

# Address by His Excellency President Soeharto of the Republic of Indonesia at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

Rio de Janeiro, 12 June 1992

Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a distinct honour and pleasure for me to participate in this historic and auspicious Summit. The exquisite natural setting and striking beauty of Rio de Janeiro underscores the truly important and universal significance of the purposes for which we are gathered at this Earth Summit. I should therefore like to take this opportunity to thank the Government and people of Brazil for the warm welcome extended to us and the extensive facilities and preparations they have provided for this Conference.

As requested, I shall abbreviate my speech. The unabridged version will be distributed to all delegates. May I ask your kind assistance, Mr. Chairman, to put this on record as my official speech in its entirety.

In an era of pervasive change and profound transformation, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development stands out as a major milestone for Mankind. No one can deny that the world is facing increased danger of environmental catastrophe, of diminishing quality of life and a grave threat to the long-term survival of the global ecosystem. It is now being increasingly recognized that the problem is global in scope and nature and therefore requires a commensurate, globalized and balanced approach that integrates the efforts and commitments of the entire international community. This requirement is graphically reflected in the various documents now before us for further deliberation and adoption at this Conference.

The relationship between Man and his environment, especially since the Industrial Revolution, has been an exploitative and predatory one. Until the early seventies, little or nothing was done. In the absence of global accountability, greatly accelerated economic activities as well as population pressures combined to erode the carrying capacity of the global ecosystem, to destroy natural resources and habitats, and bring about widespread pollution of air and water as well as the degradation of the soil. Then, twenty years ago, at the first U.N. Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, the world was put on notice concerning the dangers and impact of such excesses on the global environment. The issue of environmental degradation took centre stage at that Conference. Now, two decades later, with the provisions of the Stockholm Declaration largely unfulfilled and the dangers to the environment still rapidly escalating, the international community is again urgently reminded of this clear and persistent danger, most notably by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its report "Our Common Future".

This Report, together with the findings of many scientists, scholars and environmentalists as well as the indispensable work of the UNEP, has underlined the magnitude of the risks and imminent dangers

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confronting Mankind. Alarming statistics, reflecting wasteful patterns of production and consumption, inter alia resulting in global warming and the progressive depletion of the ozone layer, have jolted the world into renewed and heightened concern. Unless these self-destructive practices are halted or drastically reduced, our planet is doomed to ecological catastrophe. Life as we know it is at stake. Conditions in the developing South also have an adverse impact on the environment. But here, degradation of the environment primarily results from population pressures and their corollary, pervasive poverty. The General Assembly responded decisively to the continuing deterioration of the environment in resolution 44/228 by calling for a conference that would initiate steps to reverse these adverse trends and to enable a rapid transition to a sustainable way of life in the 1990s and beyond. The present Conference, while building on the foundation of Stockholm, has also added the dimension of development as an essential corrective to the earlier perspective.

This is indeed a necessary and timely correction. For it is obvious by now that we cannot effectively address the problem of environmental degradation without at the same time resolving the problems of development and in particular of human poverty.

The poor and disadvantaged are unavoidably the first victims of environmental degradation. To lift them from their abject misery is therefore a matter of social justice. Moreover, in response to the imperative of daily survival the poor will, however inadvertently, continue to inflict damage to the environment. It is therefore a matter of practical prudence that they be the major beneficiaries of economic development so that they too will contribute constructively to that development.

We therefore have before us two sets of vital concerns: the environment and development. The integration of these two concerns in practice is central to the purposes of this Conference and would constitute a major breakthrough for Mankind. It should be noted, however, that the ability of the developing countries to tackle global environmental tasks while simultaneously pursuing their development objectives will ultimately depend on whether a supportive economic environment is in place or not. This fact underscores the basic truth that environmental protection should not be undertaken at the expense of development, and that economic development is the fundamental right of all peoples and countries. It logically follows that natural resources in the developing countries should not be designated as global commons while unsustainable consumption patterns in the developed countries are left unresolved. Otherwise the burden of environmental responsibility will be unfairly shifted to the developing countries of the South — which will certainly be unacceptable.

To us, the interaction among development, environment and population is a cornerstone of national policy. We have learned to be concerned not only with population growth rates but also with the quality of the population, the levels of education that the people attain, and the skills and capabilities that they acquire. We have to consider the rights of individuals as they constitute population and a society, such as the right of men and women alike to determine the size of their families, the right to further the interests of the communities to which they belong, and other rights guaranteed under our laws. Such rights, together with the right to development and to obtain the best possible quality of life, as well as the right to a proper social and physical environment, are part of the spectrum of human rights that we uphold.

Mr Chairman,

In this light, let us consider the various decisions and measures that have been proposed for adoption by this Conference. The drafts before us not only define the problems and the steps that will bring us to their solution, but they also specify the rights and obligations of all of us who are committed to the cause of environment and development.

I should like to stress that these obligations must be allocated and shared as equitably as possible. That means that we should take into consideration the differences in levels of financial, technological

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and institutional capabilities of all the countries concerned. It seems clear that our common cause will be best served if we continue to develop and share all our human capabilities. This is true of our environmental efforts, and even more so of our development efforts.

Development has many facets, including social and cultural, but development is primarily an economic endeavour comprising the pursuit of material wealth, of income and earning capacity. Aware as we are of the link between development and environment, we are convinced that when a country is able to increase its material wealth and financial resources, to the same degree it is able to strengthen its pursuit of sustainable development. By serving the cause of economic development we thus serve the cause of the environment.

Therefore, a major objective of international cooperation, within as well as outside the context of UNCED, should be to enable the developing countries to reach self-sustained growth and achieve sustainable development within the shortest possible time.

One of the means by which that objective can be attained is for the developing countries to be allowed to obtain better and more equitable prices for the commodities extracted from their natural resources — prices which reflect both environmental and resource-renewal costs. Another way is for developing countries to be allowed to achieve higher value-added earnings by processing the yield of their natural resources themselves before exportation. In brief, it is high time that we abandon the colonial heritage whereby developing countries are relegated to the function of mere plantation economies.

This will not be an easy task since vestiges of colonialism still persist in the patterns of international relations, in the patterns of trade and resource flows which greatly favour the industrialised countries to the inherent disadvantage of the developing countries. And at present we also witness the painful paradox of financial resource flows from the developing to the developed countries exceeding those from the rich to the poor countries.

Indeed the possession of greater wealth and more advanced technology has provided the industrialised countries with the comparative advantage that enables them to unilaterally set the terms of their relations with the developing countries. This has resulted in a further accumulation of material wealth in the industrialised countries, further strengthening their dominant position in the world. This is a vicious spiral that has to be broken.

For today it has become imperative that we undertake joint efforts globally to safeguard the viability of the entire planet. But even in this context, the industrialised nations would still wish to impose their terms on our common efforts. This they do with the full knowledge that all nations, without exception, are under the same threat of an environmental catastrophe. They persist, even in the face of the fact that industrialised countries bear the greater responsibility for the acceleration of global environmental degradation as evidenced by the fact that their consumption patterns are many times more wasteful and waste-producing than those of the developing countries.

This is an inequity that cannot be justified by the certainty that they will have to make substantial financial contributions to the global programme for the environment. The fact is that they also stand to reap substantial benefits that are proportionately larger than all the benefits to be gained by developing countries. It is obvious that the industrialised countries will derive more than just environmental benefits from such a programme. In embarking on these environmental efforts, it is not our purpose to perpetuate the gap between rich and poor countries. Yet that is how it would appear in the light of this inequity. In the process, neither the cause of the environment nor the cause of development will be adequately served.

Such a course of events would relegate the developing countries to second class status in the community of nations. It does not require much imagination to realise that such a situation could become the seedbed for potential global conflict on a scale more perilous than any we have experienced before.

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Mr Chairman,

Sustainable development implies the integration of two elements: environment and development. Both must be simultaneously and equally attended to and their respective objectives reconciled and harmonised. One cannot be sacrificed for the sake of the other. And its implementation requires above all the equitable sharing of responsibilities as well as of opportunities.

On the global scale, it requires the re-integration of all our efforts for the sake of preserving and enhancing the viability of this planet at the same time as we pursue global development. We must overcome the disintegrative and centrifugal forces that only serve short-term economic expediency and the self-centred pursuit of material gain. Our common objectives cannot be achieved when nations and peoples become alienated from one another and lose their sense of global solidarity.

We must therefore learn to nurture the habits and practices of global cooperation, to sharpen the awareness of our shared humanity and of the fact that we are the steward of a single vulnerable environment. We must arrive at a new global partnership. We can forge that partnership not only by adopting a global-environmental programme but also by establishing new patterns of relations between nations in terms of trade, in terms of investments, of capital and other resource flows. As we seek to establish such a new global partnership, we will have to reconsider, rethink and perhaps create a new pattern for the division of labour among nations.

We see this Earth Summit as a vital step towards the establishment of that new global partnership. We hope that the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, and all the other agreements that we will adopt here at this Conference will bring us closer to its realisation. It is therefore vitally important that we ensure the successful implementation of these agreements. This, we believe, will be one of the most important tasks of the United Nations in the coming years.

In this context, we realise that the United Nations System must undergo some necessary adjustments. The United Nations System, after all, was established almost half a century ago when issues were less complex and inter-related than they are today. Already it is difficult enough to monitor and coordinate the myriad efforts of all the UN bodies, agencies and programmes.

This could become a problem of even greater magnitude when it comes to the implementation of a global programme of sustainable development, which is cross-sectoral in nature and spans almost all of the UN agencies and programmes.

We believe that it is essential to establish, within the United Nations, an entity which is mandated and entrusted with the task of coordinating the global pursuit of sustainable development in all its aspects. In particular, this entity should coordinate, monitor, and ensure the implementation of Agenda 21 and the other agreements adopted by this Earth Summit.

For administrative and organisational purposes, this entity could be placed under the purview of ECOSOC, but for substantive and policy issues, it should have direct access to the highest decision-makers in the United Nations.

I am gratified that developments at the Conference have led towards the establishment of a High Level Commission on Sustainable Development. The specific organisational modalities for the work of this Commission will be determined by the General Assembly at its 47th Session.

I believe that it would be desirable for the High Level Commission to convene at the level of Heads of State/Government at an appropriate and mutually agreed-upon time. This would lend the necessary weight to the High Level Commission and ensure that follow-up of this Conference will meet our hopes, expectations and aspirations.

I should like to seek your views and support for this proposal and to assure you that Indonesia stands ready to undertake further activities and discussions to explore its practical realisation.

We submit this proposal in the awareness that the pursuit of sustainable development, the integration and reconciliation of environment and development, requires a concentrated and unrelenting effort

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involving the highest decision-makers in the community of nations. The stakes are high and they include the future of this planet as a life-support system, the capacity of nations to share the one world in which we live, and the ability of all Mankind to practise their shared humanity.

Let us not squander the environment which has been placed in our trust, nor lose this opportunity to bring about harmony among all human beings and all peoples of the world as well as harmony between humanity and the planet that supports its teeming life. That harmony shall be our worthiest tribute to God's Providence for all His Creation.

May God grant us wisdom and bless this our common endeavour.

Thank you.

SOURCE: This unofficial translation was provided by the State Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia.