

## **Opening Remarks at the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit**

Maurice Strong

Delhi, India

February 7, 2001

Honourable Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Chairman Ramachandran, Dr. Pachauri, UNDP Administrator Mark Mallock Brown, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, ....

I am honoured to be here today among such illustrious company to participate in this landmark conference on sustainable development and its relation to poverty. My only regret is that my visit to India has been darkened by the shadow of the catastrophic earthquake in Gujarat, the effects of which will leave a wound on India and neighbouring areas for years to come. On the bright side, however, there are many good reasons why I am so pleased that I could be here today on this auspicious occasion, so soon after India has passed two important milestones: the 52nd Anniversary of its independence and the birth of its billionth living citizen.

I was not able to join in the celebrations around TERI's Jubilee Summit that was held at this time last year. So when my good friend Dr. Pachauri invited me to speak at this Delhi Sustainable Development Summit, I appreciated the opportunity renew my relationship with TERI, and to take part in this event which is indicative of the kind of important contribution that TERI, as one of India's pre-eminent policy and research institutes, continues to make to stimulate informed dialogue and enlightened action on sustainable development in India and internationally.

Secondly, I have been a long admirer of India and pivotal role this country has played in moving the global environment and development agenda forward and linking it to the issues of hunger, poverty and population that are central to the concerns of the developing world. Your presence here, Prime Minister Vajpayee is immensely encouraging evidence of your own deep interest and leadership in the cause of sustainable development as an indispensable instrument for overcoming hunger and poverty in India.

It is now twenty-nine years since representatives of 113 nations assembled in Stockholm in June 1972 for the inauguration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Stockholm was the beginning of "a new journey of hope". It placed the environment issue firmly on the global agenda and provided the political impetus which led to a proliferation of national action and the convening of the several other global conferences on related issues. The environment issue and the more comprehensive concept of sustainable development which evolved from it provide a broad framework in which economic, social, population, gender and human settlements issues can be seen in their systemic relationship to each other.

The Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992 produced agreement on Agenda 21, the Rio Principles and on two historic framework conventions, one on

Climate Change and the other on Biodiversity which have since come into effect. It also launched the negotiating process which has led to agreement on a Convention on Desertification, an issue of special importance to many developing countries, particularly in the arid regions of Sub-Saharan Africa.

India has been one of the most influential nations in shaping international response to these agreements and has taken a leading role in promoting the interests of the developing world in these negotiations. From Stockholm through to Rio, India has championed the shared concern of most developing countries that inadequate availability of funds for the financing of sustainable development and barriers to transfer of technology remain the greatest impediment to alleviating the hunger, poverty and environmental degradation which continue to plague to less developed countries.

Today developing countries are leading the revitalization of the global economy. Developing countries are growing. India's real GDP has sustained a compound annual growth rate of 6.5 percent for the last eight years - a performance that makes its economy the fastest growing among the world's democracies. Indian software exports have increased at an annual rate of 65 percent over the same period, and agricultural production by 4 percent - well ahead of the 1.8 percent pace of population growth. Food grain output has trebled in the last 30 years.

On this basis, as noted in The Economist's survey of the global economy a few years ago, China is expected to replace the United States as the world's largest economy by 2020, and 9 of the top 15 economies of the world will be today's developing countries. India will replace Germany as the fourth largest economy. And the same survey projects that developing countries' share of world output will grow to 62% by 2020 while that of the rich industrial countries will decline to 37%. While the particulars of these projections are subject to challenge, they clearly point up the direction the world economy is headed. The G-7 which today does not include a single developing country is clearly becoming an anachronism. The recently constructed G-20, of which India is an influential member, is a promising step towards redressing this imbalance. .

So, as you move into a new era of economic growth, developing countries have a rare opportunity to fashion their own development model. No country is in a better position to take the lead in creation of this new sustainable development model than India. Because of the strength and experience of its democracy, its diverse natural resource base, its formidable scientific and technological capabilities, its well developed industrial sector and entrepreneurial tradition, the quality and strength of its institutions and professional cadres, its commitment to education and its high degree of environmental awareness.

Implementation depends on motivation. Motivation then is the central issue.

Economics, of course, is a powerful motivator. And in this, the role of governments is crucial in establishing the policies, the fiscal incentives and the regulations that influence the behaviour of corporations and individuals. Today the fiscal and regulating regimes and the systems of subsidies of most governments are designed to meet goals that are for

the most part unrelated to the environment and sustainable development, provide few incentives and many disincentives to sustainable development. A recent study by the Earth Council estimated that in four sectors alone – water, transport, agriculture and energy – governments expend some seven hundred billion dollars annually on subsidies which contribute to unsustainable practices, and often unnecessarily waste public funds. One of the most important things which governments could do to foster sustainable development would be to review and revive the system of incentives and penalties to provide positive incentives for achievement of sustainability.

At the deepest level, all people and societies are motivated by the moral and ethical values in which their culture and belief systems are rooted. A diversity of belief systems within the human family is a great source of richness and strength. But all share a basic reverence for life itself and a common interest in fostering the entities and the practices which nourish and sustain life on Earth our “Only One Earth”. It was on this basis that I proposed to the leaders gathered in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 for the Earth Summit that we adopt an Earth Charter – a statement of basic ethical and moral principles designed to guide the behaviour of nations and people towards the Earth and each other. We were not able to obtain an agreement on this. The Earth Summit did adopt a declaration which incorporated some of what we sought. Since then, I have had the privilege of joining with former Soviet President Mikhael Gorbachev and a number of other leaders from all parts of the world and all major religions and philosophical positions in drafting a “Peoples” Earth Charter which was formerly launched in the Peace Palace at The Hague in Netherlands in July 2000, and presented to Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. Among the most effective and active leaders in this movement has been India's own Professor Kamla Chaudhery who is Co-Chair of the Earth Charter Commission.

The Earth Charter is now being taken up by literally millions of people throughout the world – not as a sacred writ - but as a guide to their own behaviour and a guide for most governments, organizations and communities. Plans call for its presentation to the United Nations at the Sustainable Development Summit to be held next year in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Today, I have special pleasure in presenting the Earth Charter to you, Mr. Prime Minister, commending it to your for your blessing and endorsement by your Government.

I am deeply convinced that the fate of the Earth will be determined by what we do or fail to do in the first few decades of this new millennium. And I see great hope in the convergence of our moral and ethical principles with our economic and social imperatives. Concepts of caring for each other, sharing with each other and a respect for our life are no longer pious ideals divorced from reality, but the indispensable prerequisite to our common survival and well-being. Our revitalization of the moral, ethical and spiritual foundations of our lives, is called for in the Earth Charter, is the only basis on which all of the foundations for a secure and sustainable future for India and the entire world community can be built. No nation is better able to lead this process than India. Your presence is with us today, Mr. Prime Minister, and your inspiring message

make clear your commitment to providing this leadership. It is an immense source of encouragement to us and I extend to you our profound thanks.