toward the objectives set for 2013.**

✓ Households are increasingly considering **energy performance** in their decisions:

▪ **As of January 1, 2011, energy performance statistics** must be published in all real estate ads, both for sales and rentals.

▪ Unprecedented **renovation work** is underway on existing buildings. For example:

- tax credits for sustainable development and interest-free loans for environmental projects (Eco Ptz) have both been distributed, and both tools were redefined this year for greater efficiency.

- since 2009, 100,000 public housing units have been renovated through environmental loans for public housing.

- In addition, the "**Habiter Mieux**" (Live Better) program, managed by the French national housing agency (Anah) and implemented as part of the Invest in the Future program, is aimed at helping 300,000 homeowners of modest means finance home improvement work by 2017.

- and for the future: The Grenelle laws, particularly the Grenelle 2 law, have modified the **co-ownership** rules for similar renovation projects and provided a set of complementary tools.

- For its own property, the French government has initiated an unprecedented **inspection campaign**. These inspections are ongoing, and work is being scheduled.

- Finally, a consultation process has begun on the scope and content of the requirements called for under Grenelle 2 to update **tertiary buildings** by 2020.

✓ **Trained and qualified players, and a construction subsidiary committed to saving energy.**

The training program for construction contractors and tradesmen on energy savings (FEEBAT) has already helped nearly 40,000 professionals.

→ **We are already seeing the results: the proportion of energy consumed by buildings has been decreasing by 1 point each year, dropping from 43% in 2007 to 40% in 2010.**

This major effort, which creates jobs in the renovation sector and reinforces French excellence in construction, should continue at a sustained pace into 2020.

As you can see, France is experiencing a real housing revolution in terms of energy, making it a natural host for the Solar Decathlon on 2014.

➤ **I would like to take a moment to thank everyone who made this event possible.**

~ First, thank you to the **Ambassador of the United States**, since along with Stephen Chu and Richard King, you believed that our country was fully capable of taking the baton from Spain, and more recently China, and hosting this competition.

~ Next, I would like to thank the **city of Versailles**, which very quickly grasped the benefits and importance of the Solar Decathlon and saw how much in tune the theme of this competition is with the Sun King's city, whose history is marked by centuries of Franco-American friendship, and with the values of a sustainable city that it espouses.

And I know that Versailles will also be able to use its hosting of the event to promote the city - assuming there is even room for improvement in that area, Mr. Mayor. -.

- My thanks also to our **Spanish friends and the European Commission**, whom we have gotten to know over the past several months in preparing our candidacy.

Spain's advice will be valuable to us; and indeed, I've already received very positive feedback from the meeting in Madrid ten days ago between the French and Spanish teams.

As for the European Commission, whose support was naturally very meaningful to us, we are happy to note that the **joint press statement from Washington on November 28** made by the United States and the European Union explicitly mentioned the role that the Commission will have to play in the future of the Solar Decathlon, ensuring that we will have its support.

- Also, I would like to thank the **French teams** that competed in the Solar Decathlon at the hubs in Grenoble and Bordeaux, whose

representatives are here with us. Right from the start, they offered to share their experience and skills with us as we prepare for the 2014 Solar Decathlon.

- Finally, let me thank the **government departments that have contributed, on both sides of the Atlantic.**

The presence of several secretaries and ministers today clearly attests to the strong interdepartmental commitment to this project, beginning with the important first step of signing the Memorandum of Agreement.

Because as I say, it is only the first step. We have barely 30 months between now and the summer of 2014, and they will be busy ones for the organizers and competitors alike.

- I would like to recognize the chairman of the steering committee for the event, **Alain Lecomte**, also a section president at the general council for the environment and sustainable development, and **Benoit Parayre**, inspector general for planning and sustainable development, both of whom have been working on this project almost every day for nearly a year now.

If you do not object, Mr. Vice President, I would like to request that they be allowed to continue working on the project as it enters this new phase.

- Finally, let me recognize **Mr. Delcambre, chairman of the scientific and technical center for construction**, who will be our “hands and feet” during this period.

Mr. Ambassador, ladies and gentlemen, my dear friends, those are the thoughts I wished to share with you today, as we sign the memorandum of understanding to hold the Solar Decathlon in Versailles.

France is already delighted to be organizing this competition, which it will be honored to prepare for meticulously and hold in one of its most [historic] cities.

Thank you.