

# Plenary Statement by Professor Dr Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn Mahidol Personal Representative of His Majesty the King of Thailand and Head of Delegation of Thailand at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

Rio de Janeiro, 5 June 1992

Mr President, Your Majesties, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

As head of the Thai Delegation, I should like to express our deep appreciation to you, Mr President, and to your government for hosting this United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. We owe much to your tireless efforts as well as those of the Governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro and the Mayor of this beautiful city, for the excellent facilities provided.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General of UNCED, Mr Maurice Strong, and his colleagues in the Secretariat, for their contributions and for their dedication to this event.

It is not often that there is the opportunity to speak at such a gathering and to address so influential an audience as on this historic occasion. The leaders present here have the capacity to make far-reaching decisions that could have profound consequences for humankind and the planet. I am honoured to be among you today.

The world's civilization is now at a critical junction. All the social, economic, cultural, political and ecological indicators clearly underscore this critical point in the course of human civilization. We, as human beings, have the intellect, technical and scientific means to decide on the path which we could take. The vast numbers of leaders of governments, business and industry, the science and technology community, local government, women, youth, indigenous peoples [who] are both here in Rio Centro as well as in downtown Flamingo Park, must clearly emphasize the concern and their desire for concerted activities to reconcile developmental needs and ecological imperatives.

The preparations for this unprecedented summit meeting have been conducted at the national and international levels for over two years, and have been remarkably broad in scope. They have drawn on the experience and dedication of governments, the agencies of the United Nations, intergovernmental organizations, and a multitude of non-governmental organizations, and experts from around the world. The attendance here of more than 110 Heads of Government underscores a worldwide recognition at the highest level, of the importance of this momentous event.

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The time has now come for us to act in concert to build on these promising preparations and to launch the global partnership which will set the foundations for a more equitable, hospitable, secure and peaceful Earth in the twenty-first century.

The critical elements of this partnership, drawn from the UNCED preparatory process, should be as follows:

There is a need to agree urgently to a fundamental set of principles that will provide a critical framework for our actions as individuals as well as collectively as nations. These principals must revisit the need for equity, justice, peace, compassion, respect and care between human beings, between and amongst countries as well as between human beings and all the manifestations of nature, the priceless heritage for all that share this unique, beautiful and bountiful world. A set of fundamental principles will help guide the conduct of nations and peoples in respect of environment and development so as to ensure the further viability and integrity of the Earth as a secure and hospitable home for human and other forms of life.

The Rio Declaration will provide us with the needed guiding fundamental and basic principles for international behaviour to protect the environment and to encourage sustainable development. It will not be legally binding but it will have a very strong political and moral force.

The Declaration must be sensitive to the needs of countries from all regions. It must be prescriptive but yet flexible enough to allow developing countries to identify and carry out their own initiatives to protect the environment at a cost which they can afford.

My delegation welcomes the progress made on the Rio Declaration at the Fourth Substantive Session of the Preparatory Committee in New York. The Chairman's draft text contains delicate compromises. The text is now here with us for further consideration and finalization. We hope that in Rio de Janeiro, the spirit of cooperation will prevail to ensure our success.

Some of the principles which are considered to be of special importance are:

- the pursuit of sustainable development;
- the upholding of the sovereign right of States to exploit their own resources in accordance with their own environment and developmental policies, together with the responsibility of States to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or to areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction;
- the reaffirmation of the intimate linkage between environmental protection and the development process;
- the eradication of poverty by giving priority to the special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly those affected by desertification and drought;
- the promotion of international cooperation to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development — this requires the improvement of scientific understanding through the transfer of scientific and technical knowledge as well as the transfer of technology;
- the recognition of the right to development for all peoples and states;
- the sharing among States on an equitable basis, of the responsibility for the protection of the environment;
- the assurance that trade policy measures for environmental purpose will not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade.

The programme of action exemplified in Agenda 21 must truly help integrate environment and development. It should provide the basis for sustainable livelihoods, so that the inventiveness and aspirations of an individual will be increased. The dignity of the individual will also be respected and the resulting effects of hunger and poverty will be reduced or eliminated. In my country, Thailand, all the Royal initiated projects by my father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, have had these key goals for the

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past four decades. We have identified a number of fundamental principles and concepts which contribute towards sustainability, namely:

1. An approach which is integrated transcends sectoral integration, and includes spatial and institutional integration.
2. The need for development activities to be area-specific, taking into account the particular factors and actors in the project operational environment of each specific location.
3. The application of technology which is appropriate to the particular physical, social and cultural environment where the area-specific development will take place.
4. The necessity to address first the basic needs of the population before proceeding to income-generating activities.
5. The need for the maximum participation of the people in the planning and implementation of projects.
6. The availability of a reliable data base, supplemented by site visits, consultations and discussions with the people affected by the development project.
7. The holding of field demonstrations of likely solutions to rural problems to persuade farmers and villagers to use these solutions.

To illustrate how these major principles and concepts can be applied, perhaps I may be permitted to highlight some of the projects carried out at the Chulabhorn Research Institute to explain most of the principles and concepts which contribute towards sustainability as earlier mentioned.

Recent floods in Southern Thailand constituted one of the worst disasters in the recent history of my country. These caused severe loss of human life and great damage to infrastructure, settlements, the environment, agriculture and fisheries.

Chulabhorn Research Institute was requested by the Royal Thai Government to coordinate activities and carry out the implementation in resettlement and rehabilitation, and in the restoration and management of natural resources and the environment in two of the worst affected provinces.

The programme consists of two work plans. Short Term Plans include rehabilitating people, implementing urgent measures to minimize and prevent future floods and landslides, revegetating and reforesting damaged areas, surveying geologic conditions and mineral resources, and reforesting slopes and ridge areas. Long Term Plans include a survey of natural resources and their management for maximum use and prevention of future floods together with education of the people in ecology and conservation. Resettlement of the people in the newly-established communities was planned in different cooperative styles according to the basic, social and cultural needs of the people as well as the availability of the land. Throughout the programme, special emphasis has been placed on improving the quality of life of the people through education and training. The programme, so far, has accomplished its primary objectives and goals. It is hoped that it will be a model to demonstrate integrated development and environmental management.

Thailand considers the implementation of Agenda 21 to be a national priority. Indeed, we have placed emphasis on the need to integrate environment and sustainable development. The Thai Government's five-year development plans, from 1992-96, are increasingly focusing attention and resources at similar objectives. Poverty and hunger have been significantly reduced in my country.

To conceive, plan and implement the integration of environment and development policies requires a cadre of trained and experienced personnel. Implementing and increasing national capacities, through education, training and awareness programmes for all sectors of society is a necessary prerequisite. Then only will the country be able to identify, choose, implement and use the technologies and know-how that will address the specific local and national conditions to help ensure sustainability. Developing countries must strengthen their endogenous capabilities in all areas. Thus, capacity building for research and

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human resources development is an excellent area for international collaboration in which technology and expertise can be transferred between and amongst countries and particularly from developed and developing countries. My country, Thailand, is in a position to offer the international community the training of human resources in the area of environmental toxicology and management, through the selected Institutes of Higher Learning such as the Chulabhorn Research Institute which has been designated a “Centre of Excellence” by the United Nations Environment Programme. Special attention should also be directed at the youth, who will one day inherit this Earth, as well as women who must play an equal partnership role in the integration of environment and development.

Participatory, responsive and accountable institutional system[s] are needed to help ensure that the priorities, needs and aspirations of the people are taken into account and incorporated in the policies and programmes of the public as well as the private sectors. Intergovernmental mechanisms including the United Nations system must also possess these attributes.

With respect to financial resources, there is a need not only for new and additional resources but also the participatory mechanisms for identifying and agreeing on priorities and means for managing financial resources. While international cooperation is important in promoting sustainability, increasing and improving national capacity and capability to be self reliant is as crucial, if not more so.

This, the first “Earth Summit” is an opportunity that presents itself at a turning point in history. Now is the defining moment in global relationships. We must use this opportunity to launch the global partnership that I and others have outlined, and the building blocks of which are before us in the shape of the elements for negotiations and agreement at this Conference. This week is the twentieth anniversary of the inauguration of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. We have also just commemorated World Environment Day — an occasion conceived to increase our awareness of environmental issues and commitment to their solution. It is an auspicious occasion for all of us meeting together in Rio de Janeiro, to forge a historic alliance to set our planet on course for a more secure and equitable future. Let us put aside the immediate and local anxieties that inevitably concern us and reach a worthy agreement of global solidarity. May understanding, sacrifice and compassion unite us all in this great endeavour for our own survival and well being, and also for generations yet to come.

SOURCE: Royal Embassy of Thailand, Singapore.