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Global Environmental Protection

by

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UNEP is now 31 years old. We are the result of the first global environment conference, held in 1972 in Stockholm under the title “The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment”. The main consideration of the conference was that the impacts of consumption and production could no longer be confined to the borders of individual states. This thinking was based on the insight that negative consequences could pose costs on others, which could result in tensions and conflicts.

The classical mission of the United Nations was addressed: to make possible peace policy. But not peace policy in terms of solving existing conflicts by deploying blue helmets, but preventive peace policy, which consists of the early identification and common treatment of possible reasons of conflict.

In 1972, when it was decided to locate the UNEP headquarter in Nairobi, many people criticized this decision as a sign that environmental policy was not taken seriously in developed countries.

After six years in office, I can tell you that Nairobi is an excellent location. It became apparent that tensions can easily arise between the use of environmental resources and economic development, particularly in developing countries. “Let’s be rich first and clean up later !”. In many countries economic development followed exactly this path. Today many developing countries argue : it is not fair that you (the developed countries) first shifted the costs of economic development on the environment, and now you want to keep us from doing the same. Many developing

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countries are afraid that developed countries might use environmental protection as a means to restrain the economic growth of developing countries.

Many people believe that the protection of biodiversity is a privilege of those who have no other problems. But there is an interrelation between biodiversity and cultural diversity. Where biodiversity is lost, culture is lost too. Providing for biodiversity therefore also means providing for stability. This has also important economic consequences ! The provision of biodiversity and stable environmental conditions are a prerequisite for the alleviation of poverty. On the other side, poverty is also responsible for the overuse of the environment, although the main sources of environmental degradation are the production and consumption patterns of the developed countries.

I was once on a business trip to Columbia. After a meeting, I went to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta with a couple of Environment Ministers. This region is the home of the people of the Kogi-Indians, who live untouched by civilization. We found these Indians in big despair, since they thought they would have offended their gods. What was the background ? These people, although absolutely poor, lived in an intact and functioning environment. But in recent times, the weather had changed and the rainfalls did not come sufficiently anymore. When we told them that the likely reason for this phenomenon was climate change, they did not understand what we said.

I term such a situation "ecological aggression". We have many of these ecological aggressions. By encumbering other people with the things we cannot handle, we attack them. I do understand all those who use the argument of competitiveness. But in the end we have to ask ourselves: what dangerous consequences for world peace does our behaviour imply ? That is why I mentioned the Kogi-Indians. They could not understand the interconnections, but they were the victims !

Of course this includes a very important ethical component, because the world's poorest people have to carry the burden of the world's richest people. It also implies an ethical component because the world's poorest, in practical terms, do not carry responsibility for these problems. For this reason, I am convinced that we have to identify and tackle these ecological aggressions. The United Nations should not limit its activities to the deployment of blue helmets in cases where conflicts already exist, but it should employ green helmets before conflicts actually arise.

Many people talk about water conflicts. But water is not a question of resources, but a matter of investment and administration. With more

investment it would be possible to ease tensions in those areas where people have diverging opinions on how to use available water resources.

We know that climate change is not the forecast of some nervous environment politicians, but that climate change is happening now. In Switzerland the glaciers have diminished over the last 100 years by 25 %. Over the years, the pace of climate change has increased.

So we have to act now. First of all, we have to identify the responsible factors. We know them: the climate-impacting factors, the gases, the CO₂ that originates from any incineration of fossil fuels, such as mineral oil, coal and gas. The second step is: we oblige the most developed states to reduce these emissions. The *per capita* use in the US is 20 tonnes per year, in India only 0.9 tonnes, and in Germany 9 tonnes or so.

This is exactly the starting point of the Kyoto Protocol. But it has to be ratified in order to come into force. The crucial point is that the parties who ratify the protocol have to include industrialized countries accounting for at least 55 % of the CO₂ emissions in 1990. Without the US and Russia, the Protocol cannot come into force.

The developing countries blame the industrialized countries for not achieving the mitigation of emissions. But climate change is taking place. Therefore, you have to help us at least with the adaptation. I experienced the meaning of this when we recently presented a concrete example.

For example, climate change changes snowfall. Today, skiing resorts, in order to have sufficient snowfall, have to be located in a height of 1,500 to 1,800 metres, instead of 1,200 in earlier times. This has enormous economic impacts. In general, skiing resorts cannot achieve *mitigation*. Therefore, they ask for *adaptation*. The adaptation in question is the snow-canon. These are the adaptation processes we are taking for granted. We increasingly substitute nature with technique.

There is one good and correct saying: nature is the wealth of the poor. Where an intact environment is lost, the rich have the technological means to adapt to this situation. We have to understand that this is not a matter of alms and charity. It is much more a matter of "debt for debt". If we cancel debts of developing countries, we do so not only to be nice, but we do so because we are in the debt of developing countries. We owe them something.

Many young people in the developing world say: it is necessary to work together, because the sources of the problems are partly in our realm, but problems are also caused and aggravated by others. By working together it is possible to start development processes, which do not follow the same path that we have taken.

When we went to Johannesburg, the third conference after Stockholm and Rio, we were looking for a slogan like “responsible wealth for all”. It must not be “wealth for all”, but *responsible* wealth for all, taking into account both sides of the spectrum. We have to identify the costs as such, and use them as the basis of our work, our actions and our research.

We are doing exactly this in the area of waste. I do not want to discuss with you the deposit system on cans, but it was obvious that we had to introduce a cycle. By introducing a “life-cycle-economy” we shifted the costs of waste to the relevant decision-making levels. You will not believe how drastically this impacted the behaviour with respect to the treatment of waste. Ghandi once said: “We have enough for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed”. We have to build upon the notion that, in times of increasing demand, limited resources reward those who know best how to deal with them. This is a very important challenge.

But these questions not only affect us. I am a member of the China Council, an advisory council of the Chinese government. Three months or so ago, this council adopted a policy that called for the quadrupling of the Chinese GNP until 2020. But without a major change in consumption and production patterns, can we even image this? If we transfer our patterns of consumption to China, we might face a nightmare. Therefore, we have to look for ways to change existing consumption and production patterns in order to make economic growth possible without catastrophic consequences for the globe as a whole. That is not a question that the Chinese pose on us, but rather something they are asking themselves. And it is fascinating to see that the Chinese see this a great chance to overtake us as regards the quality of development.

This all implies that we have to make use of the still most abundant resource in the world: the capital in the heads and minds of young people. We have to raise their awareness of the bottlenecks and limits of the future.

When we began to desulphurize coal-power plants in order to mitigate forest degradation, the cost calculations were exorbitant, because there was nobody who had developed the relevant technology so far. No market existed. With the fixing of sulphur limits, a corresponding market has developed. Today the costs are by far lower. By raising the awareness for the limits of certain resources, we can change the employment patterns with respect to these limited but important resources.

We can solve these environmental problems, if we analyse them, identify them, take them seriously and include the economic responsibility of those who are responsible for them. We can thereby solve developmental

problems and make possible the economic development of those countries that need it today. We have to cooperate in order to find ways to make possible economic growth without damaging the environment in the long run. And Germany, a leading country in terms of technology, is invoked to do so.

What are we doing in the area of energy ? It is good that we will have a world conference next year in Bonn on renewable energies. I have to mention in this context, that for developing countries, renewable energies are not primarily wind and solar energies, but biomass and water. We have to consider how to make better use of these resources.

You cannot tell an African to use wind and solar power for environmental reasons, because these techniques are still the most expensive ones. The Africans will tell you to do it yourself. We can respond them that it would enable them to preserve the life of people in rural areas. Because as a matter of fact: if electricity does not come to the people, the people will go to electricity.

We have to raise energy efficiency worldwide. Why do we not set ourselves a target ? The Japanese did something similar when they decided to increase their energy efficiency by 50 % until 2020. We also have to work on that, because the changing of behaviour and the identification of scarcity create chances for people who are in urgent need to overcome their poverty. It is not a stable world, in which 20 % of people consume 54 % of energy, while 80 % of the people consume 46 %. It is not a stable world, in which the gap between poor and rich is so big that it unavoidably leads to conflicts. The young people in developing countries are eager to contribute with their skills and expertise.

Environment is the wealth of the poor. We should be cautious not to contribute to the destruction also of this wealth. Instead, we should use this wealth in order to facilitate the peaceful development of the world as a whole.