

World Appeal

'Twenty-five years ago, UNESCO brought together in Paris the representatives of more than 60 governments to define "the scientific basis for rational use and conservation of the resources of the biosphere". It was the first time that all the problems of our environment had been examined at this level; the first time that their global dimensions had been recognized; and the first time that the need was affirmed to reconcile the requirements of exploiting natural resources with those of protecting them for the future. Thus the intergovernmental Conference on The Biosphere, a quarter of a century ago, blazed the trail for what we now call sustainable development.

'This conference gave rise to the Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB), a vast research effort which is today being carried on in over a hundred countries and is helping to guide the management of the terrestrial and aquatic environments. Since 1968, knowledge of the vital mechanisms of the planet has considerably increased. Significant efforts have been made to curb soil degradation and to reduce air and water pollution; national and international institutions have been established; laws and conventions have been adopted. The "Earth Summit", recently held in Rio, showed how public opinion and the attitudes of political leaders have changed with regard to the relationship between environment and development.

'However, new problems have arisen in addition to those which already existed, and there is still a long way to go before they are overcome. Although human inventions are prodigious and the Earth's resources immense, neither is limitless. Three-quarters of the world's population are still experiencing rapid demographic growth, while the other quarter ceaselessly devours raw materials, space, and energy. Everywhere, The Biosphere, which is the sole source and prime pre-condition of our life, is continuing to be subjected to unprecedented pressures arising from our technical power, sheer numbers, and voracity. We know that, in some places, the limits of its endurance have already been exceeded.

'By letting poverty spread in the industrialized countries, we are encouraging the proliferation of inhuman urban sprawls with their concomitant trail of environmental destruction. By closing our eyes to the immense destitution of increasing masses of men, women, and children, in the Third World, we condone the destruction of the resources upon which they depend for survival. In both cases, it is human rights that we are undermining.

'Today, I call on governments world-wide, and on all those who have to take decisions about development and public or private aid, to honour the commitments entered into, especially at Rio, and to promote everywhere, in North and South alike, environmentally friendly and sustainable forms of development, ensuring that all individuals have a quality of life that is at least compatible with human dignity.

'By letting ourselves be drawn into civil and military applications of science over which we do not have complete mastery [or even control], and by being too slow to act in the face of complex or uncertain phenomena that we have not yet wholly understood, we are in danger of unleashing insidious or abrupt ecological catastrophes which will affect both the present and the future of humanity.

'I call on scientists and engineers in all countries, whose generous efforts are needed more than ever before, to observe the same rigour in the ethical sphere of their actions as they do in the conduct of their research.

'By ignoring the immutable rules of the physical, chemical, and biological, world that surrounds and sustains us, we are becoming strangers in our own home and are destroying by negligence or greed the very sources of our subsistence and well-being.

'I call on educators and the media to give young people and the public the keys that will make it possible for them to understand and appreciate the living systems of which we are all a part, and tirelessly to teach the respect that is due to The Biosphere, which is the inseparable complement of the respect we owe to other [and incidentally our whole home and life-support energized by the Sun].

'By causing irreversible damage to the environment, and by squandering the capital that Nature offers us, rather than being content with the product deriving from it, we are alienating the resources and rights of future generations.

'I call today on the young people of all countries to demand of their elders that the processes which keep us alive on Earth should be protected, and to commit themselves to conserve the resources of The Biosphere, so that they can pass on to their descendants the world which they themselves would have liked to have received.

'The technological culture that dominates the world today leads us to forget the "umbilical cord which binds us inextricably to the nourishing Biosphere. I deeply believe that the respect we owe to this unique home of *Homo sapiens** should constitute the common denominator of all cultures and of all human beings. But I likewise believe just as profoundly that human beings will be able to respect The Biosphere and its vital resources only if there is a degree of equity and solidarity among them. Development will be sustainable only if it is sustainable for all the passengers on "spaceship Earth".

'It is for this reason that, on the occasion of the commemoration of the Conference on the Biosphere [and also of the founding of MAB], I am today issuing on behalf of UNESCO this solemn appeal to all governments, to all governmental and non-governmental organizations, to all scientists, engineers, and educators, to all the media, to all the citizens of the world, and to all the young people of all countries in the name of our "common future".'

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* Or, as the speaker's predecessor as the first Director-General of UNESCO jocularly used to call our species, '*Homo misnamed sapiens*', while never forgetting Nature. — Ed.