



Triglav Circle

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TRIGLAV CIRCLE

MEETING “ZOOM” OF 24 OCTOBER 2020

Subject: HARMONY WITH NATURE

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The following report is a summary of statements made by participants in the Triglav Circle Zoom meeting of October 24th, 2020. For the full list of participants, see Annex 2. See also the accompanying video, posted on the website <https://www.triglavcircleonline.org/>.

INTRODUCTION

The first “Zoom” gathering of the Triglav Circle took place 24 October 2020. It was hosted by the Mission Numerique du Pays Nivernais Morvan, Burgundy, France. The subject for discussion was “Harmony with Nature.” Before reporting on the debate, it is appropriate to recall the origins of the Circle and of its concern for Harmony with Nature.¹

The Circle was established to pursue the discourse begun in the Seminar on Ethical and Spiritual Dimensions of Social Development convened in Bled, Slovenia, in October 1994, in preparation for the United Nations World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen, March 1995. Nine participants drew up a constitution for the Triglav Circle which was incorporated in the United States as a non-profit organization in March 1998. Then, as of May 2001, the Circle became a non-governmental organization (NGO) in “special consultative status” with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations. With this status, it has the possibility to attend meetings of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies and there to deliver oral and written statements. In June 2010, the Triglav Circle was also established as “Cercle Triglav—Europe,” an Association under the French law of 1901.

The Circle seeks to enrich the public discourse on global policies with moral and spiritual perspectives drawn from universal values. It focuses on questions pertaining to development, social justice, environment and nature, notably in relation to globalization and the normative work of the United Nations.² The Circle has long been concerned with the perceived need for a holistic approach to development issues in view of the deterioration of the world’s environment resulting from industrial expansion, trade and globalization. It has held a number of gatherings on this topic and began to focus specifically on harmony with nature in 2011 when the member of the UN staff responsible for this subject attended the meeting and invited the Circle to participate in the elaboration of the Zero draft for the 2012 World Conference on Environment and Development [Rio + 20]. The Circle’s work on this topic is documented in the Triglav website <https://www.triglavcircleonline.org>. See the Concern “Harmony with Nature.”

Initially the Circle considered “sustainable development” as the concept that would bring about the strengthening of interdisciplinary linkages between different branches of knowledge and the facilitation of developing more comprehensive policies. Sustainable development was elaborated in the much-respected report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, otherwise known as the Brundtland Commission³. These expectations were buttressed by scientists and publicized in books and articles.

¹The website of the Circle is <http://www.triglavcircleonline.org>. Harmony with Nature is one of the six concerns featured on the site.

²In the Triglav site, see ‘United Nations’ and ‘Activities’ in the main menu.

³See *Our Common Future*, The World Commission on Environment and Development, Oxford University Press, 1987.

Under the aegis of the United Nations and also at the regional level, not only were declarations of intention to put sustainable development in practice made but a number of legally binding treaties were adopted. Quite a few countries--albeit not amongst the most populated, nor the economically and strategically powerful,-- established effective domestic environmental policies, at the same time respecting their international obligations. As years passed following the Rio Conference in 1992 and the adoption of Agenda 21, sustainable development became a common catchphrase and traditional economic policies continued to expand at the global as well as the national levels.

Thus members of the Circle offered enthusiastic support for the General Assembly's resolution entitled Harmony with Nature, adopted in 2009 in which Member States and international and regional organizations were invited (1) "to consider, as appropriate, the issue of promoting life in harmony with nature and to transmit to the Secretary-General their views, experiences and proposals on this issue;" and (2) "to make use of International Mother Earth Day, as appropriate, to promote activities and exchange views on conditions, experiences and principles for a life in harmony with nature." Also, the Assembly decided to include in the provisional agenda for its 2010 session a sub-item entitled Harmony with Nature under the item Sustainable Development and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on this theme.⁴

As stated on the UN website for Harmony with Nature: "Devising a new world requires a new relationship with the Earth and with humankind's existence. Since 2009, the aim of the General Assembly, in adopting its annual resolutions on Harmony with Nature, has been to define this association based on a non-anthropocentric relationship with Nature. The resolutions contain different perspectives regarding the construction of a new, non-anthropocentric paradigm in which the fundamental basis for right and wrong action concerning the environment is grounded not solely in human concerns.

In 2011, on the basis of a substantive report of the Secretary-General, the Assembly identified key elements of the concept of harmony with nature. The concern was "the documented environmental degradation and the negative impact on nature resulting from human activity." The objective was "to promote a holistic approach to sustainable development in harmony with nature." Recognized also was the fact that "many ancient civilizations and indigenous cultures have a rich history in understanding the symbiotic connection between human beings and nature that fosters a mutually beneficial relationship." "The work undertaken by civil society, academia and scientists in regard to

⁴ See in the site of the United Nations, General Assembly, Documents, Resolutions, Sixty-fourth session, Resolution 64/196, Harmony with Nature, 21 December 2009, operative paragraphs 1-4. The sponsors of this resolution were the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the Republic of Ecuador. These same states had also sponsored a few months before Resolution 63/278 of 20 April 2009 designating the 20th of April as International Mother Earth Day.

signaling the precariousness of life on Earth, as well as their efforts to devise a more sustainable model for production and consumption,” was also recognized.

A major step in this direction was further reaffirmed in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (2012), entitled "The Future WeWant." ... *“We recognize that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that "Mother Earth" is a common expression in a number of countries and regions, and we note that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development.”*⁵

Initially activities on ‘harmony with nature’ had to be accomplished at no additional cost for the regular budget of the United Nations. In particular, no new post could be created. Accordingly, in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in New York, only one person in the professional category was given the task of implementing the resolutions of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature. Today, this situation is not markedly changed in terms of allotted resources but the work of the UN on Harmony with Nature, despite limited resources, is remarkable. It suffices to look at the latest resolution of the Assembly on the subject⁶ and at the relevant websites, including Facebook,⁷ to measure the quantity and quality of the work done.

Apart from the production of informative reports and the organization of “interactive dialogues” in the General Assembly, an impressive network of persons competent in various disciplines and various types of activity, called the Harmony with Nature Knowledge Network, was created. Designated experts and other interested persons now feed the Secretariat with information and disseminate world-wide their ideas and savoir-faire enriched by their cooperation in the United Nations.

A challenge for the United Nations is to give increasing attention to nature as compared to the environment. The Circle has been working to that end, just as the UN office concerned with this subject has been. Since 2011, the Triglav Circle has participated actively in this endeavor, notably through a number of its participants and its coordinator. Statements were delivered in interactive dialogues and contributions were made to documents, for example on Earth Jurisprudence.⁸

But work toward building a renewed model for a healthy relationship between humankind and nature has so far had little influence on the most recent major agreement negotiated and adopted at the headquarters of the United Nations, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

⁶ Resolution 75/220, Harmony with Nature, 21 December 2020.

⁷ See www.harmonywithnatureun.org/trustFund.

⁸ See <https://www.triglavcircleonline.org> Refer directly to the Concern: Harmony With Nature where the details of the Circles contributions are presented chronologically.

Development.⁹ There are three mentions of the words harmony with nature, including, more importantly, a target referring to this concept but the political philosophy that permeates the text is familiar.¹⁰

Today, however, the ideas developed in the United Nations by the work on harmony with nature are no longer marginal. 'Nature' is increasingly present in the spirit of the time. As detailed in the latest Report of the Secretary-General on Harmony with Nature, in a growing number of countries and in different domains, ranging from law to education, nature is becoming the *ultima ratio* of decisions taken at the local and even national level.¹¹ And, most importantly, now widely shared is the realization that the continuing deterioration of the health of planet Earth is threatening the future of humankind.

And, in a speech at Columbia University, New York, on 2 December 2020, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said, "humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal and nature is already striking back with growing force and fury. Consequently, making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century." Based on data from the latest reports of UNEP¹² and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), this speech describes the alarming state of the planet, summarizes the positive and negative aspects of the measures currently taken, and outlines what ought to be done urgently. Concerning the pandemic, the following sentence ought to be particularly highlighted: "We have a chance to not simply reset the world economy but to transform it." Large extracts of this speech are given in Annex I of this report.

⁹ Resolution A/RES/70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 25 September 2015. These 35 pages text contains: Preamble (2 pages), Declaration (10 pages), Sustainable Goals and Targets (15 pages), Means of implementation and the Global Partnership (8 pages).

¹⁰ These three mentions are: (1) "We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature." Page 2 Preamble under "Prosperity"; (2) "We envisage a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth (...) A world in which (...) One in which development and the application of technology (...) One in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected." Declaration, paragraph 9, Page 4; (3) "By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature." Target 12.8 of Goal 12, Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Paragraph 59, page 23.

¹¹ General Assembly, Seventy-fifth session, Harmony with Nature, Report of the Secretary-General, and Supplement, A/75/266, 28 July 2020. This report was forwarded to the participants before this meeting.

¹² The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created in 1972 as recommended by the United Nations Conference on Human Development held in Stockholm that same year. UNEP is a "programme," that is an entity which is much more than a department of the central Secretariat of the UN and less than a specialized agency of the UN system, such as WHO, UNESCO or the WMO. A Programme has its own source of funding (in 2020, the budget of UNEP was 460,8 million dollars and 95 per cent of it was from voluntary contributions). Its head, the Executive Director, is elected by the UN General Assembly on recommendation of the Secretary-General of the UN, and reports to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA).

PART ONE:
CAUSES OF THE MULTIPLE INJURIES INFLICTED TO PLANET EARTH

Texts resulting from the diplomatic interplay among nations of unequal power and divergent interests do not usually lead to significant cultural and political changes, but not so the texts on Harmony with Nature, which indicate the aforementioned, that nature is increasingly present in the spirit of the time. Even before the pandemic a strong interest in everything considered relating to nature was a sign of a different trend as detailed in the 2020 Report of the Secretary-General on Harmony with Nature.¹³

Yet, globally, from climate warming to the loss of biodiversity, from pollution of the oceans and seas to pollution of the atmosphere, all indicators are in the red. What causes this collective failure? How pertinent is the assumption at the origin of this meeting that the different philosophies and policies attached to the concepts of “environment” and “nature” play a decisive role?

An introductory presentation pointed out that nature had been lost in environmental politics. Nature was absorbed in the concept of environment and its intrinsic value was forgotten. And a premium was placed on the instrumental value of nature’s resources, with dire consequences for nature and for its inseparable part of it, humankind. Symptoms of disharmony abound. And policies have treated these symptoms one by one in denial of the holism that defines nature.

This introduction compared differences in the overall approach to nature as a holistic concept with physical and metaphysical dimensions as against scientism’s vision of the environment as humankind’s physical surroundings of artifacts, landscapes, and natural resources. Nature is much more than the environment. In its largest sense it has been defined and described by philosophers and physicists as a phenomenon of infinite interconnected parts woven together in the intricate web of life’s biosphere and linked to the universe. It needs to be sensed, experienced, reasoned and otherwise instinctively understood as well as objectively studied as a life science. In other words, to appreciate nature is a philosophical, spiritual, poetic, aesthetic, legal and ethological quest as well as a scientific one. Values and principles as well as ethical horizons should guide people in their interactions with Nature. A multidisciplinary education that includes the humanities, the natural sciences, and the arts directed to the ‘head’ and the ‘heart’ of humanity is perhaps the best way to gain appreciation for and desire to protect nature.

Not so for the environment: there are multiples of slices of environments defined and delimited depending on where groups of people are rooted. The environment on the scale of the planet is a mass of different natural resources, some of which are useful, but increasingly

¹³General Assembly, Seventy-fifth session, Harmony with Nature, Report of the Secretary-General, and Supplement, A/75/266, 28 July 2020. This report was forwarded to the participants before this meeting.

polluted or exhausted and of different forms of life over which human beings are supposed to have dominion. But biodiversity is rapidly disappearing because of over exploitation and climate change. The natural and social sciences are called to the rescue.

An ethic of fear would seem less effective in driving an effective socio-economic solution to damages inflicted on nature's useful resources or the 'environment' than an inspired ethic of sustained empathy that might lead humanity to relevant sources of knowledge including metaphysical and natural sciences and their applications in global and local policies. Common sense tells us such thinking and motivations require a radical change in humanity's current mindset.

Some years ago, Vaclav Havel expressed the challenge and promise of such thinking.: "Only humankind's understanding of its place in the overall order of existence ... will allow the development of new models of behavior, new scales of values and objectives in life, and through these means to finally bind a new spirit and meaning to specific regulations, treaties and institutions."¹⁴

At the root of modernity is alienation from nature

We must first ask ourselves what characterizes modernity. To a large extent, modernity is based on alienation from nature. Fundamental to the way the world has evolved, particularly the Western world, is the degree to which success, fulfillment, happiness, even in a sense spirituality, have been associated with technological progress. And nature was there to be used, not to be harmonized with. Alienation from nature is embedded in the sensibility of modernity. Until we adopt a critical perspective on this aspect of our modern dominant culture, it will be very hard to move beyond the very selective sensibility that we apply to our relations with nature. That's why pre-modern worldviews are very relevant. In the outlook of indigenous people there was –and there still is recognition that nature was sustaining them and that they were sustaining nature. There was a reciprocity that has been lost in modernity.

Jacques Derrida once said, "we are inevitably living together on the planet; the real challenge is how do we live together well on the planet". We have come to the point where living together well means living more ecologically, less anthropocentrically. Perhaps that will not bring complete harmony with nature and acknowledge enough the dignity of nature, but it is a lesser and achievable utopia. It means in post-modernity a new kind of connectedness, the wholeness and sacredness of nature as a product of living together in a sustainable way on the planet. It means overcoming the belief that technology and technological innovations are the secret to a greater human happiness and human progress. One needs to understand that technology is a curse as well as a source of problem-solving transcending some of the difficulties of nature.

¹⁴I. Havel, A Markos, eds. *Is There a Purpose in Nature?* Vesmir, Semily, Czech Republic, 2002. 11.

The atomic bomb awakened people to the contradictions of technology that the Greeks understood. Part of the Prometheus myth was that there are certain things that the humans handle at their risk. Humanity rejected that kind of Promethean wisdom and believed that progress as the result of alienation from nature. And monotheistic religions largely incorporated that kind of alienation. With few exceptions, for example, St Francis of Assisi, one has the sense that religions adapted to the flow of history, and this history is dominated by the western initiation of modernity and with it the alienation of nature.¹⁵

Modernity ignores the spiritual dimension of nature

Nature has a spiritual dimension and humankind has a spiritual relation with nature. This evidence has been totally forgotten and totally absent from all the political debates, conferences and agreements that have taken place since the question of the environment found its place on the international agenda. And this is why the health of our planet continues to deteriorate. Without the understanding of humankind's spiritual relationship with nature and without the realization that it is part of this amazing nature, it will never be able to protect itself and nature. Human is one with nature. Rationalism, materialism, indeed modernity itself has separated humanity from nature. Putting ourselves above nature we have treated it as a reservoir of resources at our disposal.

How can humankind move beyond this terrible mistake and find once again its true relationship with nature? Obstacles are enormous, as huge cities continue to grow, as industrial agriculture continues to dominate, and as our children and grandchildren are more and more immersed in a virtual world. Individually, we can reconcile ourselves with nature through experience, through direct acquaintance with nature. Starting from childhood and pursuing this question adulthood, including when assuming important public responsibilities, is a blessed opportunity. The practice of direct contact with nature is a source of balance, of harmony with the self and with the world. Meditation in nature is part of this experience. This is the subject of the book *Méditer avec la Nature*.¹⁶ It is an experience, simultaneously physical, emotional and spiritual. With practice, taking time to distance oneself from daily occupations enables one to feel and understand the spiritual reality of nature. There is no need for theorizing this relation with nature. To experience it is the key. And when one succeeds in reaching the hem of this spiritual reality, one cannot make decisions that will harm nature. It has become part of oneself.

¹⁵The tradition initiated by St Francis of Assisi is now the official doctrine of the Catholic Church and of the other main Christian churches. See in particular the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis issued in May 2015, *Laudato Si' Our Care for Our Common Home*, Published by The World Among Us, Frederick, Maryland, USA

¹⁶ Philippe Roch, *Méditer dans la nature*, 2015, Ed. Jouvence; see also by the same author, *Ma spiritualité au coeur de la nature*, 2019, Ed. Jouvence.

Conversations on this subject with people of different nationalities and cultures show that such a relationship with nature can be widely shared, including with persons from diverse religions and spiritual traditions. In fact, every human being is able to experience spiritual unity with nature, but, in modern societies, only a minority find themselves in circumstances that make this possible. And for those who have this privilege, humility and openness of mind and heart are *sine qua non* conditions. In the sharing thereof is joy. We must share, live, exchange. Despite the smallness of an individual's actions, they are yet significant contributions to the huge task of restoring a healthy relation between man and nature. But they have to be done in full awareness that the translation from an individual's ideas and actions up to the collective and political level of decision-making is currently problematic, even obtruded.

Power and profit are put above respect for nature

Ancient religions had a very different relation with nature. They dignified and deified the various elements of nature: air, sun, water, fire...They had a direct relationship with the soil. When Western monotheistic theocracies appeared, they had a tendency to invalidate these beliefs. They called them paganism and replaced them by elaborating dogmas that promoted the 'economy' as the way of relating man to nature. Ancient peoples, however, believed that man belonged to the earth, the western concept of the 'divine right of kings' evolved in a way that reduced nature to real estate for personal ownership and for profit. It was a complete reversal of the previous attitude of nature to be enjoyed for its intrinsic value and it has rapidly and thoroughly dominated the world. Nature is reduced to its instrumental value. When Kenneth Galbraith was asked what the difference between the macro-economic models of capitalism and communism was, he famously replied that capitalism was a system where man exploits man, and communism was exactly the opposite...Indeed, there is still no difference in this regard between different countries with different political regimes: those in power exploit those who are powerless. And powerless nature is also exploited. Developed nations place the economy over ecology, the principle of profit over all other principles, and this applies not only to the economy but to the treatment of major issues such as climate change and the Covid pandemic.

In education nature gets short shrift. The environmental sciences are supported because they are relatable to economics. They fit into economic models. When we think of programs and curriculums in education, people at least in the United States, generally think of colleges. But education on nature should start at the pre-secondary level, when minds are malleable and when the young form their core principles. There are examples, such as the Bio - Centric School in Turin Italy. It is for this age-group that we should be targeting our efforts. We should design programs that speak to them. They are the next generation to be in power.

Utilitarianism and its wrong conception of happiness lead to disharmony with nature

Focused on power and profit, treating nature as a resource and an instrument, modernity has another characteristic: Notably through omnipresent advertising, it propagates the identification of happiness with more and more consumption of goods and more and more possession of things, those “goods” being increasingly diversified and processed and those “things” being rapidly renewed because of their programmed obsolescence or fragility. And such a conception of happiness is grafted on the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham summed up in the motto: “The greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.” Measured by the gross domestic product it is the *ultima ratio* of the economic policy of most governments, and as such begets the damages inflicted to planet Earth. As a goal, it is obviously unattainable. For a growing world population, and if one takes into account the welfare of future generations, as should imperatively be done, it becomes an absurdity. Suffice to note that, on average, human beings consume fifteen times more resources than what is necessary for their survival. For each of us, this is close to the level of consumption of an elephant. Let’s imagine 7.8 billion elephants in the world, and 9.9 billion by mid twenty-first century! Equally obvious, happiness never results from an unremitting pursuit of goods, possessions and pleasures. Thus, as interpreted and lived in modern times, the utilitarian philosophy leads to disharmony with the self and with nature.

The conquest of nature through technological innovations is a mistake

Today, humankind interdependence with Nature takes the form of a crisis. There is a rebellion of Nature against human beings. In Japan, a number of devastating disasters occurred between 2017 and 2020. The media noted that such disasters were far beyond scientific assumptions and even beyond imagination. There were heavy rains, a wide range of floods, a violent typhoon, an earthquake, and landslides. All these disasters were attributed to global warming. And, as we know, global warming is a product of human economic activities. We tried to conquer nature with our technological innovations, but in vain. We must recognize that we are part of nature. We must rethink our attitude towards nature. At present, the structure of humankind circumstance is threefold: (1) nature, including cosmic space, (2) technology, and (3) culture, with its historical roots. “Subjectivity” is at the meeting-point of these three elements. It is the *topos* (core or place) of their dynamic relationships. And subjective interests for nature, for technology and for culture are activated by “intentionality.” In Japanese thought, human interdependence with nature is particularly strong. This is well illustrated in *The Book of Teaby Okakura Kakuzō* (1906).

A characteristic feature of the 20th century is technological abstraction. Technology reduces the time necessary for achieving economic results. Technological innovations increase the conveniences of daily life. But “punctuality” interferes with “temporality”, the essential core

of human beings. And human beings become a part of machinery. This was the theme of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. It was also conceptualized by Gabriel Marcel, notably in *Etre et Avoir*. The late philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi wrote: "Humans are creating various machines that have structures totally inconceivable in nature and are trying to bring nature under their complete control. Human beings not only occupy the dominant position in nature but are also overpowering it and interposing machinery between nature and themselves." The result is "dehumanization" through "detemporalization." Nature "awaits maturation." Technology is "rushing about," always "in motion." Nature is waiting. Nature is the teacher of "waiting and enduring." Only by making the inner selves of humankind calm, can the meaning of waiting be understood. "Stressing temporality means emulating nature's waiting stance. This fosters the patience to wait for the unfolding of time (zeitigen), as well as an awareness of waiting."

Imamichi launched Eco-ethica, "an ethics that learns from nature," that sees "the individual as a being of dignity, with great value" and not separated from the next generation. In Eco-ethica, "individualism lies in the virtue of valuing others as much as oneself." And this leads to the cosmopolitan ideal of world citizenship, an ideal formulated in recent years particularly by the Danish philosopher Peter Kemp. If we were to give a definition of the citizen of the world one could say that he or she is a person who understands himself or herself as a citizen of two societies: the national society into which he or she is born and accepted, and the universal society to which he or she belongs simply by virtue of belonging to humanity. This only makes sense if it is assumed that there are duties associated with being a citizen of the world, just as there are duties attached to citizenship in a state. In both, rights are inseparable from duties. Moreover, world citizenship makes sense only if, in one way or another, it is superior to state citizenship.

Conservation policies are often short-term and separated from their context

The world is in the midst of a series of crises – political, economic, ecological and now health – and underlying all of them is a crisis in values. But, working on a number of projects at the intersection of nature and ethics and involving public and private actors, national and international organizations, one cannot help noticing a concentration of short-term and at best medium-term strategies and actions. The long-term perspective is generally missing. And without it, various important projects and policies are not likely to be effective, because they ignore the deep changes in behavior and values required of a large portion, even the majority of the world population. Societies are confronted with related problems but deal with them separately.

A number of conservation projects provide good examples of this wrong approach. Protected areas are created here and there, often with military surveillance, in countries marked by colonialism. These areas are a sort of luxury. People around them are in extreme

poverty. Their lands have been purchased and they remain under economic domination. Specific issues of the environment become entangled with globalization, capitalism, racialism and imperialism. And one may ask: Protected areas? Protected by whom? From what? And for what?

One must turn things upside down, rethink new forms of conservation, considering first people who live in areas selected for conservation efforts; their traditions, their values and their needs. “Experts” have to listen to them and learn from them. In Africa, projects locally thought through and managed are often very successful, notably for maintaining high level of biodiversity. Conservationists are more and more aware of the need for a multidimensional view. The place of values has to be explicitly recognized. We need to be using nature, not exploiting it. One has to be aware of the intrinsic value of nature. The pandemic is a result of exploitation and manipulation of nature. With all the deaths and suffering it causes, it gives societies an opportunity to reset their values. But the window is short.

Development and urbanization destroy the relations of humankind with nature

In Africa, nature, with its majestic rivers and wild animals, is defined and perceived as beauty and wilderness. Its huge and sometimes threatening physical characteristics are associated with spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of great importance in the traditional culture. For instance, communication with ancestors is usually organized in natural settings. Given this traditional context modern urbanization and its associated economic activity, including consumerism, makes maintaining harmony with nature an excessively challenging objective.

Cities are developing fast in ways contrary to respect for nature and its resources. Housing projects, transportation, energy sources, waste treatments and other necessities of urban life are cases in point. For example, the use of wood as a major source of fuel has led to great destruction of forests and savannas. A second difficulty is that urban environmental issues are of concern to many actors, but programs and policies are essentially aimed at rural areas, notably in the domains of agriculture, mining and tourism. Thirdly, urban dwellers are not well informed and often not even aware of the damages inflicted on nature. And, in consumer societies, nature is easily ignored by corporations, citizens, and even public authorities as profits and the satisfaction of needs are priorities whereas the well-being of all and of future generations is jeopardized.

Among the necessary steps to advance towards an understanding and realization of harmony with nature are the following:

In public discourse and policies, it is important to refer to both nature and to the environment, giving equal weight and consideration to these two concepts;

In the diverse sources of information and in all educational programs, problems pertaining to nature should be highlighted to stimulate the interest and further the knowledge of all, particularly the urban population;

To promote and implement a 'green economy' and 'green growth', a broad spectrum of measures, including tax incentives, ought to be adopted by political and financial institutions.

The Covid 19 virus has not spared Africa. How is it affecting humankind's relationship with Nature? The current pandemic could and should be used to generate a fundamental change in relations between humankind and nature. It has shown that people can reduce emissions of CO₂ by reducing their propensity to travel frequently and for no imperative reason. Teleconferences are convenient substitutes. The closing of borders, useful during this pandemic, was also useful for stopping the illegal wildlife trade.

In Africa people who lost their urban jobs are returning to their rural homes, thus increasing the pressure on natural resources. Illegal mining for gold and precious stones is on the rise. Gold has become a kind of "refuge value." These issues and many others revealed or created by the pandemic should generate a collective determination to act rapidly and decisively. We should be wiser in the manner we interact with animals, as it appears that 60 per cent of new infectious diseases generate in animals. We must build more resilient systems, notably for production, putting environmental preservation and restoration at the center of policies to recover from COVID 19.

PART TWO:
STEPS TOWARDS AN END OF DISHARMONY WITH NATURE

Rights of Nature?

A positive answer to this question was based on the notion of dignity and its link with the notion of rights. Dignity is the notion upon which the attribution of rights to nature has to be grounded. To make progress in the struggle to control the continuing deterioration of the health of the planet, nature, the object being dealt with must be recognized as a subject. And our capacity to deal with “it” as a subject needs to be developed. When the question of rights became part of the public debate in the 17th century, notably with Grotius, dignity also came up for discussion and, since that time, rights and dignity have been linked, including in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

There is dignity inherent in nature, just as there is dignity in the rest of the created universe. From this dignity, in the case of human beings, there flow rights. In the same way, we can derive rights for nature from its dignity. When we say that we have to treat nature in such and such a manner, it is a subjective form of demonstrating that nature has a request and has a right to be treated in a particular way. If I have empathy with nature, or respect, or love for nature I am regarding nature as a subject comparable to myself. In fact, large parts of our discourse about nature, when unraveled and grounded, lead to the assumption that we are treating nature as if it has dignity.

Before Grotius, the origin of this idea of dignity goes back, *inter alia*, to the Bible, and it is in the creation of man in the image of God that many thinkers discern the attribution of dignity to man. In exactly the same way, *pari passu*, nature, as created by the divinity, would also have dignity, as a reflection of that divinity. There is no inherent line or barrier between human dignity and nature’s dignity, and it would be very hard to argue that such a barrier could be built. This line of thinking was adopted by many poets, from Woodworth to Emerson and to Whitman, and it is Goethe who first characterized dignity as the capacity to grow, develop and unfold. Such characteristics of dignity are to be found in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in the German Constitutional Law, or Basic Law of the Federal Republic of Germany. Article 1 of this Basic Law derives human rights from human dignity and in a decision from 25 February 1975 the German Constitutional Court¹⁷ that the fetus “is life” and that, in accordance with Article 2 of the Basic Law, the state is “obligated

¹⁷This decision struck down abortion Reform Act of 1974 by declaring that fetus was “life,” and that abortion was “an act of killing.” But this did not mean that fetal life must always prevail over claims of the pregnant predicament, could be performed by a licensed physician and needed not to be punished. Further decisions, notably the Court’s Abortion Case of 1993, greatly “liberalized” abortion, but it remains an “act of killing.” For a remarkable commentary on this subject, see Donald P. Kommers, *The Constitutional Law of Abortion in Germany: Should Americans Pay Attention?* Notre Dame Law School, Journal Articles, 1994.

to protect and foster this life”.¹⁸ We are dealing, here, with a being, the fetus, which is unable to assert its rights itself. In its condition within the womb, it is not unlike certain other natural bodies. And what we have found here is a very important starting point for taking nature as a legal entity whose protection is required by the law to protect its identity and its life, just like a fetus.

Although this line of reasoning starting with the connection between dignity and rights was not specifically debated, the attribution of rights to nature raised a number of objections.

Part of the whole notion of rights is anthropocentric. Dominated by the western liberal tradition, rights are associated not only with the collective experience of humanity but with the individual. Some philosophers, for example Peter Singer some time ago, talked about animal rights. But it was from the perspective of man, as a duty of humans to animals, an attitude based on the otherness of nature, on this alienation of nature which is defining modernity. There is us, and there is nature, including animals. Apart from other difficulties, the attribution of rights to nature would be in the same logic.

To respect and protect nature, to use natural resources without overusing them, law is very important. Law is in fact indispensable. To the same end, values and attitudes, such as the appreciation of the beauty of a flower, of a tree, of a landscape, of a sunset, are also essential. We are part of nature, and we should draw all the consequences of this fundamental aspect of the human condition. But a long experience in public law leads to the conviction that to give legal personality to animals and *a fortiori* to inanimate objects would be a mistake. It would raise issues of great complexity and in legal matters ‘what is too complicated does not work.’

Reverence, respect, more humility in our relations with nature, is indeed, critical. These relations cannot be meaningfully reduced to rights. The logic of giving rights to nature would be to appoint an ombudsman to represent and defend those rights. But this would be a display of hubris. It would distort the notion of rights and its important dimension of trying to organize life in our societies in a more decent manner and to establish a more humane form of governance in the world. A right would lose its significance as protection against

¹⁸ Title I of the German Basic Law: “Basic rights. Article 1 (Human Dignity – Human Rights – Legally binding force of basic rights). (1) Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority. (2) The German people therefore acknowledge inviolable and inalienable human right as the basis of every community, of peace and justice in the world. (3) The following basic rights shall bind the legislature, the executive and the judiciary as directly applicable law”. This very precise and elaborate Title I has nineteen articles. Article 14 (Property – Inheritance – Expropriation), (2) may be noted, notably in relation with the forthcoming meeting of the Circle on the Common Good: “Property entails obligations. Its use shall also serve the public good.”

abuses. The rights of nature would be a metaphorical use of the notion of right that would shift the character of certain beings in such a way as to confuse the significance of reality.

A related difficulty with the “rights” of nature is that it is hardly possible to talk of rights without at the same time recognizing that somebody else has an obligation to observe those rights, to comply with them. The two have to go together. Rights do not make sense unless you have somebody to enjoy them and somebody to abide by them, to be accountable for breaching them. The human rights movement was initiated precisely for that reason: that it was the obligation, the duty of governments to observe these rights. Since nature is not a sentient being, this relation between the recipient and the provider does not exist. And one cannot assign duties to nature. We cannot ask nature to check if we humans are observing its rights. It is preferable to take a different approach than the rights of nature to achieve the desired objective: a radically different relation of humankind with nature. Let’s insist on our duties towards nature. Let’s elaborate these duties, let’s take them seriously, and it will not be necessary to go beyond. Also, it ought to be noted that it is very easy to use this notion of rights for others besides humans for acts of political aggression. For example, in India there are people who talk about cow protection. One may think that this is harmless, that these people only have in mind the rights of their cattle. But they are using that as an instrument for attacking other communities.

The last formulated objection was that if nature has rights, in which court will these rights be upheld? The notion of right is a human construct. There are no courts in which nature can take humankind to task for its abuse of nature. Therefore, whether those “rights” of nature will be treated as real or remain theoretical, is a rather academic question. Or this notion of giving rights to nature will be treated metaphorically.

Responses to these objections to the attribution of rights to nature were first directed to the absence of a competent court.

Yes indeed, presently there is no such court. But, to mention only one precedent, it was the same situation at the end of World War II, in 1945, when the victorious allies wanted to prosecute the war criminals of Nazi Germany and Japan. The idea of an international criminal court had been debated for several decades but not implemented. That inspired the allies to establish *ad hoc* military tribunals in Nuremberg and later in Tokyo. These courts did their work and even began to apply the new concept of crimes against humanity. It then took half a century for creation of the International Criminal Court, in Rome, in 2002. Good ideas often take time to mature.

A related objection was that the concept of the right of nature raises many difficulties, theoretical and practical. But, again, this is not a valid argument. It was difficult to go to the moon. It was difficult to start elaborating and implementing environmental laws. And today this remains very difficult. Rather than to throw away the idea of nature’s rights, would it

not be better to accept the validity of the concept to help like-minded environmentalists facing difficulties ranging from fierce opposition to indifference? Also, in the current context of frequent contempt for the rule of law and of widespread indifference to international law, every effort to develop legal instruments should be welcome. Everything should be done to prevent the emergence of a lawless world.

The fundamental point in the objection that the notion of rights require two sentient beings was a rejection of the treatment of nature as a subject – a subject, like the fetus, unable to communicate, but nonetheless a subject - which was a key element in the reasoning starting with the link between dignity and rights and concluding with the attribution of rights to nature. To illustrate this point, it was added that obviously nature could not be expected to perform duties. And it was further noted that rights and duties do not necessarily go together. For many years, rights were debated without reference to obligations. Perhaps rights and duties are logically linked, but *de facto* they are not.

Lastly, at the end of this debate on the rights of nature, it was pointed out that such discussion was largely academic because the rights of nature had already been recognized in a number of countries and for a variety of specific situations. Far from been metaphorical, the right of nature was a reality.

In a statement made in another session of this meeting, this affirmation was documented and reference was made to evidence provided by the United Nations that the rights of nature are currently recognized in a growing number of countries. In the past decade, legislation and policies on the rights of Nature¹⁹ have been either adopted or under work in 35 countries. In Ecuador, which was the first nation to grant constitutional rights to Nature in 2008, provincial courts in 2019 invoked the rights of Nature to render three decisions,²⁰ prohibiting mining in two of them and genetically modified crops in the third. In Colombia, comparable decisions were rendered, notably to recognize rivers as subjects of rights. In Brazil, the Superior Court of Justice made the same decision for a parrot of the Amazonian Forest and a city municipal chamber adopted a law granting rights to Nature. Although without specific mention of these rights of nature, various authorities in India, Nigeria and the Netherlands rendered decisions granting special rights to a lake, a river and an interior sea. In the United States, the councils of the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin and the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho passed resolutions recognizing the rights of the Menominee River and

¹⁹ It might be noted that the capitalization of Nature was recognized by the General Assembly and incorporated in its resolution 73/235 on Harmony with Nature adopted on 20 December 2018.

²⁰ Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, Preamble, third paragraph: “Celebrating Nature, the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) of which we are a part and which is vital to our existence”; and in Title I, Rights, chapter 7, Rights of nature, has four detailed articles starting with the attribution to nature of “the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structures, functions and evolutionary processes” and “the right to be restored.” Also, “All persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature.”

the Snake River. The latter is “a living entity that has rights, including the rights to exist, flourish, evolve, flow and regenerate and the right to restoration.”²¹

The same report of the United Nations indicates that in some countries – Australia, El Salvador, Mexico, Philippines, and Sweden – initiatives have been made in 2019 and 2020 to imitate Ecuador and integrate the rights of nature in their constitutions or national legislations. In Sweden, the proposal made by the Green Party to include the rights of Nature in the Constitution specifies that these rights are “the right to naturally exist, thrive, regenerate and evolve; the rights to restoration, recovery and conservation; and the right to perform its natural functions.”²² These words, similar to those of the Ecuadorian legislators and Native Americans of Idaho and Wisconsin, also closely recall the three characteristics that Goethe attached to the dignity of nature: to grow, to develop and to unfold.

The moral arc of the universe and sustainable empathy

In 1957, in Monterey, California, a young preacher from Alabama, who was leading the Montgomery bus strike, said: “The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” This young preacher was Martin Luther King Jr. It was such a hopeful message that Barack Obama, then US Senator from Illinois, incorporated this phrase in a speech he delivered in 2008. And indeed, if we believe this, we have to believe that there is something that is driving it, something of a spiritual nature. In October 2020, as the end of the presidential campaign in the United States is approaching, this “something” that should and will bend the moral arc of the universe towards justice, not only in the United States, but in the world, is empathy. And, even more so, it will be sustainable empathy.

One of the regrets of the generation of civil rights leaders in the United States is that the gains realized in the 1950s and 1960s have been eroded in subsequent years. The forces, spiritual and material, that drove the civil rights movement in the 1960s, drove the gender revolution of the 1970s and then flattened. Much of the progress made has actually been reversed, most significantly in the last five years. Voting rights, for example, have diminished. It is today difficult to register and to execute one’s vote. This demonstrates clear erosion of the progress made up until 1965, with the Voting Rights Act, an Act that has now been largely shattered by the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Roberts who was appointed by President Reagan. In other areas where remarkable progress had been made, we have come to a standstill or a regression.

²¹ For these various examples, see pages 10-12, paragraphs 54-64 of Harmony with Nature, Report of the Secretary-General, A/75/266, 28 July 2020.

²² Ibid, section B. Key ongoing legislative processes, page 12, paragraphs 65-72; paragraph 72 for the example of Sweden.

But, in recent months, the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd by a policeman in Minneapolis have given rise to an era of empathy. And the candidate of the Democratic Party for the presidential election, Joseph Biden, has introduced empathy into the political discourse with sincerity, conviction, skill and force. He has put himself in the shoes of all urban poor. For example, by referring to his humble beginnings, he has created a platform to move forward, regain the progress made before and even extend it further.

In the 1960s and 1970s we, civil rights activists, were identifying issues not only of police brutality or interrelations between people of color and minority groups, but also issues such as environmental justice.

Police brutality and destruction of the environment are intertwined, yesterday and today, in ways that it would be most important to clarify.

But, within the limits of this intervention, the point that has to be emphasized is that we saw clearly in the 2000s, and particularly in the last six months, thanks to technology, facts that we suspected but we had not actually seen. And this was the George Floyd case. We knew about lynching, but we had never witnessed one before we all watched the murder of George Floyd.

And suddenly, in the days and weeks that followed this lynching, there was recognition that we, as moral beings in this planet, are interchangeable to the extent that from our own psychological profile we can put ourselves in the shoes of others. Across the United States, in cities and small towns, people of all colors, all generations, and all walks of life took to the streets and showed that they identified themselves with George Floyd. Images of a man held on the ground, a knee on his neck, dying... "For the Grace of God, there go I." People felt that they could put themselves in the place of this man.

There was in the United States, and in other parts of the world, a groundswell of empathy that had never been seen before. Such empathy could be useful not only in the perception of the moral arc of the universe, but in moving our agenda on police brutality, on violence in all its forms, and on environmental justice. The only thing that we lack is the way to sustain it. Then, sustainable empathy becomes a goal, like sustainable development.

The components of what makes empathy sustainable are still elusive, but we know one thing: as for sustainable development, leadership plays an incredibly important role. Five years ago, nobody would have believed that the United States could ever be in the situation that it is today. And it would have been very different should we have chosen another president. Not only here in the United States, but everywhere in the world, leadership in the years ahead will be crucial. Here, we have the possibility to begin a brand-new agenda, that we may call the sustainable empathy agenda. We have the possibility to elect somebody who knows how it is to walk into the shoes of others. This empathy is going to be very

important if we want to address the problems of our environment and live in harmony with nature.

Rejoinders and comments

The importance of taking a holistic approach to Nature versus a fragmented one was stressed. Efforts to integrate the different dimensions of the environment are thwarted by fragmented policies stemming from divergent specific interests. And the result is the present state of the environment. In the Floyd case participants were asked to sort out the links, the connections between police brutality and environmental degradation and injustice. What are the common causes, the common explanations of these two forms of violence? It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of this sort of inquiry, which, as said in the introduction to our meeting, calls for the use of different intellectual disciplines, different sources of knowledge, and calls also for dialogue and attention to the views of all concerned. Finding the links between issues is critical. We need to understand how 'things' can be mutually destructive and also mutually dependent. Otherwise, political discourse on the different problems the world is facing will continue to be disconnected and it will be very difficult to move forward.

That good leadership was indeed an essential condition for the realization of any significant societal endeavor, was another rejoinder on the same intervention. The example was the implementation of Agenda 21, the main outcome of the Earth Summit of 1992 which was attended by a great number of members of the civil society. Back home, these people, taking to heart the agreement made by their leaders, established local Agenda 21 committees in more than 100 countries. Many of the committees worked well for a few years with concrete results, but then collapsed. The support they needed from their governments never came. There are limits to what grassroots movements can achieve without the active involvement of their political leaders. And it is alarming to observe that a quarter of a century later the history of Agenda 21 repeats itself with the Paris Agreement: the enlightened, responsible and courageous young people mobilized for action on the climate issue are facing the indifference or even hostility of most of the decision-makers of our world. The lack of implementation of noble and good sentiments and ideas is a recurrent problem, whether it is for respect of the environment or for social justice. And the result is that in the confrontation between the economy and ecology, or the economy and social justice, the economy always prevails. In this context, sustainable empathy is an interesting and important idea, but, in the colleges of the United States, which are the hotbeds of this kind of talk, and are polarized to the left of the political spectrum, there is obviously no follow-up action. Another observation is that because of the pandemic, the unprecedented isolation of people, notably young people, new and still developing technologies of communication offer new and effective alternatives to real human contacts and social relations. There is no reason to believe that the use of this kind of technology will recede

after the pandemic. There is also the development of remote work. People, including young, even small children, will be more and more segregated and isolated. The image of crowds of people behind their masks, of people fearing encounters with others who might be contaminated and dangerous augers a future not conducive to sustainable empathy.

Other comments and observations concerned relations between empathy and love, empathy and the community, empathy and self-restraint.

Empathy and love, and attention to “the Other”

Empathy has its roots in love. If one loves something, then one feels empathy for it. Empathy is a spiritual drive, a spiritual connection. Loving God is loving humanity and seeking the divine in nature. The more one has this positive attraction, the more one is led to empathize with another. But, to do this, we need to overcome this materialistic society where everything is perceived in terms of monetary value. Objects and even human beings, workers, are put aside, trashed, if no longer useful. It is the same culture that produced slavery, ghettos, lynching, and that, for so long, was so cruel to a major part of the human race. Empathy, rooted in a spiritual quest, helps to make amend, and should help building a humane world society.

Empathy is indeed very important. Molly Worthen, a professor at the University of North Carolina, in Chapel Hill, wrote an essay on empathy in the New York Times of September 6, 2020. She wrote that it is not enough to say to somebody else “I feel for you, I know exactly what you are going through.” One has to take the next step and listen to the other person, to let him/her explain how things are. You will learn from the other person and in doing so it will become more personal. This should be understood as you, yourself having exercised your own personhood in addition to genuinely empathizing with another person. If you just stand in somebody else shoes, it is still you, yourself. Take the advice of Molly Worthen and open yourself up to the other.

Empathy and the community

In addition to the moral arc of the universe, one of the other phrases associated with Martin Luther King is the beloved community. And one would think that community is another scale with which to associate empathy. As the concept has developed, a beloved community is only possible if there is justice, but justice is not enough. We need to be in a place where we cherish our community members. It has to do with empathy, with the recognition of mutual dependence, and also with a posture of the spirit. As Bryan Stevenson, the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative was heard saying, “No hope, no justice.” As we seek a renewal of the spirit, in the United States and in the world, the ultimate goal and the hope is a community,

a community in which we cherish each other, rely on each other, and where empathy can be sustained.

Empathy and self-restraint

We need empathy and action, an action that needs to be thought through more fully. The foundation for so much injustice across the world and for the ecological disaster that is unfolding can be attributed to the lack of self-restraint that prevails in Western societies. People want to take everything, including things that other people may need and things that disrupt ecological systems. Links are now made between the struggle for ecological sustainability and the struggle for civil rights. This includes the denunciation of colonialism, because colonialism was also based on the appetite for everything that could bring profit, from natural resources to people. One needs to find the capacity for self-restraint, for freeing ourselves from the ruling dogma of the present time which is consumerism and the accumulation of goods. People need to know that they are not the only ones on earth and that they have to share. Empathy, community, solidarity and self-restraint are linked.

A response: technology is a vehicle for empathy and achievable dreams

The first response to these various comments on the possible and desirable emergence of sustainable empathy as a force for the good in the world was on the role of technology. The fact is that today, sustainable empathy is technologically driven. One cannot walk away from the power and the value of the repetition of images that flow across one's phone. Whether it was in Minneapolis for the lynching of George Floyd, in Milwaukee for the demonstrations that followed, or on the Texas – Mexico border for immigrant children put in cages, these images created the kind of empathy that is under discussion.

To take the Texas-Mexico border example, it was not necessary to have been on the border, not necessary to be in love with anybody involved in this episode, but simply by being a parent one could identify with those children kept in cages and could walk vicariously in the shoes of their parents. This is a totally new situation. It did not exist in the 20th century. Empathy now comes from cellphones and TV screens, and one can repeat the images that create it. It is a new and powerful tool with which a number of good things can be accomplished. For example, it can assist peace and reconciliation efforts, as well as promote good relations between the police and communities of minorities. With the help of these new technologies there are ways to make progress in societies even without the ultimate dream of "beloved communities." This goal of Martin Luther King is too high to aspire to, but we can break it down into palatable pieces. With the available technology we can create a template where everybody can identify with something in the platter we will be offering, something in that panoply which could be identified with, empathized with. And that is all

that is needed, a hook; because when you create that hook of human-to-human contact a lot of possibilities open up.

Ethic of love and ethic of fear

The distinction between an ethic of love and an ethic of fear was brought to the debate. The question raised was: What is the most convincing and most effective rationale for environmental policies? Fear of the consequences of damages inflicted on the environment, or love for the environment, that is, for nature? This question raised earlier in international encounters on pollution and loss of biodiversity was put to Arne Naess, the founder of Deep Ecology, at a meeting in Cambridge, Mass, in the mid-1980s. His response was unequivocal: “only an ethic founded on and shaped by love for life and nature will save the world from the impending ecological catastrophe.” This was not the road taken by most governments during these past thirty years, yet it remains a relevant distinction.

Are the movements now engaged in the struggle for the preservation of nature animated by an ethic of love? Also, the same distinction still explains the profound differences between policies and politics centered on the environment and those centered on nature. Only love can be holistic, because it permits, even invites integration of diverse sources of knowledge and diverse techniques and savoir-faire, old and new, experimental and intuitive. Only love can generate the mix of patience, generosity and determination that is demanded from its practitioners. Working to help ‘something’ one is a part of, and on which our life depends, is rewarding enough to bring joy from sacrifices and hardship. Conversely, policies and practices conceived to address environmental problems have nothing intrinsically different from other human endeavors. The environment is a silo issue, competing with other issues for attention and resources, and divided into a number of sub-issues.

Such characteristics are in the word environment itself, meaning the “things” that are around us. It was created deliberately, as part of the materialist economic paradigm. The word environment separates those “things,” so that they will not intrude into the economy. They then become externalities. Some think that the different entities of the United Nations in charge of developing environmental law were intentionally put in different locations – UNEP in Nairobi, Secretariat of the Climate Convention in Bonn, part of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity in Montreal...–to prevent the possibility of an integration that would have threatened the dominant paradigm. This is one of the reasons there is need to create a holistic paradigm with a spiritual foundation and orientation.

Regarding the question of an ethic of love in the environmental movements of today, it is clear that young people, so actively engaged in the struggle to have governments implement the Paris Agreement, have respect and love for nature. They are dealing with an existential issue. Their wisdom and sense of responsibility are admirable, but, as already noted, they need support and a relay from political decision-makers.

On this point of love and nature, the definition of love by St Augustine is relevant. He said, "Love is to will that you be." If we love nature that means that we want nature to be, to flourish and to be left intact.

Humility, reverence for life, acceptance of its finitude

Nature, contrary to humans, does not like boxes. In a recent cartoon of the New Yorker, three middle-aged men are seated in their club, glasses in hand. One of them says, "I will start thinking outside the box when the box is empty." This is the mindset of the leaders of the fossil fuel industry, strip mining, clear wood cutting... They want to preserve the status-quo. As long as there are resources, they will take them. The thinking is: There will be some collateral damages, and this is regrettable. But there is a price to pay for everything one gets.

Boxes are a human creation. They have definite dimensions, are made to contain materials and serve specific purposes. But they are no boxes in nature. Nature resists being boxed. Nature is defined by universal interrelations. There are differences in the extent of connections, but nothing is completely isolated. By contrast, boxes stand alone. Considerations of relations to other boxes or to nature are not in the mission statement.

The natural realm is simply given. It is no accident that we refer to Mother Nature, the giver. In the Biblical story, creation was accomplished. We humans, the stewards, were given the privilege of naming the beings of nature. Beings come first, then the names. Think of the newborn child who is given a name! Humans are part of creation and therefore part of nature. They live together with the rest of nature. The question is: How to do that so that all of nature and creation can flourish? Water, fruits and other nutrients are essential for life. They are useful to all humanity. The responsibility of humankind is to use the resources of nature without using them up. Native Americans knew how to tread lightly on the earth. Today, in so far as possible humanity needs to build, fish and farm while leaving nature intact. People have to build boxes, but to be reflective about the boxes they build. This is a calling for recognition that to every box, there is an outside that must be respected. Rather than shrugging off collateral damages, collaboration with other people and with the energies of nature is required.

Etymologically the word nature can be related to nativity, to birth. In her late work, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt wrote, "Nativity, human birth is the miracle that saves the world," and in her last work, *The Life of the Mind*, published posthumously, she wrote, "we appear from a nowhere and disappear into a nowhere." She goes on, "Individual life is growth and decline, is a developmental process in which an entity unfolds itself in an upward movement until all of its properties are fully exposed. This phase is followed by a period of standstill. It blooms, or epiphany as it were, which in turn is succeeded by a downward movement of disintegration that is terminated by complete disappearance." Again, offering an extension: Everything in nature also comes to be, develops and passes away. If we

recognize that, we will be humbled and build not without limits or forever, but so that the human/nature complex can keep on going. Then humanity will be in harmony with nature.

Making good use of grief

Somebody said the current pandemic is dramatic evidence of humankind's disharmony with nature. Therefore, one should see it as "a portal, a gateway between one world and the next". Indeed, one has to think of problems as things to which to apply one's analytical powers and therefore as things to solve. Often, however, with these things that happen, instead of analyzing them, one suffers from them. The pandemic is one of those things. It is oppressing humankind, changing people. And so is climate change, which by now is certainly here and suffering is inevitable. The only question is how catastrophic it will be. From various sources, powerful waves are sweeping across the world. Humanity has to find ways to make a positive use of them.

The main idea of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* is that death is not a medical failure. Death is an inevitable form of life and in fact it has developmental power. The one who is dying has a chance to encounter the wholeness of life with a special vividness and seriousness. And the one who is grieving is challenged to accept cognitively what is happening, to have a door to walk through and to reach another way of being after an unbearable loss.

We are in a time of grieving and this grieving might be one of the ways we need to think about harmony with nature more fully. Take the State of Vermont, with its beautiful forests and famous maple trees. Because of climate change, maple trees are dying and the forests will not remain what they are. In this rather dramatic context, the need for clean energy has given rise to a project for the development of wind power, igniting a big controversy. Those in favor of clean energy, also a potential source of economic returns for the State, and those who refuse to see those huge windmills disfigure what is left of the forest and wilderness of Vermont, are unable even to start a dialogue.

There is one thing these two antagonistic groups share: their cry for the disappearing maple trees and for the wounded forest. They know that the land they love is never going to be the same. They share this grief. And they should meet and talk about this loss and grief. In doing so, in expressing their shared anger and sorrow, in trying together to overcome their pain, they will put their different views on the wind power project in perspective. Grief, if accepted and shared, is source of benevolence and wisdom. We have the motivating bonds of love. They are as powerful as the bonds of loss and grief. To bring us in harmony with nature, these bonds are more potent than the positivist type of analysis common in political science and economics.

Grief is a sentiment that is very familiar these days to people working with biodiversity. For the marine biologist witnessing the disappearance of coral reefs, for the scientist measuring the rate of loss of species, for all those directly engaged in the struggle to save some of the richness and beauty of the world, emotions run high. It is like watching the burning of the library of Alexandria. For these people, grief turns to anger and reinforces their determination. And this determination leads to the rejection of the artificial and materialistic aspects of the culture in which humanity is immersed, bringing joy. We are so distracted, so trapped in the omnipresent advertising, marketing and bargaining! To stand back with a more spiritual perspective on life and society is so wonderful! It eases the pressure. One does not have to accept to be driven by those “things”, by the tyranny of the market and of the corporate system that is trying to exploit everyone, in every possible way. This tyranny and the destruction of nature are obviously linked.

Consumerism is denial. There is a book called *Jesus and the Disinherited*, written in 1949 by the theologian Howard Thurman, and we are told that Martin Luther King was always carrying with him the Bible. This book tells that the people Jesus considered as blessed were those who were up against the wall, impoverished. There were the ones that reached oneness with God-Love. Today, there are huge waves of change submerging the world. Nothing, whether it is education, employment, the economy or our ways of life is going to be the same. Many changes will not be to our liking. If we accept them, we will be able to turn them into blessings.

Nature, creation, communion, love

The famous dictum, which is actually pre-Christian, says “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Because for most people, the “as” means “like”; this injunction becomes “Love your neighbor like yourself,” in other words as much as you like yourself. But this is the opposite of the true meaning of this dictum, which is: Love your neighbor **because it is** yourself. And then comes the question: can this point of view, this moral norm, be extended beyond humans? This is the question addressed in a book published in 2018 and called *Aimer la création comme soi-même (Love the creation as you love yourself)*. Intended also as a response to the common saying that Christianity is the most anthropocentric of all religions, this book was inspired by the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis.

To substantiate the observation that the Bible is all about humans, presented as the masters of all the creation, the book of Genesis is often quoted, and indeed there is no lack of such material. But, in *Laudato Si'*, there is a fabulous quote drawn from the Book of Wisdom and it runs approximately like this: God loves everything in creation because, if he did not love it, why would he make it? This takes us immediately beyond anthropocentrism. Everything is part of the single ecosphere. Each human is tributary of a huge number of creatures, each following its own way of being. *Laudato Si'* tell us that creation has a broader meaning than

nature because it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance.²³

There is a difference between community and communion. Community is a cold sociological concept. Communion has love. A communion is a community animated by Love. The relation between humanity and the rest of creation is a sublime communion.²⁴ And this gives people big responsibility, for human capacity to do harm is unlimited. In the book *The Imperative of Responsibility*²⁵ one reads that each person is to act in a manner compatible with the perennity of an authentically human life on earth. Life, being human, is not only a biological process. It is a matter of becoming human, through a process of education. And it is a matter of freely giving meaning to the world. It is a path that people need to define and accomplish. Looking for creation is not a matter of mere option. It is inseparable from the plenitude of humanity.

Creation requires a creator, and this brings the spiritual dimension into the entire world one is living in. Nature is a more scientific, more detached concept. It avoids a theological discussion. One can study nature, without looking for a deeper meaning. Nature is a larger and more integrated concept than the environment, but it is spiritually neutral. It avoids a judgment of whether God exists. Nature can be seen as simply the result of an evolutionary process, with nothing beyond that. This is a fundamental difference. Creation implies a God, or some spiritual power. In our view of the environment, this is missing. Religion is missing. Spirituality is missing. The whole sense, the meaning that one finds in spiritual traditions is missing. Living, for a human being, is adding something to our material dimension, our animal nature, to be born, to live, to reproduce and to die. What make us human are culture, arts, and spirituality. To grow and develop spiritually gives us the emotional motivations and the perspective we need to meet today's challenges in the protection of nature. The spiritual and the scientific ought to feed each other if we want to save what's left of the natural world. This has been understood by the UNEP. It has now the Faith for Earth Initiative and, for example, organized on 5-8 October 2020, from Iceland, an online Faith for Nature

²³"Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justify absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. Gen. 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human being and nature. *Laudato Si'* (op.cit.), Chapter Two, The Gospel of Creation, paragraph 67.

²⁴"When our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mere out to other human beings. We have only one heart and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationship with other people (...) Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes." Ibid, paragraph 92.

²⁵ *The Imperative of Responsibility: In search of an ethics for the technological age*, by Hans Jonas (German edition, 1979; English edition 1984)

Conference which had a very large participation²⁶. In the same vein, following the Faith Commitments launched at Windsor Castle in 2009, the Faith Long-term Plans, involving more than 200 religious groups covering all faith traditions, will be presented to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) to be held in Glasgow on 1-12 November 2021²⁷.

Religion and science meeting in the search for absolute reality

Doubts were expressed on the usefulness of introducing the word 'creation' in the debate. For many, the word evokes fundamentalist Christian groups and their rejection of science as a source of knowledge. And, more importantly, the word nature, as understood by prominent philosophers, poets and scientists, has both physical and metaphysical dimensions. From Spinoza to Einstein and their contemporary disciples and admirers, nature is the Whole, the Universe...On this "foundation", on this understanding of nature with its material and spiritual components, people of different faiths and people of no faith can meet and work together to save our planet.

The word creation evokes love. If creation was an act of love, then every creature has its own value, and nature, of which we are part, has to be loved and respected. An essential point is that every subject should not be regarded as an object. And there are more complementarities than divergences between those perspectives on creation and nature. Scientists are looking for a better, more complete understanding of the world around us. We see reality from different angles, different lenses, and we talk about atoms, forces, formulas...Missing however, a total and persistent "black hole," is the absolute reality. And for that we have to come to God. But we do not have to remain with a traditional, narrow and anthropomorphic conception of God. There are other ways of looking at the divine which are very close to the metaphysical thinking of physicists, mathematicians or philosophers. There is harmony, unity there in the different ways of looking at the beauty of the universe around us and at the manner in which it functions. These different ways do not have to separate us. They can unite all in a mutual understanding.

²⁶ The proceedings of this conference are available on the website faithfornature.org. One of the outcomes of the conference was the creation of Faith for Earth Coalition.

²⁷ The faiths involved cover all major traditions within Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Daoist, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, Shinto and Sikh faiths. Also participating are key interfaith organizations. The Faith Long-term Plans cover seven areas: Faith-consistent use of assets, including buildings, land and investments; Education and young people, in both formal and informal situations; Wisdom, including theology, liturgy and prayer; Lifestyles, including traditions of simple living, pilgrimage; Media and advocacy; Partnerships, eco-twinning, and creating and environment departments; Celebration, including festivals and traditions. Source: online document, The Faith Long Term Plan Programme.

Which actors, which forces will bring humankind closer to harmony with nature?

The deteriorating health of Mother Earth is common knowledge since more than half a century. Many declarations, plans of action, conventions with their norms and recommended policies have been adopted at the international and regional levels. Most governments have ministries of the environment, and some have introduced the protection of nature into their constitutions. Organizations of the civil society with global, regional and local reach have numerous and dedicated agendas. There are foundations and a variety of non-profit institutions giving support to the “green” cause and to sustainable development. Religious leaders joining their voices with scientists, artists, writers and other public intellectuals call for radical change in the manner humankind relates to nature. And yet, globally, as tragically evidenced by the pandemic, this relationship is still deteriorating. How to move from the realm of ideas to the realm of politics as well as that of the world economy?

One should not forget the persuasive power of enlightened self-interest. A number of large corporations and governments realize that continuing to harm nature is “bad business” and that such actions are going to hurt them in the medium and long term. Everything encouraging a change in behavior can be very effective.

The role of individuals and the force they have when joining with others is important. But, in this regard, to talk about world citizenship is a mistake because actions today are taken in a global setting and not within a global community. Citizenship on a global scale remains to be created. It cannot exist without some kind of global community. Often, à-propos the United Nations, this notion of world community is evoked. In reality, the U.N. is a vehicle for the expression of states as geo-political actors. It has not developed into a genuine global community and therefore is it misleading to talk about world citizenship at this stage.

This statement generated a number of comments.

As a force for positive change, the power of education should be recognized and encouraged. Educating children to love and have respect for nature will have a strong impact in the medium-term. Educating adults through various means to the same ends and to encourage them to communicate to children that we all belong to the same humanity and have obligations to our family, our country and the entire world, would have rapid effects. Changes in attitudes can happen quickly.

It is necessary to understand that the philosophy the world needs presently is twofold. First is the need for objectivity. We should not escape in denial, or in dreams of perfection that are illusory. The second need is the recognition that ideals are necessary and as important as respect for facts. We may call these ideals ethical horizons. World or global citizenship is today not a fact, but it is a necessary ideal.

The United Nations that was evoked is indeed not a world community. It is the United Nations of its headquarters in New York. It is the UN of the Security Council subjected to the dictates of the five main powers and of the General Assembly reduced to the useful but limited role of a forum for the annual gathering of heads of States expressing, at best, their views on the state of the world. But the United Nations is also the United Nations system or family of organizations where world community and world citizenship are something real, albeit in different domains. One can mention, for example, labor relations with the International Labor Organization (ILO), health with the World Health Organization (WHO), communications with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). In these organizations and a number of others, there is world citizenship in the sense of finding ways to work together across borders in a very real sense. And the United Nations is making a great contribution to this critical endeavor.

One cannot over-emphasize the importance of the point just made. We may not have world citizenship, but over the last thirty or forty years we have seen the emergence of specific world communities approaching problems from an issue perspective. Having run four UN summit conferences authorizes the following conclusion: countries came to these conferences to talk from the point of view of national interest, but we only got some positive results because there were communities across national borders who were talking from an issue perspective, be it women rights, children rights, poverty, or environmental problems. This is a very important development. Even though we do not have world citizenship we are seeing the emergence of a world civil society. This is a very positive feature of what is happening in international relations. Actually, one could say that it is the only positive feature of the present state of international relations.

The pertinence of these arguments notwithstanding, it remains that citizenship implies participation in a community. Since the world is far from being a community of nations, it is misleading to talk of world citizenship at this stage. To acknowledge efforts made in this direction, the terminology of citizen pilgrim is preferable. It evokes what needs to be created. Using world citizenship gives the impression that a community exists on a global scale when we refer to the United Nations. But for all the good things that it does, the UN is still above all a venue for geo-politics and for the interaction of national interests. It is important to de-sentimentalize the United Nations.

What is clear is that we, humans, are the problem, and we have to be the solution. We are the culprits of general disharmony. The world population has exploded. The planet is not expandable. Human footprints take the form of cities, which are expanding, or of agriculture, also expanding, and in both cases we destroy our natural environment. We need ingenuity to overcome the challenges we are facing and to allow other inhabitants of the planet to develop. To change direction, we need a global perspective and a local perspective. We need governments and we need a people's movement.

Governments are indispensable parts of the solution. And they can be committed to the environment cause and efficient, as shown in New Zealand. An Environment Act was passed in 1989 and a Fiscal Responsibility Act in 1994. All laws and decisions cannot have provisions contradicting these two pieces of legislation. Today, environment policies are effectively integrated with social, economic and cultural objectives and policies within a sustainable development framework. This should be capped in the future by an Environment First Act so that all domestic laws and all agreements ratified by New Zealand, including the Paris Agreement, would have to be fully respected. A number of other initiatives have been taken by the current government, including 'One Million Trees by 2028.' Not everything is perfect. Progress has still to be made, notably in agriculture and transport. But New Zealand offers a good example of what can be done by an enlightened and determined government.

And this determination is helped by an equally determined peoples' movement, similar to the "grey power" and the "gay power" that in the recent past of New Zealand were strong enough to change governments. This is what is needed at the global level. With a common objective and a clear enough message, a global people's movement could be determinant in winning elections in a number of countries with free and fair electoral systems. The key is to link and unify currently numerous but disperse movements. And this now is much easier than in the past, as there are ways to connect people across the world. A people's movement without frontiers is possible and this is a source of hope.

All the more so because surveys show that a majority of people share the view that major changes in values and behaviors are necessary to address the environmental problems the world is confronted with. People think that way, but, critically, they believe that their neighbors do not. They believe that they are a minority, and they refrain from acting or speaking. These surveys were done mainly in Europe but there is no reason to believe that that the findings would be different in other parts of the world. Therefore, the point is not changing people's values, but rather revealing the truth of people's values. And for this, organized, collective movements are most effective.

Collective movements are indeed essential because it is now very difficult to rely on the standard political processes that prevailed until the 1990s. In many ways, national and international politics have moved away from the actions that could secure the changes one is referring to. The current Prime Minister of New Zealand is a remarkable exception. There are few governments able or willing to do what is required to stop the degradation of the health of our planet. Yet the constituency who would like to see the changes is there. It may not be a majority, but it is big enough. At this point, in global politics and in national politics a civil society movement is needed to bring together people from the different parts of the world having similar views on the direction to take to bring about development in harmony with nature. The question is how to do that. It is true that humanity is far from anything looking like world citizenship or world government. But it is at a stage comparable to what national politics would have been in the XVI and XVII centuries, when national states were

emerging. There is need to focus on this practical issue: how do we bring together people who favor a change of course? How to allow them to express themselves? It is difficult to imagine that governments will do that.

Not to be forgotten are the new ways to connect people around the world cheaply and efficiently. A people's movement without frontiers is possible through technical means that were not available forty years ago.

Unfortunately, these same technologies are being used to cause great harm. There are the examples of foreign interference with electoral processes. But far worse is what has been revealed in the Netflix document, *The Social Dilemma*. The social networks are not effective in blocking manifestations of extremism because these events increase the number of their viewers. We cannot count on the commercialized social networks alone. Older traditional ways of bringing people together through the United Nations remain valid.

PART THREE:
THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

From the Stockholm Conference in 1972 to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, convened in Stockholm, June 1972, proclaimed that “both aspects of man’s environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights – even the right to life itself (...) For the purpose of attaining freedom in the world of nature, man must use knowledge to build, in collaboration with nature, a better environment. To defend and improve the human environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal of mankind – a goal to be pursued together with, and in harmony with, the established and fundamental goals of peace and of worldwide economic and social development (...) A growing class of environmental problems because they are regional or global in extent or because they affect the common international realm, will require extensive cooperation among nations and action by international organizations in the common interest.”²⁸

Such a comprehensive and integrated approach to the man-made and natural environments and to their interactions was reflected in the 26 Principles and the Action Plan for the Human Environment adopted by the Stockholm Conference. In the following years a very different approach, fragmented both conceptually and politically, prevailed at the international level. Important exceptions, notably the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution adopted in Geneva in November 1979²⁹ and the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer adopted in March 1985³⁰ did not alter this

²⁸Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972, Part I, Chapter 1, Declaration, paragraphs 1, 6 and 7. The General Assembly decided in December 1968 to hold this Conference (resolution 2398 (XXIII)). It acknowledged the “important work” done by Governments and NGOs such as the international Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the International Council of Scientific Union and the International Biological Programme. Within the United Nations itself, work on the environment had started in the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in 1955 with a Meeting of Experts on Pollution of the European Rivers. For information on the pioneering work of the ECE on the environment see on the website of the UNECE, *Looking Backward and Peering Forward, A Short History of the UNECE, 1947-2007*, by Yves Berthelot and Paul Rayment (in particular pages 70-73). It might be recalled that the famous book by Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, was published in 1962, and that the no-less famous *The Limits to Growth*, originated in the Club of Rome and written mainly by Dennis Meadows, came out in 1972.

²⁹This Convention, negotiated within the framework of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), came into force in March 1983 and has 51 parties, all European members of the ECE, including the Russian Federation, plus the United States (also a member of the ECE), plus the European Union. It has eleven protocols and amendments, the most recent from 2012.

³⁰The Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (adopted in 1987) have both 198 Parties. Five amendments to the Montreal Protocol have been subsequently adopted (London, 1991, Copenhagen 1992, Montreal, 1997, Beijing, 1999, Kigali, 2016). The Convention, the Protocol and its first four Amendments have universal membership (197/198

trend. A single-issue approach was used despite the overall World Resources Strategy adopted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in 1980.³¹ In Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Earth Summit, adopted Agenda 21, a Statement on Forests, and two conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity³² and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,³³ were signed. These two major conventions are separate although closely connected legal instruments. Only now are the first signs of concrete cooperation between them becoming apparent.

The delayed reaction to the climate challenge,³⁴ besides the adverse political reality in the United States at the beginning of the 1980s³⁵, is largely attributable to this fragmented approach. The detrimental North-South divide illustrated early on the dilemma of sticking to outdated perceptions and policies. Two examples: The industrialized countries that were the key protagonists in those early days – the United States, Canada, the Netherlands and Sweden³⁶ – gave priority to reaching an agreement on transboundary pollution. Their focus was on the self-interest of developed countries with the underlying assumption that no major changes in the international economic system were called for. There was no focus on the unsustainable production practices and resource consumption of the industrialized

Parties). The Kigali Amendment, which came into force in October 2016, concerns the emissions of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), a major contributor to global warming that is used to replace the chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) responsible for the depletion of the ozone layer. Full compliance with this Kigali amendment would prevent between 0.2° and 0.4°C of global warming over this century, but it has only 114 Parties: missing countries include China, India, Brazil, Italy, USA. Independently of this issue, the ozone layer is expected to recover by the middle of the century and the Montreal Protocol is, at this point, the only major global treaty on the protection of the environment that is successfully implemented. It has an elaborate and effective system of follow-up under the leadership of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

³¹The IUCN, founded in 1948 in Fontainebleau, France, presents itself as “a democratic union that bring together the world’s most influential organizations and top experts in a combined effort to conserve nature and accelerate the transition towards sustainable development”; it has 1400 member organizations that include governments, international organizations and organizations of the civil society. Headquartered in Geneva, its Secretariat in 11 regions, it operates in 160 countries. The World Conservation Congress is held every four years.

³² The Convention on Biological Diversity came into force in December 1993 and has 196 Parties. The USA signed in June 1993 but has not ratified this Convention.

³³The UN Convention on Climate Change, adopted in New-York in May 1992 and signed in Rio a month later by 154 States, led, through the Kyoto Protocol of December 1997 and its two amendments (Nairobi in 2006 and Doha in 2012), to the Paris Agreement of December 2015, which came into force in November 2016 and has 191 Parties.

³⁴ Global warming was recognized since the beginning of the 1980s, notably by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the UNEP. The World Commission on Environment and Development, or Brundtland Commission, presented it as a major threat in its report issued in 1987, notably in pages 8, 174-177, 324. See Note 10.

³⁵ On January 1981 Ronald Reagan became President of the United States, replacing Jimmy Carter who served only one term. Reagan was succeeded by G.H. Bush in January 1993. Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in May 1979 and remained in this post until November 1990.

³⁶ In 1972, year of the Stockholm Conference, these four countries had the following leaders: USA: President, Richard Nixon; Canada: Prime Minister, Pierre-Elliott Trudeau; Netherlands: Prime Minister, Barend Biesheuvel; Sweden: prime Minister, Olaf Palme.

countries³⁷. Similarly, developing countries, led by Brazil, demanded that financial resources for environmental protection should be additional to the traditional development assistance that had already been decided by the General Assembly in the 1970s³⁸. The nationality principle disappeared around the turn of the 21st century but contributed to cementing the perception that the environment was a secondary issue both in poorer and richer countries. It also cemented the view of the South on the particular responsibility of the North through the concept of common but differentiated responsibility. The failure to implement Agenda 21 with its negotiated Plan of Action for the 21st century is to a major extent due to the following two factors. On the one hand, the globalization paradigm established in the 1990s was based on the mistaken belief that the market would solve all problems and generate enough wealth to ensure environmental protection. On the other hand, countries of the North failed to honor the financial commitments to the South agreed in Rio de Janeiro.

More positive developments, however, emerged in the later part of the 1990s. The holistic perspective gained ground, particularly in the United Nations. The UN agenda broadened considerably in the aftermath of the Rio conference with recognition of the concept of sustainable development formulated in the Brundtland report. Several cross-sectoral world conferences modeled on the Stockholm and Rio conferences – on gender and social development, among others – greatly contributed to this broadening of the global agenda.

The “Rio +10” World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002³⁹ paved the way for the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)⁴⁰ and the “Rio +20” United Nations

³⁷ In 1982, in New York, during the finalization of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the G.H. Bush administration succeeded in eliminating from the text language that would have required the United States to cap its emissions of carbon dioxide by 2000 at 1990 level, by threatening to boycott the Rio Summit. Later that same year, at the Rio Summit, President Bush explained his reasoning for refusing to sign the Convention on Biological Diversity: “The treaty is noble (...) but the truth is, it contains provisions that have nothing – nothing – to do with biodiversity (...) The private sector is proving it can help generate solutions to our environmental problem. The treaty includes provisions that discourage technological innovation, (and) treats them as common property even though they are developed at great cost by private companies and American workers. We know what will happen: remove incentives and we will see fewer of the technological advances that help protect our planet.” Source of both this quote and the watering down of the Convention on Climate Change: *The Earth Summit: What Went Wrong in Rio?* by Geoffrey Palmer, Washington University Law Review, Volume 70, Issue 4, 1992, pages 1021 and 1023. Mr. Palmer was at that time Minister of the Environment of New Zealand and the delegate of his country at the Rio Conference. He was Prime Minister in 1989 - 1990.

³⁸ The UNGA adopted the International Development Strategy (IDS) for the Second United Nations Development Decade on 24 October 1970, Resolution 2626 (XXV). Paragraph (43): “(...) Each economically advanced country will progressively increase its official development assistance (ODA) to the developing countries and will exert its best efforts to reach a minimum net amount of 0,7 per cent of its gross national product at market prices by the middle of the Decade.” (This commitment for ODA is still valid 50 years later; see target 17.2 of Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). In this second IDS, section 8, Human Development, Paragraph 72 is on the environment: “Governments will intensify national and international efforts to arrest the deterioration of the human environment and to take measures and towards its improvement, and to promote activities that will help to maintain the ecological balance on which human survival depends.”

³⁹ It might be noted that the United States – Presidency of G.W. Bush – did not send a delegation to this Summit held in Johannesburg, South-Africa. Colin Powell, Secretary of State, came to deliver a statement and left.

Conference on Sustainable Development Conference in 2012 led⁴¹ to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) with its 17 goals.⁴² The 2030 Agenda has a robust follow-up mechanism with precise statistics, something which was unthinkable with the top-down approach that before prevailed. The same is true of the Paris agreement,⁴³ the implementation of which is the responsibility of individual countries. Recognition of the responsibility of each government to honor its commitments has eased the North-South divide. It has engaged the developed countries in a manner that was unthinkable before. The bottom-up approach of the 2030 Agenda is more realistic than the top-down approach favored in Rio in 1992. In addition, non-governmental actors – organizations of the civil society, cities, the scientific community, the private business sector– are actively engaged in the implementation of the SDGs. As a result of this more holistic, decentralized and participatory approach to global issues there is now an impressive normative corpus at the world’s disposal. Becoming visible is the beginning of a global paradigm shift whereby the artificial conceptual split between man and nature has begun to fade. This is an indispensable foundation for addressing today’s challenges.

The challenges remain immense. Political and structural constraints led to a huge deficit in the implementation of what was agreed, including legally binding treaties, since this long and tortuous process that started in Stockholm. Serious obstacles in the areas of population and resources further increase the sustainability crisis. Governments continue to fail to integrate economic policies in a coherent strategy for sustainable development. Instead, they stick to the old GDP concept which does not put a price on ecosystems services. The abdication of its global leadership position by the United States has created a void that others will have to fill. But time is of the essence and not much is left. Determined actions during the next decade are imperative if ecological planetary catastrophes are to be averted. The integrated approach outlined in Agenda 2030 urgently needs to be implemented at the national level. This is in itself a huge challenge for societies, still governed by sectoral

⁴⁰ On 8 September 2000, the General Assembly adopted the *United Nations Millennium Declaration*. In this short text (9 pages) six “fundamental values essential to international cooperation for the twenty-first century” were listed – freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, shared responsibility – and “key objectives” (about 60) were given. These objectives were reduced by the Secretariat to eight *Millennium Development Goals* that, never formally accepted or rejected by the General Assembly, became nevertheless the normative message of the United Nations. These eight goals were: *Achieve Universal Primary Education, Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, Reduce Child Mortality, Improve Maternal Health, Combat HIV/Aids and other diseases, Ensure environmental sustainability, Global Partnership for Development.*

⁴¹ Convened in Rio de Janeiro, this Conference is known as the “Rio + 20.”

⁴² See Note 8

⁴³The Paris Agreement, adopted on 12 December 2015, is the conclusion of a long process that started with the adoption in New York on 9 May 1992 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This was followed by The Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, adopted the 11 December 1997. Two amendments to this protocol were adopted in Nairobi (2006) and in Doha (2012). The Paris Agreement has 191 Parties, including the European Union. The countries that have signed but not ratified this treaty are Eritrea, Iran, Iraq and Libya. The secretariat of the Paris Agreement is the secretariat of the UNFCCC established in 1992. Part of the UN system, first located in Geneva, it is since 1995 in Bonn, Germany.

decision-making structures. This is a domain where radical changes are called for. Governments need to make much stronger commitments and to stick to them on the climate issue. We can only hope that the ongoing global mobilization, not least among the younger generation, will help to meet these challenges. The Covid pandemic may prove to be an added incentive.

Sustainable development: origins and limitations of the concept

Early in its work in 1984, the World Commission on Environment and Development, found itself in major difficulty: it was split between those who put priority on “development” – economic growth, trade, the reduction of poverty, the situations of countries classified as developing and least-developed – and those who were mostly concerned with the “environment” and the damage inflicted by the prevailing conception of economic and social progress. There was need for a bridge between these two views. A person, subsequently becoming a prominent international civil servant in the United Nations, proposed, as a bridge, the notion of responsible development. This suggestion was rejected because, for some, it invoked possible legal obligations, and sustainable development, a term that had already been used, notably in the World Conservation Strategy,⁴⁴ was the bridge chosen. It was chosen not as an ethical concept, but as a bridge.

A bridge is useful if people walk across it and talk to people on the other side, if both sides engaged in an honest and constructive dialogue. Has this been the case with sustainable development? Only to a very limited extent. The two communities, those thinking of nature and those thinking of economic growth and development, still operate with values, goals and objectives that are very different. And today, policies are still driven by the market. When the market finds environmental measures advantageous in the medium and long terms, governments pursue them, including through subsidies. This is the case with energy, and, to a degree, with climate change. Otherwise, when the market says no, and it has many persuasive channels to communicate its views, with very few exceptions governments stall or, in democracies, make false promises to appease the general public. This is the reality of the present market-based policy system the world over, including in global institutions. How to reconcile harmony with nature with such a reality?

The idea of harmony with nature appears to be timely to help the world moving beyond the notion of sustainable development. In many ways, the Covid pandemic has made people more receptive to the necessity for a change of course, in concepts and actions. In Sanskrit, a

⁴⁴Published in 1980 by the International Union for the Conservations of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the full title of this book is World Conservation Strategy: Living Resources Conservation for Sustainable Development. Its presentation indicates that it benefitted from inputs from UNEP, FAO, WWF and UNESCO.

proverb says, “Nature protects if it is protected.” We cannot live apart from nature and its ecosystems.

When these ecosystems are hurt, every living thing is affected, and sooner or later, worse than Covid, people will be deprived of their basic needs, including food. This evidence has to be recognized by people and by the political leadership. At the United Nations, two initiatives would be helpful. First, the issue of health ought to be explicitly connected with the other issues included in the 2030 Agenda. Even if there was no pandemic, health is a need and a problem to which people respond strongly. This fact has not been recognized enough in the work of the U.N. Second, in the same line of thought, much more emphasis ought to be given to the question of biodiversity. It is no less important for the future of humankind than the sources of energy or climate change. Something similar to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment⁴⁵ should be repeated and, in 2021, several meetings related to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the targets of which are far from being achieved, will take place.⁴⁶ For this critical task of safeguarding what is left of biodiversity, we must, as pointed out in the introduction to this meeting, recognize that all these things are connected.⁴⁷ One cannot usefully act for the protection of this or that particular species, without considering its relations with other species. The same goes for ecosystems. All are connected. For biodiversity as for a number of crucial environmental issues, the currently prevailing fragmented approach of specific goals and targets ought to be transformed into something far more integrated and holistic.

Thus, sustainable development, brought as an idea 35 years ago, has been helpful. And it probably will still be useful. But effective action is necessary. The whole system is not working, and the global environmental situation is not markedly better than 35 years ago. It is even worse. For instance, the extent to which natural resources are being extracted is much greater than before. All reputable reports show this. Therefore, work should be

⁴⁵This comprehensive Assessment, issued in several reports, was undertaken during the period 2001 – 2005 at the request of Secretary General Kofi Annan in his report of 2000, *We The People: The United Nations in the 21st century*.

⁴⁶Two meetings are tentatively scheduled for the second quarter of 2021: (1) The Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15); (2) The Fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing. The Convention on Biological Diversity has two Protocols: The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (into force since 2003, 173 Parties) and the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization (into force since 2014, 129 Parties).

⁴⁷Regarding harmony with nature and biodiversity two significant developments ought to be noted. (1) The COP 21 (see Note above) will consider a “Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework”. The “Zero Draft” of this document includes a “2050 Vision”, “2050 Goals”, “2030 Milestones” and “2030 Action Targets”. The “2050 Vision” is “Living in Harmony with Nature”, with a short explanatory text. See UNEP, Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD/POST2020/PREP/2/1, 17 August 2020. (2) In the last resolution on Harmony with Nature the President of the General Assembly is requested to convene on International Mother Earth Day, 22 April 2022, an interactive dialogue “to discuss the relationship between harmony with nature and the protection of biological diversity.” See A/RES/75/220, operative paragraph 3.

continued to spell out and concretize the concept of harmony with nature. The two points given above on health and biodiversity, illustrate the task ahead.

Sustainable Development Goals: a very problematic implementation

Are the sustainable development goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda a useful contribution to this task? Serious doubts were expressed. In the 17 goals and the concomitant targets the needs of the economy and the needs of the ecology are more juxtaposed than reconciled. The first three goals – *end poverty, end hunger, ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages* – and the corresponding 28 targets are formulated in traditional economic terms, and so are Goal 7, *on modern energy for all*, Goal 8, *on economic growth, full and productive employment*, and Goal 9 *on infrastructure, industrialization and innovation*. Nothing in their formulations – except the repeated use of the words sustainable and sustainability – evokes the environmental crises engulfing the world and the changes in economic structures and policies that are called for. Goal 12, *ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*, which was the perfect vehicle for specifying such changes and promoting an end to the subordination of ecology to economics, is actually timider and more conservative than in past declarations and agreements.⁴⁸

The SDGs are also open to criticism from the viewpoint of the protection and promotion of human rights. Civil and political rights, often called the first generation of human rights and designed to protect individuals against abuses of power from political authorities, are mentioned directly in Goal 16, Target 16.2, *end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children* (Why only children?); and very indirectly in Target 16.3, *promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice and law*. As to economic, social and cultural rights, there is a brief allusion to the *equal rights (of women) to economic resources* (Goal 5, Target 5.a) and another brief allusion to labor rights (Goal 8, Target 8.8). And, although the right to food is not indicated, Goal 2 on *hunger, food security nutrition and sustainable agriculture* is important enough in itself and for the relationship between humankind and nature to warrant a look at its targets. Among the eight targets of Goal 2, there is no mention of eco-agriculture, bio-agriculture, or permaculture and no allusion to the problems associated with genetically modified organisms, chemical pesticides, herbicides and other products of industrial agriculture.

⁴⁸Examples: (1) Target 12.6: “Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.” This is the main explicit “demand” made to transnational companies in the 17 Goals. (2) Target 12.8,c: “Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries (...).”

It seems that industrial agriculture is still the principal source counted on for the future increases in agricultural production and productivity (an objective repeated three times). Additionally, “free trade” of agricultural products is still presented as the way forwards.⁴⁹ On the other hand, *small-scale food producers* are the subject of Target 2.3, while target 2.5 calls for *the maintenance of the genetic diversity of seeds and cultivated plants: and farmed and domesticated animals*. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development does not recognize that the right to food could be honored at the world level with agriculture in harmony with nature. This possibility, actually an absolute necessity, is well proven and well documented.⁵⁰

Full responsibility for the elaboration and implementation of Agenda for 2030 and its goals and targets lies with member countries. The United Nations was just the host for the intergovernmental negotiations leading to the agreement and remains a host – with technical competence but no mandate for evaluation or assessment – for the monitoring of the progress achieved in its realization.⁵¹ Countries themselves are reporting on their achievements and are the sole deciders of corrective or additional measures they may wish to take. At least at the international level, there is no accountability of the States for their lack of progress in implementing the agreed sustainable goals and targets.

The United Nations never had the power to “force” its Member States to comply with their commitments, even for treaties they have ratified. But, in the past and in some cases, the moral power – including the power of shame – was a positive role played by the United Nations. The practice of reaching consensus, instead of voting for agreements such as the 2030 Agenda, contributes to the adoption of texts particularly respectful of the views of the dominant world power(s). The advent of a world order respectful of nature will require different concepts and new methods for international cooperation.

Needed: less declarations and goals but more seriousness in implementing policies

The 2030 Agenda and its sustainable developments goals was further criticized, not for its deficiencies, but for some of its provisions and, more fundamentally, for its reason d’être. First questioned was target 12.8 of Goal 12: *“By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have*

⁴⁹Goal 8, Target 2.c: “Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effects, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round.”

⁵⁰See for example *Feeding the world without industrial agriculture*, by John Ikerd, April 23, 2020.

⁵¹ The monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs is done by the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Open to all the Member States of the United Nations, it meets every year for two-days under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, and every four years for two at the level of Heads of State or Government under the auspices of the General Assembly. This Forum replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development in 2013.

the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.” What can and should be the meaning of harmony with nature for people living in cities, with low income and with very few possibilities for access to rural areas? Only a small minority of urbanites has secondary homes or can afford weekends in the countryside. And, everywhere in the world, the numbers of low-income persons and people living in urban areas are growing. In addition, in countries industrialized and urbanized since the 19th century, the number of city-dwellers having at least one grandparent familiar with the countryside is diminishing and there are fewer people left to transmit the taste for and the knowledge of nature. One would think that there are more useful things to do for people living in these conditions than to “inform” them and make them “aware” that somewhere there is “development” and “lifestyles in harmony with nature.”

And, not only for the urban poor but for people in general, is it within the mandate of the United Nations to try to influence lifestyles?⁵² Countries are different. Living conditions vary enormously. Above all, lifestyles are a matter of personal choice, of personal liberty. For example, one of the effects of the pandemic is to reduce the mobility of people. Is this preferable for the future, too? Can one foresee fewer planes and reduced use of cars? It might be good to reduce excessive mobility. But mobility, contacts with others, not only at work but through various means including travelling, is a source of physical and also spiritual energy as demonstrated by Hartmut Rosa in his recent book *Resonance, Une sociologie de la relation au monde*.⁵³

More generally, one should do the best with what is available before inventing something else, and this is especially valid for governments and international organizations. The word environment, however, is indeed questionable. It evokes “something” external to us. We are part of nature, and we should respect and protect it. But why “harmony” with nature?

⁵²The question of “unsustainable lifestyles” is part of the larger issue of “unsustainable patterns of production and consumption” which was put on the international agenda by the Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Principle 8 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development reads as follows: “To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.” Agenda 21 has a chapter 4 titled Changing Consumption Patterns. Point 4.5: “Special attention should be paid to the demand for natural resources generated by unsustainable consumption and to the efficient use of those resources consistent with the goal of minimizing depletion and reducing pollution. Although consumption patterns are very high in certain parts of the world, the basic consumer needs of a large section of humanity are not being met. This results in excessive demands and unsustainable lifestyles among the richer segments, which place immense stress on the environment. The poorer segments, meanwhile, are unable to meet food, health care, shelter and educational needs. Changing consumption patterns will require a multipronged strategy focusing on demand, meeting the basic needs of the poor, and reducing wastage and the use of finite resources in the production process.” Goal 12 of the 2030 Agenda is much more limited in its scope and ambitions.

⁵³Hartmut Rosa is a German philosopher and sociologist generally considered as continuing the critical tradition of the Frankfurt School. His book *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* was published in 2016. The French translation was done in 2018: *Résonance. Une sociologie de la relation au monde*, traduction de Sarah Raquillet, Editions La Découverte. The English translation was done in 2020, *Resonance. A Sociology of the Relationship to the World*.

Harmony with the self and with others is not separable from harmony with nature. Obviously, such an ideal is beyond the reach of any organization. To invoke it might be seen as a form of escapism. The members of the United Nations should implement existing agreements and treaties before negotiating new and more ambitious ones. The recommendations of the Brundtland Report, partly adopted by the Earth Summit of 1992 and Agenda 21 were sound and achievable. We have to be firm, stick to a good objective, and act.

The point made on the irrelevance of the notion of harmony with nature for city dwellers, particularly the poor among them, generated some comments. Examples of cities in Norway and Japan that remain integrated in their natural environment were given. In many countries, efforts are made to “green” once again cities that had become, notably in their suburbs, ugly deserts of concrete. The “nature deficit” affecting particularly the young is now a well-known problem that private associations and schools are trying to address. But it is still very clear that deprivation in urban and rural areas is incompatible with love and respect for nature. The elimination of extreme poverty, the reduction of all forms of inequality and the search for harmony with nature are related tasks.

ANNEX I:
THE STATE OF THE PLANET IN DECEMBER 2020

Speech of the U.N. Secretary General, Columbia University, New-York, 2/12/2020

(Large extracts)

Today are released two new authoritative reports underscoring the severity of the climate crisis. The World Meteorological Organization says that 2020 is on track to be one of the three warmest years on record. The United Nations Environment Program points out that to limit the temperature rise to 1, 5 degrees Celsius, as set out in the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the world needs to decrease fossil fuel production to roughly 6 per cent every year between now and 2030.

The environmental and climate trends described in these reports show that humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal. Nature is already striking back with growing force and fury. Consequently, making peace with nature is the defining task of the 21st century. It must be the top, top priority for everyone everywhere. The Covid pandemic presents an opportunity: Covid recovery and our planet's repair can be two sides of the same coin.

There are three imperatives:

- Achieving global carbon neutrality within the next three decades.
- Aligning global finance behind the Paris Agreement.
- Delivering a breakthrough on adaptation to protect the world, and especially the most vulnerable people and countries.

The state of the planet is broken:

- Biodiversity is collapsing. One million species are at risk of extinction. Ecosystems are disappearing before our eyes. Deserts are spreading. Wetlands are being lost.
- Every year we lose 10 million hectares of forests.
- Oceans are overfished and choking with plastic waste. The carbon dioxide they absorb is acidifying the seas.
- Coral reefs are bleached and dying.
- Air and water pollution are killing 9 million people annually.
- And, with people and livestock encroaching further into animal's habitat and disrupting wild spaces, we could see more viruses and other disease-causing agent's jump from animals to humans. Lets' not forget that 75 per cent of new and emerging human infectious diseases are zoonotic.

-The past decade was the hottest in human history. Oceans' heat is at record level. This year, more than 80 per cent of the world's oceans experienced a marine heat wave.

- In the Arctic, 2020 has seen exceptional warmth, with temperatures more than 3 degrees Celsius above average, and more than 5 degrees in Northern Siberia. Arctic sea ice in October was the lowest on record and now refreezing has been the lowest on record.

- Greenland ice has continued its long-term decline, losing an average of 278 gigatons a year.

-Permafrost is melting and releasing methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

-Apocalyptic fires and floods, cyclones and hurricanes are increasingly the new normal.

-The North Atlantic hurricane season has seen 30 storms, more than double the traditional average, and breaking the record for a full season.

-Central America is still reeling from the two back-to-back hurricanes, which were part of the most intense period for such storms in recent years.

-Last year, such disasters cost 150 billion dollars.

-Covid 19 lock downs have temporarily reduced emissions and pollution, but carbon dioxide levels are still at record level high, and rising. In 2019, carbon dioxide levels reached 148 per cent of pre-industrial levels. In 2020, the upward trend has continued despite the pandemic. Methane soared even higher, to 260 per cent.

-Nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas that also harms the ozone layer, has escalated by 123 per cent.

-Meanwhile, climate policies have yet to rise to the challenge. Emissions are 62 per cent higher now than when international climate negotiations began in 1990. And every tenth of a degree of warming matters.

-Today, we are at one or two degrees of warming and already witnessing unprecedented climate extremes and volatility in every region and on every continent. We are headed for a thundering temperature rise of three to five degrees Celsius this century.

-The science is crystal clear: to limit temperature rise to 1, 5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the world needs to decrease fossil fuel production by roughly 6 per cent every year between now and 2030. Instead, the world is going in the opposite direction: planning an annual increase of 2 per cent.

-The fallout of the assault on our planet is impeding our efforts to eliminate poverty and imperiling food security. And it is making our work for peace even more difficult, as the disruption drive instability, displacement and conflict. It is no coincidence that 70 per cent of the most climate vulnerable countries are also the most politically and economically fragile.

It is not happenstance that of the 15 countries most susceptible to climate risks, eight host UN peace-keeping or special political missions.

-As always, the impact falls most heavily on the world's most vulnerable people. Those who have done the least to cause the problem suffer the most. Even in the developed world, the marginalized are the first victims of disasters and the last to recover.

There is no vaccine for the planet. Nature needs a bailout. In overcoming the pandemic, we can also avert climate cataclysm and restore our planet. This is an epic policy-test. But, ultimately, this is a moral test. Trillions of dollars are needed for Covid recovery. We cannot use those resources to lock in policies that burden them with a mountain of debt on a broken planet. We have a chance to not simply reset the world economy but to transform it. Covid recovery and our planet repair can be two sides of the same coin.

There are some positive developments:

-The European Union has committed to become the first climate neutral region by 2050, and I expect it will decide to reduce its emissions by at least 55 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030.

-The United Kingdom, Japan, the Republic of Korea and more than 110 countries have committed to carbon neutrality by 2050.

-The incoming US administration has announced the same goal. China has committed to get there by 2060.

-This means that by early next year, countries representing more than 65 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions and more than 70 per cent of the world economy will have made ambitious commitments to carbon neutrality.

The central objective of the United Nations for 2021 is to build a truly global coalition for carbon neutrality. Every country, city, financial institution and company should adopt plans for transitioning to net zero emissions by 2050, and I encourage the main emitters to lead the way towards achieving this vision, which means cutting global emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 compared with 2010 levels.

But there are worrying signs:

-Some countries have used the crisis to roll back environmental protections. Others are expanding natural resources exploitation.

-The G 20 members, in their rescue package, are spending 50 per cent more on sectors linked to fossil fuel production and consumption, than on low carbon energy.

-If the shipping sector was a country, it would be the world's sixth biggest greenhouse gas emitter. Last year, a shipping coalition agreed for zero emissions from deep sea vessels by

2030. Current policies are not in line with this pledge. We need to see enforceable regulatory and fiscal steps so that the shipping industry can deliver its commitments. The same applies to aviation.

In the fall of 2021, COP 26 will take place in Glasgow. It is time:

- To put a price on carbon
- To phase out fossil fuel finance and to end fossil fuel subsidies
- To stop building new coal power plants and halt coal power financing domestically and overseas
- To shift the tax burden from income to carbon and from taxpayers to polluters
- To integrate the goal of carbon neutrality into all economic and fiscal policies and decisions
- And to make climate related financial risk disclosures mandatory.
- Funding should flow to the green economy, resilience, adaptation and just transition programmers.
- We need to align all public and private financial flows behind the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. We have the Global Investors for Sustainable Development Alliance and the Net-Zero Assets Owners Alliance. The world pension funds manage 32 trillion dollars in assets, putting them into a unique position to move the needle. They are still far from doing so.
- Developed countries should fulfill their long-standing promise to provide 100 million dollars annually to support developing countries in reaching out climate goals. This is a matter of equity, fairness and enlightened self-interest.

ANNEX II:
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