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Global Environmental Action

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Their Imperial Highnesses, the Crown Prince and Princess

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Mr. Gaishi Hiraiwa, Chairman GEA

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Mr. Nitin Desai, Under Secretary General UNDESA

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 Japan, with profound respect for what this nation has accomplished.

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 been even 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 on knowledge.
- Communications will be between us, the people, and not between the places where 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 of a shift in development styles, towards one that is inherently sustainable:

- 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 wish to build, and the societies we wish to live in.
- A development style where macroeconomic balances will no longer be seen as the only road to human development and environmental responsibility, but will share equal weight in the equation of development, together with investment in strategic human development, and the construction of an alliance with nature.

In short, a development style which represents a true cultural change, from those 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. Japan hosted the world for Kyoto 97. In light of this leadership, 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 were the urgent needs of today, would suffice as an argument to take the easy way out. However, we chose to do different. Allow me to share some facts with you:

- In terms of economics:
 - Instead of investing less and generating power with fossil fuels, today 85% of our power is renewable based, and will increase to 100% by the year 2,010.
 - In 1995 we enacted a new forestry law containing our first emission tax: 15% 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.
- 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 we chose to honor our planetary responsibility, by keeping these factories and warehouses were 12% of the world's 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, to facilitate knowledge sharing, research, proper use and proper care. We are convinced that biotechnology will be to the next century, what electronics has been to this ending century.
- In terms of strategic human development:

- o Unlike the majority of 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, and therefore also raising our country's productivity?
- o 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 are implementing Agenda 21, goes on.

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:

- At the international level:
 - o The United Nations could produce new instruments to measure development, in which indicators would adequately reflect the state of advancement of Sustainable Development.
 - o 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 mitigating climate change. The Earth Council has pioneered in these efforts.
- 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 under the leadership of Mohamed El-Ashry, 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. Sharing of national experiences through collaborative efforts with other nations, such as the "Alianza para el Desarrollo Sostenible" subscribed by the Central American countries, is of the utmost importance.
 - Civil Society must continue to step up to its responsibilities, for as Jonathan Lash of WRI has said: "Sustainable Development is much too important to left in the hands of governments alone".
 - Preparation of "leaders in Sustainable Development", such as conducted by the LEAD International Program under the direction of Julia Marton-Lefevre, should be enthusiastically supported.

Ladies and gentlemen:

This detailed "call to action", 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 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. 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.