

## Redefining Environmental Responsibilities

### *Threatened Survival*

Issues affecting an individual are not readily appreciated by the world at large and, conversely, it is all-too-easy for an individual to fail to devote even a modicum of attention to problems of a truly global nature. For their very globality and magnitude can instil a dwarfing sense of futility, hopelessness, and frustration. Yet the threats to The Biosphere, and to humanity as a whole, are fast becoming a widespread exception to this norm.

An end to human life on Earth as a result of the mortal abuse of our life-support system seems to us almost inevitable if such abuse is not stopped and, so far as possible, its effects countered. There is increasing evidence of the consequences of ozone depletion, of greater concentrations of 'greenhouse gases' in the atmosphere, and of devegetation and other human interferences with The Biosphere. The complex interrelationships that exist within, and sustain, ecological systems, have been fragmented by short-sighted human activities. The cause-and-effect shuttle between economy and ecostasis has been highlighted by increasing populations and diminishing natural resources. For example, if agriculture and forestry are poorly planned, then excessive sums and effort may be invested in the short-term extraction of produce from land that will then burden the community which it was intended to serve, as erosion reduces the area to barren wasteland. Communities are then forced to relocate themselves away from the affected area, only to initiate the same cycle again elsewhere.

### *An Interdependent Whole of Many Parts*

Public awareness of Mankind's dependency on the Biospherical environment, and of human-made threats to the environment, has heightened. The concepts of the holistic nature of The Biosphere, and the disturbance of its natural processes by human activity, are now increasingly accepted. The nature of the interaction between living beings and inanimate matter and processes, largely determines whether or not life-sustaining conditions will continue to subsist on this unique planet which is our common but only home. An increased ability to assess and monitor the significance of, and changes in, less obvious features of the land, seas, and skies, of Planet Earth, has helped to ratify these concepts.

### *The Savage Becomes the Saviour*

With the awareness of our ability to influence our environment and even to disrupt the processes sustaining the continuing existence of the whole and its various different components individually, comes acceptance that the continued welfare or terminal mutilation of our life-support system lies within our capability. The continued existence of human life, in its present form, is undeniably at stake as a result of irresponsible use of this power. The nature of this global issue, its very real status as a present threat, and the limited effect of the steps so far taken to resolve the problem, have prompted not only governments but also individuals all around the world, in a private capacity, to take what steps they can, alone or in groups, to protect and improve the environment of Man and Nature.

Amongst the tools at the disposal of such concerned individuals are the creative powers of the human mind. These can be used to develop a bold and confident approach that should be capable of universal application — such as an optimistic, positive outlook that starts with the formulation and definition of clear objectives, and comes up with a consensus-based desideratum as an essential preliminary to effective cooperative efforts. A cooperative approach is seen as being essential — an inevitable corollary to the transnational nature not just of the threat but also of our environment. The Biosphere is a shared resource of the whole globe; the oceans and the atmosphere are slow to recognize any barriers. Ground-water and atmospheric pollution do not cease to exist simply because of national, economic, or social, barriers. Further, the holistic nature of life on Earth is being highlighted by the rapidly-developing network of global communication and transport facilities.

There is accordingly a need for greater collaboration between the various disciplines of science. Moreover the approach resulting from this collaboration must be functional and relevant to present circumstances. We must heed the call to go beyond the reductionistic approach of trying to ascertain the 'essential truths' in the 'basic building-blocks of matter', and instead nurture and then act upon the realization that all activities which take place on this unique planet are in some way or ways interconnected. Efficiency of returns are to be sought for in productivity, but must be balanced with the need to sustain on a world-wide level the viability and variability of the systems upon which our life depends.

### *Global Cooperation*

As the then Secretary-General of the Commonwealth said when launching 'Global Cooperation for a Better World' in 1988 in London: 'The path to sustainable human development requires a degree of

internationalism which cannot forever be overwhelmed by the nationalist notions of the past. As we approach the twenty-first century — and the new millennium — our perception of the future surely cannot be defined essentially in national terms’.

Global Cooperation for a Better World aims to provide the context to encourage, and find acceptance for, desires for a better world than we currently inhabit; this should involve the opportunity to define the direction towards which decisions are to be made and resources channelled. Its approach is thus more creative than directly remedial, but such creativity is necessary to sustain the attitudinal adjustments and value changes without which any remedy will be, at best, short-lived.

Global Cooperation is coordinated world-wide by the Brahma Kumaris, a nongovernmental organization on the roster of the UN Economic & Social Council. It is in consultative status with UNICEF and its activities were recognized by the presentation, in 1987, of six UN Peace Messenger Awards. As the first Peace Messenger initiative dedicated to the United Nations, Global Cooperation has received tens of thousands of perceptions of, and ideas for, a better world from a wide range of people in nearly 120 countries.

### *The Global Vision*

In February 1989, The Mount Abu Declaration was drawn up and this contains ‘The Peoples’ Vision’ — the synthesis of visions received from people in 60 countries in the project’s first year and a 15-points’ statement of global priorities for the world. The Declaration was referred to in the UN Secretary-General’s report to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1989, under agenda item ‘Achievements of the International Year of Peace’.

Building from the base of ‘The Peoples’ Vision’, with further visions and the opinions of leaders world-wide in a variety of fields, project coordinators have already compiled ‘The Global Vision’, and anticipate publishing it as a part of a book ‘Global Vision — Positive Change through Vision, Values, and Cooperation’ in 1991.

### *Science, Technology, and the Environment*

During 1989 and early 1990, round-tables and seminars for different professional groups served as a vehicle for generating some such visions of a better world, and provided a forum for an in-depth discussion on the principles of cooperation and on the corresponding values and systems. One such event was a Symposium in Athens for Scientists from 23 countries on the theme of ‘Science, Technology, and Environment: A Case for Global Cooperation’.\*

The participants of the five-days symposium divided into four round-table discussion groups and each group developed its views independently. There was a great diversity of backgrounds and expressed ideas but the commonality was significant and a shared perspective emerged in a number of areas.

Emphasis was placed on the need for high ethical values throughout science, on its integration with social purpose, and on social responsibility and environmental sensitivity in its application. There was a call for a greater integration of scientific disciplines to reduce the fragmentation of knowledge. There was also a call for a closer nexus between science and the humanities, so that the way in which science is developed and used is more sensitive to its social context than is apt to be the case currently. Educational programmes which reflect these ideas were considered essential.

### *The Vision*

Some of the specific components of a better world were identified in the Athens Symposium in terms of the following statements. In a better world:

- a) There is a universal outlook reflecting an understanding of the interrelatedness of all aspects of life;
- b) Society is in ecological balance with a sustainable level of human population and duly responsible use of energy and other resources;
- c) Society establishes political, legal, economic, social, scientific, and educational, frameworks that foster security and sustenance for all;
- d) Tolerance, humility, and mutual respect, govern a flowing intercultural exchange of ideas, knowledge, and human and natural resources;
- e) The social and humanistic sciences take responsibility in developing value-systems based on individual and social needs;

\* See the account by Drossoula Elliott & Anthony Strano published in our Summer issue (*Environmental Conservation*, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 183, 1990). — Ed.

- f) There is recognition of, and respect for, different approaches to the practice of science;
- g) Science is based on principles of harmony between society and Nature, incorporates social participation in its development, and is used for the realization of a shared vision of society;
- h) Science ensures that the means used to satisfy peoples' basic needs are in balance with the environment and with the diverse cultures that constitute humanity;
- i) Technology serves justifiable needs, uses energy efficiently, complies with health criteria, and is compatible with a process of sustainable cooperation;
- j) Humanities are included in science curricula;
- k) Development is not defined solely in terms of Gross National Product (GNP); and
- l) The needs of the human spirit, mind, body, and society, and of The Biosphere, are fulfilled.

### *Suggested Steps Towards a Solution*

A number of recommendations, or suggested courses of action, have emerged in response to the need to determine ways of realizing some of the above desired future conditions. Among these are the following:

- (i) New types of thinking, based on moral principles and social values, are needed, and ethical and human values must be embodied in professional and private lives;
- (ii) Research directed towards the understanding of Humankind should be encouraged, so that the metaphysical nature and capabilities of humanity can be demystified;
- (iii) Education should help people to understand the interrelatedness of spirit, mind, body, society, and The Biosphere, and develop a future-oriented and holistic outlook;
- (iv) A change of attitudes at many levels — such as placing less importance on specialization at university, stressing philosophical training in science education, and securing conditions appropriate for improved cooperation between scientists, technologists, and decision-makers;
- (v) The development of a coherent system of knowledge which takes into account the interplay between Nature and culture, and enables wisdom and virtue together to serve the world;
- (vi) Science has to be value-based, and should have an orientation of rational spirituality that can bring inner transformation and social change; and
- (vii) People must recover their sense of harmony, balance, wholeness, and wholesomeness, developing life-styles as harmonious and ecologically-aware beings.

### *Conclusion*

Thus, in conclusion, in order to manage as a whole the unique natural resource that the Earth is (and to counter the undeniable threat to human and Nature's survival posed by chronic abuse of our environment), world-wide communication and collaboration are essential. For such activities to be productive and capable of longevity, an attitudinal change is required. Such a change may be developed through the exchange of ideas with an aim of listening and understanding, given increased trust and broad-visioned education. The issues involved do have their complexities and subtleties; but the fundamental truth of the transnational nature of The Biosphere, and the holistic approach to it that is now more demonstrably than ever essential, is also unquestionably straightforward.

In order for any real improvement in the condition and future prospects of The Biosphere, there must be a change in our actions in relation thereto. For such a change to take place there must be a change in our attitudes and way of thinking; for the deep root of the present disastrous state of the environment comes from human activity and the attitudes and values that are the origin of such activity. We have the knowledge and capacity but must sacrifice egocentric short-termed attitudes for a more caring, holistic approach. The responsibility lies with each of us. It is the potential of our own mental abilities that created the threat, and so each of us can also play a part in creating a better world through a more appropriate use of that same potential. The future is ours to determine, but it will only have the form that we choose for it through our actions.

CHRISTOPHER M. DRAKE, *Coordinator*  
*Global Cooperation for a Better World*  
 98 Tennyson Road  
 London NW6 7SB  
 England,  
 United Kingdom,

&

FRANK HUBBARD, *Manager*  
*Marine Environment Protection*  
*Marine Services Board of New*  
*South Wales*  
 GPO Box 32, Sydney  
 NSW, Australia.