

Foreword

Maurice Strong

Maurice Strong, who was appointed Secretary-General to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1989, is the leading voice in international environmental and developmental concerns. In 1972 he was active in the organisation of the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment, the predecessor to the Earth Summit.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro early this year offered a unique opportunity to establish the basis for the major shift required to put this planet on the path towards a more secure and sustainable future.

At the core of this shift there is a need for fundamental change. Change to our economic life, a more careful and more caring use of the Earth's resources and greater cooperation and equity in sharing the benefits as well as the risks of our technological civilization. Of particular importance is the need to integrate the ecological dimension into education and culture as well as in economics.

I will mention some of the major Earth Summit achievements:

- Agenda 21 – a comprehensive blueprint for the global actions to affect the transition to sustainable development;
- The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development – a series of principles defining the rights and responsibilities of States in this area;
- A set of principles to support the sustainable management of forests worldwide;
- Two legally binding conventions – aiming to prevent global climate change and the eradication of biologically diverse species – that were signed by representatives of more than 150 countries.

Of course, satisfaction over some of the Earth Summit achievements must be conditioned by what has not yet been achieved. We cannot ignore the reality that some of our goals have been weakened, that we need much stronger commitments on finance, that targets and timetables must be set for conventions to be effective. But overall, Agenda 21 constitutes the most comprehensive and far-reaching programme of action ever approved by the world community.

And the fact that their approval was at the highest political level lends it special authority and importance. For the first time in international politics we have consensus that the future of the planet is at stake if we do not reverse the process of abusing it.

The real measure of success will be in what happens now, after Rio, when government leaders and citizens alike have returned to their countries, to their organizations, to their immediate preoccupations. It is up to all of us to build on the foundations laid by the Earth Summit to ensure that the decisions that have been taken at the global level be translated into national politics and practices at all levels.

A new world order, as we move into the 21st century, must unite us all in a global partnership – which always recognizes and respects the transcending sovereignty of nature, of our only one Earth. We have to make sure that the road from Rio is a fast track, if we are to realise our hope that the United Nations Earth Summit really was a quantum leap forward on that road to sustainable development.