

Maurice Strong at the IUCN World Congress

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I can't tell you how very much I value the opportunity of speaking to you today at the inception of this IUCN World Congress which is clearly the most important event on the world environmental calendar in this first year of the new millennium. I am impressed with the galaxy of stars of the environment, conservation and sustainable development movement that are assembled here. From my own experience with world conferences I know the extraordinary efforts and skills that have gone into organizing this Congress. And I want to congratulate President Yolanda Kakabadse, Director General Maritta Koch-Weser, as well as the Jordanian hosts for bringing us here under such hospitable and auspicious circumstances. I want particularly to salute His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan and his government for the priority they have accorded to preserving and enhancing the environment - both natural and cultural, - of this historic and pivotal country despite the conflicts and the hardships which have inflicted such economic and human cost on your people. I am delighted that his Majesty and other members of Jordan's royal family have blessed this Congress with their fulsome support.

My own ties and debt to IUCN dates from my earliest involvement in the environmental movement when, under the leadership of my friend and continuing colleague, Gerardo Budowski, it made such an important contribution to preparations for the first global conference on the environment - the UN Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, Sweden, in June 1972. Since then I have continued my close association with IUCN, most recently through the Earth Council and the University for Peace in yesterday's Earth Forum, in the Ombudsman and Peace Parks initiatives, as well as in the development and launching of the Earth Charter, of all of which you will be hearing more during this Congress.

IUCN is well positioned for even more important and expanded leadership in this new millennium. With your universally esteemed and respected President in Yolanda Kakabadse and your dynamic and talented Director General heading an impressive leadership team you are clearly prepared to meet this challenge. We look to this Congress to set the direction and to mobilise the expanded support that will be required to do this.

I would like to utilize the opportunity accorded me here to give you my own perspective on how far we have come in the environmental movement, where we are now and "Where On Earth Are We Going?"

The Stockholm Conference in June, 1972 put the environment on the international agenda. It also broadened the agenda to include the concerns of developing countries, which had threatened to boycott the Conference - as to the effects on their priorities of under development and poverty.

By the mid-1980's it became evident that, despite progress on many fronts, the overall condition of the earth's environment continued to deteriorate while the forces driving it -

population growth and wasteful patterns of production and consumption - persisted. This led to decision by the United Nations General Assembly in 1984 to convene the World Commission on Environment and Development to re-examine the issues in the perspective of the year 2000 and beyond. Chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, its report, issued in 1987, called for a transition to sustainable development as the only viable pathway to a secure and promising future for the human community. The Brundtland Commission recommendations led to the decision by the UN General Assembly in December 1989 to convene a new global conference on environment and development in June 1992, the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference, and to accept the offer of Brazil to host it. Again IUCN made an important contribution to the preparatory process and many of you were involved.

As an event in itself Rio was clearly a milestone - attracting more heads of state and government than had ever before attended a world conference, a greater number and broader range of civil society participants, and an unprecedented media corps. It created a new surge of public awareness and political engagement. Its tangible results were less than I and many others had hoped, given the watering down of provisions on key issues like population, energy, production and consumption patterns in order to achieve consensus. Nevertheless the agreements reached at Rio - both in Earth Summit itself and in the Global Forum of NGO's - constitute the most comprehensive set of measures for effecting the transition to a sustainable way of life on our planet than has ever before been agreed - framework conventions on climate change and biodiversity, initiation of a negotiating process that produced the convention on desertification, a program of action defining priorities for change in almost every sector of human activity - Agenda 21, and the Rio Declaration of principles building on the Stockholm Declaration but falling short of the Earth Charter to which we had aspired. And the fact that these measures were agreed by virtually all world governments, most of them at the highest levels of their leadership, gives them a high degree of political authority. But they are not legally binding and as we have seen, this does not ensure their implementation. As we now focus on preparations for the 10th anniversary of the Earth Summit and the 30th anniversary of Stockholm, which I refer to as 10/30, we must examine the lessons learned in the past three decades. And our focus must be on the future and how we can use this milestone to break the impasse and make the change of course for which Stockholm and Rio prepared the way.

It must be said that over-all implementation and follow-up of the Earth Summit agreements has been disappointing. In the more industrialized countries there has been a recession in the political will for environmental action. Developing countries are at the same time experiencing an unprecedented increase in environmental awareness and concern, as their own environmental problems become more visible and acute. But the capacity to deal with these problems is severely constrained by lack of resources and diminishing international assistance. It is an ominous paradox that while evidence of continued environmental deterioration becomes more compelling the will to deal with them has weakened. As the latest World Resources report point out "Consumption of everything from rice to paper to refrigerators to oil has risen together, all at a cost to the eco-system. The current rate of decline in the long term productive capacity of eco-

systems could have devastating implications for humans and the welfare of all species." This is manifest in the accelerating extinction of species, depletion of fish stocks, ominous decline of the quality and availability of water for human consumption; continued degradation of precious biological resources - to name but a few of the issues on which this Congress will be focusing. The prospects of meeting even the modest targets set for reducing greenhouse gas emissions under the Climate Change Convention are not promising and even less so the prospects for the more stringent measures that are clearly required. The funding necessary to move forward with implementation of the conventions on biodiversity and desertification has been disappointing. The Official Development Assistance required to support developing countries in effecting the transition to more sustainable patterns of development and eradicating poverty have continued to decline since Rio.

There are some bright spots. The Global Environment Facility, the only new financial mechanism to emerge from Rio, has been adept and innovative in mobilizing and leveraging its funding of the incremental environmental costs of selective projects. There has been notable progress in the development of new technologies and techniques to abate pollution and reduce the energy and materials content of a unit of production - what the World Business Council for Sustainable Development calls "Eco-efficiency". The role of civil society has assumed more and more importance in driving the processes of change - and in resisting them. The phenomena commonly referred to as "globalization" has become the focal point for the backlash we are currently witnessing against the very currents of change, which has made us the wealthiest civilization ever while deepening the disparities between winners and losers.

For every one who takes to the streets in Seattle, Washington, Melbourne and Prague there are many others who quietly share the same concerns and misgivings about globalization. Not that it would be realistic to think that it could - or should - be stopped or rolled back. Rather the real issue is how the manifest risks and vulnerabilities to which it gives rise - to the environment, to the social fabric, and to the economies of the poor and technologically deprived - can be avoided, - and how its benefits may be more widely and equitably shared.

Why is this important to those of us who are deeply concerned about the environment and sustainability of our societies? Because we must see these issues in the broader perspective of system of cause and effect in which human actions, their impacts immensely increased by technology, are shaping the human future. We have not yet come to terms with the reality that the processes of globalization are systemic in nature while the mechanisms and institutions through which we manage them are not.

Civil protests against the phantom phenomena of globalization and the direct action in Europe targeted at the steep increases in fuel prices are in my view no mere passing events. Rather they signal widespread disquiet and diminishing confidence in the ability of our current political and economic governance systems to manage these processes effectively and equitably. It would be unrealistic to think that civil society can somehow replace governments and inter-governmental organizations. Civil society is too diverse,

their own views too disparate. And they lack for the most part the necessary mechanisms of legitimisation, accountability and concerted action. But it would be equally unrealistic to underestimate their growing influence.

Communications technology has now given civil society the capacity to organize themselves around issues of common concern, whatever may be their differences in other areas. Indeed, at the global level civil society will, I believe, function more and more as the "opposition" to the formal systems of governance but not as an alternative to governments. For the most part I am confident that it will be a responsible, "loyal" opposition. But this will depend as much on how governments and international organizations respond to the challenges they raise, listening to the voices of civil society and valuing their views and concerns. Decisions taken by trade ministers in the World Trade Organization, by finance ministers in the World Bank, and by central bank governors in the IMF - to name but a few - may well be within their traditional specialized mandates and expertise. But they have major impacts on others, and must be much more open to inputs from those who have a stake in these.

This does not mean giving civil society organizations the same kind of place at the tables of national governments or international organizations, which for the foreseeable future will remain the principal elements in the system of governance. It does mean devising new methods of ensuring that the voices of civil society are engaged in the dialogues and negotiations out of which official policies emerge. Fortunately, technology, notably the Internet, provides the mechanisms for involving millions of people around the world in the processes. I very strongly believe that one of the most urgent priorities of moving toward a more effective system of managing the processes by which we are shaping our future is to establish new mechanisms to enable the views of people to be heard and their concerns and questions answered by the officialdom. How much better and more effective this would be than leaving them no alternative but to go to the streets to make their point!

I have made this the centrepiece of my remarks because I believe it is directly relevant, indeed central, to the issues of environment and sustainable development, which have brought us here to Amman. The unique character of IUCN as a global organization with both governmental and non-governmental members: I am greatly encouraged at revitalization of the long-standing partnership between IUCN and WWF. This, together with your new partnerships with organizations like the Earth Council and University for Peace, and links with the World Economic Forum and World Business Council for Sustainable Development provide IUCN with an unprecedented opportunity for leadership in developing the new mechanisms of global governance. These, I am persuaded, involve a move away from traditional patterns of centralized control to the forming of coalitions and networks of all major actors around specific issues. Indeed, this is what UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is proposing under his program of reform and his new vision for the future of UN.

The architecture and functioning of the governance of the environment and sustainable development movement. This should be high priority for the 10/30 Conference. The

many ideas that have been developed for improvement of the international governance structures must now be examined and crystallized into concrete measures that could provide the basis for agreement by governments in 2020. These, in my view, must include a "world environment collaborative" that brings together governments, intergovernmental organizations with NGO's, business and professional organizations. I see UNEP as the centerpiece of this - strengthened and elevated to the status of a U.N. specialized agency. IUCN must clearly have a key role in such a collaborative and I am encouraged at the ideas now being discussed within IUCN as to how this may best be designed.

The issues on the agenda of this important Congress cannot be dealt with in isolation from the issues of managing globalization, which provide their essential contexts. Nor can those with special interests and concerns about the state of the environment and the transition to sustainability leave it to others to shape the processes and mechanisms through which these issues can be effectively managed. We must be part of that process. We must help to lead it and to shape it.

Finally, let me share with you the central lesson that I have derived from my experience in international life, of which the environment and sustainable development have been the main focal points. Ours is the wealthiest civilization ever. The fact that something like one billion of our fellow human beings continue to live in conditions of dire and debilitating poverty is surely an affront to the moral basis of our civilization. On a global basis we have the resources, the knowledge and the capacities to develop in this new millennium a civilization and mode of life in which pollution and poverty are eradicated and the benefits which knowledge and technology affords made available universally to ensure all inhabitants of the earth a better life and a secure, sustainable future. The real issue is why are we not doing it. Why is the movement for a better, more sustainable world stalled and to some extent even slipping back?

At the root of this dilemma is lack of sufficient motivation-motivation to give priority to the policies, attitudes and practices on which a sustainable future depends. Motivation has several elements. Economic self-interest is certainly one of them - at both the national and the individual levels - economic self interest on not just a short-term basis that undermines the economic future, but on a sustainable basis. The economic motivations of people and corporations are strongly influenced by governments, through the policies, regulations, fiscal incentives and penalties that they put in place. One of the most important things that governments could do to foster the transition to sustainability would be to review and re-vamp this system to provide positive incentives sustainability. This, I submit, would be one of the most effective measures to which governments could agree at the 10/30 Conference in 2002.

Peace and security provide strong motivators. Indeed, peace is an indispensable pre-condition to sustainability. Peace with nature and environmental security must be seen as essential components of a sustainable future. Basic to of all our motivational systems however are the ethical, moral and spiritual values which motivate all peoples and societies. While there is an immense range of diversity in these values there are also

important elements that people of all belief systems can share - and indeed must share if they are to join in cooperative measures to ensure a sustainable future.

The Earth Charter which has been formulated after several years of consultation and dialogue with literally hundreds of thousands of people throughout the world articulates these values and principles designed to guide the conduct of people and nations towards the Earth and each other. IUCN has been deeply involved in the process of formulating the Earth Charter which is complimentary to and supportive of your Covenant. I strongly urge you at this Congress to give the Earth Charter your blessing. Your moral leadership in the revolution and values on which our future depends is essential.

I am not a prophet, nor even an expert, but my own experience in international life for over more than 40 years has brought me to sobering conclusion that the future of our civilization, at least as we know it, will be determined during the first three decades of this new millennium. For the level of human population and the scale and intensity of human activities is now impacting on the Earth's environmental and life support systems in ways which affect the basic boundary conditions on which life as we know it depends. We should draw no comfort or make no arrogant assumptions on the basis that life has flourished, despite the dire predictions of doomsayers, for many thousands of years. For the conditions which make life possible have only existed for a minute portion of the Earth's history and we are now affecting these conditions, accelerating and altering the processes of natural change which had previously occurred over tens of millions of years.

We are literally now the agents of our own future. What we do, or fail to do, in this first part of the new millennium will, I am persuaded, be decisive. It is an awesome responsibility, for which we are not yet well prepared. Those of us who have been deeply involved in the conservation, environmental and sustainable development movement have contributed significantly to the insights from which this picture of our common future emerges. It is our most challenging task to join in leading and shaping the new processes of cooperative governance required to ensure that those who follow us will realize the immense benefits of the transition to a sustainable civilization and the avoid the ominous risks of the demise of our species which will surely follow from our failure. No generation has ever faced a more awesome challenge and no one is better positioned to take the lead in dealing with it than the people gathered here.