

Trinidad and Tobago Earth Charter Launch

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Feature Address:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your generous introduction. Let me, however, reverse the roles; for my first words must be of congratulations to you and your colleagues on the Earth Charter National Committee of Trinidad and Tobago. National Committees are an integral element of the Earth Charter Movement. The goal of establishing the Earth Charter as a global Testament - but even more so as the Credo of our Civilisation - will be reached through the work of the Charter's National Committees. You have a functional, not a cosmetic, role in bringing to full realisation the Principles enshrined in the Charter and the vision of humanity's future that is integrated into them. And, of course, you have a mission to carry the message of the Charter both nationally and regionally. It is a responsibility, I am sure, that rests in capable hands.

Mary Schorse and Angela Cropper have presented the Charter and its Principles and outlined the National Campaign that is being developed here. In this Address, I shall look to the global environment which, in my view, makes universal acceptance of the Principles and Values to which the Earth Charter speaks a pre-condition of human survival on any tolerable basis. Have no doubt, the issues with which we are dealing bear on survival, human survival, sustainability of the Planet. Why a Charter? Is it any more than a restatement of pious platitudes? No, it certainly is much more. It is what it proclaims itself to be, a Charter, pointing the way forward - a beacon lighting the way ahead. And that way ahead needs to be illumined by commitments to progressive and enlightened action by our human species.

In the early years of the 1990s, in an unprecedented joint statement, the Royal Society in Britain and the National Academy of Sciences in the United States issued a warning in these terms:

If current predictions of population growth prove accurate and patterns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged, science and technology may not be able to prevent either irreversible degradation of the environment or continued poverty for much of the world.

It was 1992 - the year of the Rio Conference on Environment & Development. Most people have almost forgotten it now, but we should not. The logo of the Earth Summit depicted the Earth 'In Our Hands'. It asserted that sustainable development required a shared effort by all the world's people, a partnership for survival in which each country has a role that is related to, sometimes Integrated into, the roles of others.

The partnership, of course, is not between equals. Developed and developing countries are unequal, in responsibility for getting it wrong and in capacity for setting it right. Aristotle, in his 'Ethics', instructed us a long time ago that equity between unequals requires not 'reciprocity' but 'proportionality'. His dictum holds in this ultimate domain of environmental restoration. Proportionality must be the ethical touchstone of the role of developed and developing countries in their partnership for survival through sustainable development.

Why were the scientists concerned about population growth? Why did they not think of it as a flowering of the species, but in the negative sense of an overgrown garden? If we are, as we believe, the best thing that has happened to the Planet, why shouldn't more of us be ever welcome? There is good reason why they did not. The real reason, the ultimate reason, for their concern is sustainability - the sustainability of life on the Planet.

In scientific terms, it is described as Earth's 'carrying capacity'; less formally, it is our impact on the biosphere measured by what we use and what we waste. When we ask whether Planet Earth can sustain double its present human population, the answer has to do with consumption. If we continue to draw from nature at the rate we do today - if, overall, we consume at today's level - such a doubling may not be sustainable: the population explosion could threaten survival. Remember the words of the scientists: If current ... patterns of human activity on the planet remain unchanged: they were talking about 'consumption'.

The scientists spoke out in 1992. 1998's Human Development Report was devoted to the issue of consumption. It had this to say:

Today's consumption is undermining the environmental resource space. It is exacerbating inequalities and the dynamics of the consumption-poverty-inequality-environment nexus are accelerating. If the trends continue without change - not redistributing from high-income to low-income consumers, not shifting from polluting to cleaner goods and production technologies, not promoting goods that empower poor producers, not shifting priority from consumption for conspicuous display to meeting basic - today's consumption will worsen.

The problem, however, is not only the level of human consumption, but also its skewed pattern. At present, about one-quarter of the world's population (mostly in industrial countries) account for about three-quarters of the world's net annual consumption of resources of all kinds. The industrial world consumes:

- 75 per cent of the world's commercial energy
- 90 per cent of its traded hard wood;
- 81 per cent of its paper;
- 80 per cent of its iron and steel;
- 70 per cent of its milk and meat;
- 60 per cent of its fertilisers.

The other three-quarters of the world's people must get by altogether on the remaining one-quarter of the resource pie.

If a quarter of the world's people continue to sequester three-quarters of the planet's bounty, there will never be enough resources available for leveling up. In fact, it is estimated that if the whole world aspired to the living standards now prevailing in the West, the world of the 21st century would require the resources of many more planet Earths to satisfy that aspiration. But, of course, we will continue to have - 'only one Earth'. Our science may increase its bounty, and our husbandry makes its resources o further; but its capacity to support life cannot be extended ad infinitum. We have to manage within the resources this one planet offers and provide space for all who dwell on it. We have to heed the wisdom of the ancient saying with which Sun Yat Sen led the revolution against feudalism in China: What is under Heaven is for all.

But we have not heeded that precept as a global community. For the greater part, the movement away from feudalism stopped at national frontiers; the concept of sharing, even of fairness, generally evolved only within states, not between them. Human society, the world of people, remained beyond the reach of that civilising precept. What is under Heaven has not been for all on Earth.

In 1987, in addressing the role of the international economy in securing humanity's future, the Brundtland Commission on Sustainable Development headed by Norway's inestimable former Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland (and of which I had the privilege to be a member) made the basic point that 'the pursuit of sustainability requires major changes in international economic relations.' We elaborated this in our report 'Our Common Future' as follows:

Two conditions must be satisfied before international economic exchanges can become beneficial for all involved. The sustainability of ecosystems on which the global economy depends must be guaranteed. And the economic partners must be satisfied that the basis of exchange is equitable; relationships that are unequal and based on dominance of one kind or another are not a sound and durable basis for interdependence. For many developing countries, neither condition is met.

What is the dawn of the 21st Century heralding for that 'marginalised global underclass'? Will it be any more than perpetual struggle in the periphery of the global economy?

Not surprisingly, last year's Human Development Report, the last of this Century, had globalization as its theme. It has this to say looking to 2000 and beyond:

The challenge of globalization in the new century is not to stop the expansion of global markets. The challenge is to find the rules and institutions for stronger governance - local, national, regional and global - to preserve the advantages of global markets and competition, but also to provide enough space for human, community and environmental resources to ensure that globalization works for people not just for profits. Globalization with: Ethics ... Equity ... Inclusion.... Human Security.... Sustainability Development.

Keep this in mind as you read the Principles of the Earth Charter!

We tend to associate this Century with the flowering of human genius and the explosion of human prosperity. And in some respects we are right to do so; but not in all respects. One hundred years ago as the 19th Century turned into the 20th the ratio of average income of the richest country in the world to that of the poorest was 9 to 1. Last New Year's eve, as the 20th Century turned into the 21st, that ratio had risen to 60 to 1. Today, the average family in the United States is 60 times richer than the average family in Ethiopia - or in America's own Hemisphere, 40 times richer than the average family in Haiti. Inequality has been rising too within many countries, including rich ones, since the early 1980s.

As we came to the start of the new Millennium, the richest countries, with just one fifth of all the world's people, have:

- 86 percent of world GDP
- 82 percent of world export markets
- 68 percent of foreign direct investment
- 74 percent of world telephone lines

The remaining four-fifths have to make do with what is left over. And for the bottom fifth of humanity, their share in all these areas is 1.5 percent or less. What is under Heaven is not vouchsafed for all. Our global neighbourhood retains its feudal forms.

Those trends of yesterday are the starting points of tomorrow. This is how the 21st Century is beginning on Planet Earth. For only 20 percent of the world's people is it a confident dawn. With globalization running ahead of global governance to ensure that its benefits are more widely shared, the prospect is the emergence of new threats to human security in poor countries, and to the poor in rich countries too. That means in the end threats to the rich and privileged themselves. Can these trends be reversed? Of course they can, for they are man-made, not the working of forces beyond human control. Whether they will be reversed is the challenge to humanity in the new Century beyond the unpromising dawn. We need to remember this as we ponder what each of us can do to further the Principles of the Earth Charter.

Let me end with a reminder of the way we have come. Rio, as you know, was an emanation from the Report of the Brundtland Commission. The Earth Charter should have been an emanation from Rio. But Governments balked. A diluted - and largely unfulfilled - version of Agenda 21 was the furthest they would go. I wrote, as you know, the official book for the Rio Conference *Our Country, the Planet*, in 1992. Let me read you a short paragraph from its concluding section:

From the high-profile occasion in Rio will not come all the decisions that will guide us to a safer and better future. But Rio must represent a point of departure in the direction of sustainable living. It must signal the sort of commitment to enlightened change that is being sought through the proposed Earth Charter and Agenda 21, an agenda for the

twenty-first century. The Preparatory Committee for the Earth Summit has invested much effort in drawing up the charter and the agenda. Their endorsement by the summit can make them powerful instruments in humanity's quest for a secure future.

As I said, Rio did not agree on the Earth Charter. But humanity's quest for a secure future must go on. And so, now, eight years later, the people of the world - after deliberations with more than 100,000 people in over 52 countries - have launched the Earth Charter. Governments will come on board - as they did right through the 20th Century with all the great movements for change that empowered people worldwide generated:

Decolonisation and the end of 'Empire', the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the anti-nuclear Movement, the Gender Revolution, the Environment Movement itself. They were all people-led. Let the Earth Charter Movement continue into the 21st Century that great tradition of action for enlightened change - by people everywhere; today, here in Trinidad and Tobago; for all humanity's sake.