

Earth Forum

**Where are we going.
Prospects for the Earth in the new
Millennium**

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José María Figueres Olsen

Ex President of the Republic of Costa Rica

Your Majesty, Queen Noor

Honorable Maurice Strong, Chairman of the Earth Council

Dr. Maritta Koch-Wesser, Director General of the World Conservation Union

Prof. Klaus Schwab, President of the World Economic Forum

Fellow Panellists

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please allow me to begin by thanking the organizers for convening this Forum, and for having invited me to participate in it. I come to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, with the joy of being here, and profound respect for what the Earth Council and the World Conservation Union both stand for, and have accomplished over the years. My special congratulations to the World Conservation Union, on the very special occasion of the celebration of its "2nd World Conservation Congress".

This session asks us the question: Is Sustainable Development Sustainable? In Spanish we have a saying that says "la duda ofende", meaning "the doubt

offends. My answer to this question is an absolute yes! However providing real content for the answer, requires actions, along with words. Let me elaborate on this concept.

The world of tomorrow, which we are constructing today, will be different:

- Borders between nations that in the past divided us, will continue to tumble before the advance of information, technology, and capital that trespass them with no passport or visa.
- Nationalities, which often have even been the cause of war, will give way to two global nationalities: those that are connected to Internet, and those that are not.
- Creation of wealth, as we have known it, will no longer depend on material resources, but rather on knowledge.
- Communications will be between us, the people, and not between the places were we are.

Rather than a time of changes, we are living in a change of times! If we can agree on this, and I hope we can, then we can also begin to agree on the necessity and urgency for a shift in development styles, towards one that is inherently sustainable:

- A development style were Business understand that the "earth bottom line" is as important as the "corporate bottom line" of profitability.
- A development style in which we will align the decision making process concerning short term issues, no longer with the public opinion polls, but rather with the medium and long term objectives of the country and world we wish to build, and the societies we wish to live in.
- A development style were macroeconomic balances will no longer be seen as the only road that eventually leads to human development and environmental responsibility, but will share equal

weight in the equation of development, together with vigorous investment in strategic human development, and the rapid construction of an alliance with nature.

In short, a development style which is not an end in itself, but rather a means towards achieving a sustainable civilization, and therefore represents a true cultural change, from those styles prevailing today.

If we can agree on the logic and convenience of this new paradigm of Sustainable Development, and I hope we can, then we can also agree that there is much to be done.

Maurice Strong showed us the way in Rio 92. Five years later Japan hosted the world for Kyoto 97. With Rio + 10 over the horizon, we all know which steps will progressively take us in the right direction. It is our collective responsibility to act!

I come from a small, resource scarce country. One where the numerous urgent needs of today, would suffice as an argument to take the easy way out, and continue with "development as usual".

However, we chose to do different in three areas. Allow me to share some facts with you:

1. In terms of economics:

- Instead of investing less and generating power with fossil fuels, today 85% of our power is renewable based, and could increase to 100% by the year 2,010. Besides being the responsible answer to our energy needs, In the middle of this oil price surge, this investment is paying off even above our expectations.
- In 1995 we enacted a new forestry law containing our first emission tax: 15% tax on the purchase of fossil fuels. These funds go to the National Forestry Fund, were they are used to pay farmers for the environmental services they provide. Whether it is timber growing to fix carbon from the atmosphere and help mitigate climate change, or

watershed management to protect aquifers for drinking water and hydropower generation, the cost of these services needs to be internalized.

2. In terms of the environment:

- 30% of our territory has been set aside in our National Park System. Of course we could use the land for other purposes, but being a home on this planet to over 5% of the world's biodiversity, we chose to honour our planetary responsibility by thinking of our conservation areas as the factories and warehouses where this biodiversity is produced and stored, intact.
- INBIO, our Institute of Biodiversity, is conducting a full-fledged inventory of all our species, assigning a bar code to each one for the purpose of electronic
- Inventory keeping, and thus facilitate knowledge sharing, research, proper use and proper care. Instead of being a cost, this is a worthwhile investment in a tremendous asset, if we are convinced that biotechnology will be to this century, the equivalent of what electronics was to the last century.

3. In terms of strategic human development:

- Unlike many developing nations, we eliminated all lead content in fuels for transportation. We import all our fuels, and the "lead free" is more expensive; but today the lead level in the blood of Costa-Ricans has dropped below the level found in populations of developed nations. Can there be a more strategic type of investment than this kind, in terms of elevating our health conditions, keeping our environment, and therefore also raising our country's productivity?
- Elevated to constitutional mandate in 1997, today we invest 6% of GNP in public education. Never again will policy makers balance their economic figures, by cutting education budgets! With this increased investment we are revolutionizing our education system,

redefining the word literacy, and beginning to “learn to learn”, instead of “learning to know”.

The list of similar policy decisions, with which we began implementing Agenda 21, goes on.

We still need to do much improvement. However with the strength of our convictions, and the moral backing of our actions, we would like to use this podium to challenge others, in the friendliest, respectful, but most energetic way, to push forward in the transition towards sustainability. Let me point out concrete actions on three levels.

1. At the international level:

- The United Nations could produce new instruments to measure development, in which indicators would adequately reflect the state of advancement of Sustainable Development, measured by progress made on the three equally important fronts of macroeconomic balances, human development, and environmental protection.
- If we agree that Sustainable Development is really a “cultural change”, UNESCO and UNEP could work together to define content for the concept “bio-literacy”. And bio-literacy should be promoted amongst the educational systems of the world so that the new generations grow up with a respect for the environment, which our generations have lacked.
- The International Monetary Fund could measure a country’s macroeconomic balances with “full cost accounting” principles to include so called externalities, thereby incorporating the cost and benefits of environmental services.
- The World Bank could advance from its “Carbon Fund”, to help create a market for a new generation of financial instruments representing “certified tons of carbon fixed”. These instruments would be market tradable like any other commodity, and therefore unleash

the power of markets to promote the fixing of carbon, thus helping mitigate climate change.

2. At the national level:

- Countries in the South and the North could rise to the opportunity of working together to implement the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Agreement, thus helping the challenge of climate change. GEF could stand by to finance the transfer of technology as well as the transition costs.
- Agenda 21 presents many opportunities for countries to align their development paths within the context of sustainability. Efforts that facilitate sharing of national experiences through collaborative efforts with other nations, such as the "Alianza para el Desarrollo Sostenible" subscribed by the Central American countries in 1994, are of the utmost importance.

3. Working at the grass root level:

- Civil Society must continue to advance in the taking on of responsibilities, for as Jonathan Lash of WRI has said: "Sustainable Development is much too important to be left in the hands of governments alone".
- Preparation of individuals to become "leaders in Sustainable Development", such as conducted by the LEAD International Program, and other programs, should be enthusiastically supported.

Ladies and gentlemen:

This detailed "call to action", (and actions are what will render Sustainable Development, sustainable), is at the same time filled with optimism. My forefathers in Latin America witnessed the Industrial Revolution, as one sees a far off train, advancing slowly, smoke pouring from the engine. With much work and true effort, they barely managed to place some of their products (raw materials) on that train.

And so, their access to advancement and development was limited. Today we live in the middle of the Information Technology (IT) Revolution, which instead of resembling another train, has taken the form of a supersonic jet. On this jet we do not wish to load our products (as our forefathers did on the train), but rather get ourselves on it, and become empowered by technology to better cope with the challenges of development. We are changing atoms for bytes, and in so doing, more than ever before, we have the possibility to harness technology for the advancement of sustainability, and to communicate with every person on the planet. This renders us new opportunities to share a vision of Sustainable Development, defend its merits widely with solid arguments, and implement its agenda with leadership!

Thank you all for your attention.