

# **RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**PAPERS FROM ONE DAY CONFERENCE AT  
SRI KESHGARH SAHIB, ANANDPUR SAHIB, PUNJAB, INDIA  
22 JULY 2002**

**Under auspices of Sri Darbar Sahib,  
Amritsar, India**

**Organised by  
Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandik Committee  
and  
Sikh Human Rights Group**

**Programme 2**

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## RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### SRI KESHGARH SAHIB, ANANDPUR SAHIB, PUNJAB, INDIA 22 JULY 2002-08-14 AGENDA

- 9:00am Honouing of Guests and Distribution of 'Bootian da Parshaad' (saplings) Sri Keshgarh Sahib
- 10:00am Welcome address **Singh Sahib Prof. Manjit Singh**  
Jathedar Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib  
Blessing Singh Sahib Giani Joginder Singh, Jathedar Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar.
- 10:20am Keynote speech: **Dr Kamala Chowdhry.**  
Vikram Sarabhai Foundation, Member, Un secretary generals panel of Iminent Persons for World Summit on Sustainable Development.
- "Sustainability and Spirituality: A Vital Connection"**
- 11:00am Addresses by Religious Leaders and other Imminent Persons:
- Smt. Shyamala Shiveshwarkar**
- Maulana Mohammed Rafiq Kasmi: Jamaite Islami Hind**
- Father Joseph: Catholic Church of North India**
- Sri Somedho Thero: Thervadi Buddhist Tradition**
- 11:40am Address by Hon Chief Guest Sardar Surjit Singh Barnala, Governor of Uttranchal Pardesh.
- Break**
- 12:30pm **His Eminence Archbishop Seraphim.**  
Archbishop of Johannesburg and Petotia, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.
- "Religious Contributions to Sustainable Development"**
- 12:45pm **Dr Jasdev Singh Rai**  
Sikh Human Rights Group (to be presented by Dr Mandeep Singh)
- "The Spiritual and Ethical Role In Sustainable Development"**
- 1:05pm Address by **Prof. Kirpal Singh Badungar.**  
President, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandak Committee
- Lunch**
- 3:00pm **Dr Surjeet Kaur Chahal**  
Dept of Philosophy, University of Pune
- "Sustainable Development: The Sikh Perspective"**
- Discussion**
- 4:30pm Resolutions and conclusion  
**Dr Kehar Singh**  
Chairman Punjab School Education Board
- Thank you address  
**Dr Mandeep Singh**  
Sikh Human Rights Group
- 7:00pm Dinner and Close

## **Sustainability and Spirituality: A Vital Connection**

Dr Kamla Chowdhry,

Vikram Sarabhai Foundation, New Delhi  
Member UN Secretary General's Panel of Eminent Persons for World Summit on Sustainable Development

Paper prepared for a meeting under Darbar Sahib's Patronage  
Religious Perspectives for Sustainable Development  
Anandpur Sahib, July 22-23, 2002

The World Summit of Sustainable Development (WSSD) is being held at Johannesburg ten years after the Rio event. We have had ten years of experience to realise what has gone wrong in our attempts to move towards 'sustainability'. We have had ten years of various negotiations to reduce environmental damage; ten years of addressing poverty issues without much success; ten years of increasingly unsustainable businesses; and ten years of ever more increasing consumption. What have we learnt in these ten years so that in Johannesburg we can focus on relevant issues and move forward in accepting what it takes to harmonize present development with the future of the world. We should not have to take an overdraft on the future of our children and grandchildren to sustain our indulgence in the present.

My list of issues to be addressed in Johannesburg in this connection are:

### **Sustainable Development: The Need for a Clearer Definition:**

Although the term 'sustainable development' was first used in 1981 by Lester Brown of the World Watch Institute, it acquired its fame when used by the Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, and was later brought to the attention of millions during the Rio Conference in 1992. The phrase 'sustainable development' was defined in the Brundtland Commission Report, as "that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Such a definition, I believe, cannot lead to ACTION. What are the needs of the present generation? Should we look at food, shelter and clothing, or are we talking about maintaining the present consumerist life style? And how do you measure and clarify the needs of future generations? What is the yard-stick to measure this? There is

widespread use of the phrase 'sustainable development', especially by the western industrialized nations. The attractiveness of this concept could well be that, insofar as it says little that is precise, it does not breed any sense of guilt about not acting positively to improve the situation, or to move towards a well-defined goal.

Gro Harlem Brundtland in explaining the use of the phrase says in her Report, "as we strived in the World Commission on Environment and Development to agree on concepts that could gather global consensus, we realised it would be difficult to give support for global change if we had to conclude that countries and regions would have to sustain a significant decline in their standard of living". Was it because of this fear of lack of consensus that we have such a watered down statement – a statement which is broad enough, vague enough, which would of course led to a consensus – but also to no meaningful action?

Further, most western scholars, environmentalists and international institutions have focused on the technological dimensions of sustainable development – an area in which they have expertise, skills and advantage.

Elizabeth Dowdeswell who was the Executive Director of United Nation's Environment Program (UNEP) commenting on the sustainability debate said "ultimately sustainable consumption is not a scientific or a technical question, that it really is first and foremost a question of values". She pointed out that "it is uncomfortable for many of us because that kind of self-examination and re-evaluation of life styles is not an easy thing for any of us to do. I believe that what we are really talking about here, if we get past the definitional question is nothing less than a fundamental paradigm shift. How should we live? How much is enough? What way of life ought we to pursue? Those simple questions are often the most profound for they challenge the security of our accustomed norms".

The questions that Elizabeth Dowdeswell had raised regarding 'sustainability' are also the questions that Gandhi had raised earlier regarding the direction of western civilization. Said Gandhi, "Civilizations in the real sense of the term consists not in the multiplicity of wants, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants". Gandhi was addressing the question of sustainability, of peace and non-violence. If 'sustainable development' is to be achieved, the multiplicity of wants will have to be addressed –

and I believe, this is not going to be addressed by the highly industrialized nations of the world as long as they have power to influence and control resources in the South. Talking about western industrialization Gandhi had said "God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the West. If an entire nation of 300 millions (and now 1 billion) took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts...." ..... "India when it begins to exploit other nations – as it must if it becomes industrialized - will be a curse for other nations, a menace to the world".

The road to 'sustainable development' lies in simple living. As the Bible said "What shall it avail a man if he gains the whole world and lose his soul?" In not addressing 'sustainable development' in clear-cut terms, have we not lost our soul? Gandhi's famous quotation 'there is enough for everyone's needs, but not enough for everyone's greed' is important and central to the whole question of sustainability. Adopting 'sustainable' life styles is a difficult road for a consumerist society, a society which maintains its power on the basis of large differences between North and South, and between the rich and the poor.

Ultimately, sustainability will need a civilizational change.

At Johannesburg we need a new definition of 'sustainable development', a definition which can be a clearer guide to action than the definition we have so far. At Johannesburg if we wish to find the road to 'sustainability' we must explore the inner world of man as a guide to sustainable development and not exclude it as we have done in the past.

### **Economists and Ecologists:**

The economists as also our politicians look at the unprecedented growth of the global economy and of international trade and investment as signs of progress and see a promising future with more of the same. The ecologists on the other hand look at this same growth and see climate change and the destruction of the Earth's resources. The ecologists view the market with less reverence because they see a market that will not and does not tell the whole truth.

Lester Brown points out that "as we begin the 21<sup>st</sup> century our economy is slowly destroying its support systems, consuming its endowment of natural capital. Demands

of an expanding globalised economy as now structured are surpassing the sustainable yield of eco-systems". A third of the world, cropland is losing top soil endangering food security; 50% of grazing lands have become deserts; the world's forests have shrunk by 50% and are further shrinking fast. Two thirds of the ocean's fisheries are over-fished; and overpumping of underground is leading to serious water shortages.

Modern business has played a major role in the Earth's destruction. Listen to what Paul Hawken has to say "Quite simply our business practices are destroying life on Earth. Given corporate practices not one wildlife reserve, wilderness, or indigenous culture will survive the global market economy. We know that every living natural system on the planet is disintegrating before our eyes. The land, water, air and sea have been transformed from life giving systems into repositories of waste. There is no polite way of saying that business has ravaged the earth".

The adoption of the western economic model means a certain death of the eco-systems and of the Earth itself. It is essential that we transform our destructive economy, and transform our way of life so that simplicity and sustainability can be achieved, so that the Earth is saved from man's greed and his murderous ways.

The Rio meeting, 10 years ago, was an attempt in this direction. 140 heads came and agreed to Agenda 21, but nobody followed it. President Bush, the senior Bush, said 'we will not jeopardize our way of life' – but, they seem more than willing to jeopardize the life of the Earth itself!

So because of our greed and our use of violence we have raped the soil and denigrated the eco-systems and caused irreparable damage to the Earth – and its soul. In the process we have lost touch with our inner self, with the sacredness of the Earth, and the pilgrimages to the Ganges and the sacred mountains that nourished our spirituality and sustained us. It is time we brought our *Vedic* sayings and our spirituality to center stage – and remember that everything we do to the Earth, we do it to ourselves as well! If we tear her apart, we do so to ourselves as well; with violence to the Earth, we have become violent to each other as well.

In the pursuit of science and technology we require supreme wisdom and supreme ethics and spirituality. The lengthened reach of our actions in space and time has put man's responsibility and ethics into center stage.

### **Steering Business Towards Sustainability:**

Business has played a major role in environmental destruction. In reviewing ecological disasters Paul Hawken has the following to say :

“Quite simply our business practices are destroying life on earth. Given current corporate practices not one wildlife reserve, wilderness, or indigenous culture will survive the global market economy. We know that every living natural system on the planet is disintegrating before our eyes. The land, water, air and sea have been functionally transformed from life giving systems into repositories for waste. There is no polite way of saying that business is ravaging the world.”

Corporations seem to behave as if nature is a free store house of unlimited resources to be used, consumed, and wasted. Rivers have been turned around, mountains have been razed, and forests annihilated!

And listen to Victor Lebow writing in the New York Journal of Retailing “our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption a way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction in consumption... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced and discarded, at an ever growing rate”. With such a philosophy, we should forget sustainable development, future generations and even a peaceful world.

To steer business towards sustainability, we need to create sustainable forms of business, embedded in sustainable communities. A Buddhist way of life would call for Buddhist economics, just as modern consumerist way of life has brought forth unsustainable economics and unsustainable life styles.

Sustainable communities is what Schumacher was suggesting in ‘Small is Beautiful’. And sustainable communities was what Gandhi was trying to achieve through his spinning wheel and village development plans.

If we want to influence businesses towards sustainability we need to focus on the consumer and influence him to change his way of life from the 'having' mode to a 'being' mode.

### **The Missing Voice in Rio:**

In Rio we had good ideas, good vision, good dreams but were not successful in igniting ACTION.

In Rio the international community which participated and took decisions consisted of heads of State and Government, national delegates and leaders of NGOs, scientists, environmentalists, women's groups etc. The agenda for action that emerged included proposals of reducing consumption, combating poverty, protecting the atmosphere, oceans and bio-diversity etc. But as mentioned earlier, the promises made for ACTION did not take place.

Missing from the debate and discussion were the voices of the saints and spiritual leaders whose analysis of problems and their solutions follow a different path. Many of the spiritual leaders of the world have a following of millions and if ACTION towards sustainability is to be achieved it is important to get their involvement and their way of dealing with life styles and the problem of sustainability.

It is important to understand that 'religion' is different from 'spirituality'. 'Spirituality' means dealing with our inner selves, of putting our inner house in order. Spirituality is the praxis of the heart, it strengthens our inner being to pursue Truth fearlessly.

We will not be able to bring pollution or population, or poverty or consumption under control unless we learn to control our inner self – and this means the practice of spirituality.

If we can rediscover the importance of the 'inner self' and of 'spirituality' in Johannesburg, we will rediscover truth and compassion, we can then move meaningfully towards a more equal world, a less violent world, an environmentally safer world. In other words, with the integration of 'spirituality', of the inner voice of truth, with courage and fearlessness we can start moving on the road to sustainability – without it we will flounder and fail as we have in the past.

The politicians, and the government officials, and the negotiators who help take decisions in such forums because of conflicting pressures from the North and South make compromises in order to be 'practical', whereas, the spiritual leaders are uncompromising about the pursuit of Truth. They adhere to the Truth whatever the consequences. The politician's way, however well meant, is based on compromises, and one compromise leads to another, and each compromise leads you further away from the Truth – and from sustainable action.

Agenda 21, the Kyoto Protocol and other such negotiations have not worked because we have not been able to pursue Truth and action fearlessly.

To walk on the road towards 'sustainability' requires fearlessness, a pursuit of Truth, whatever may be the consequences. The politicians and officials are concerned about the consequences, whereas, the spiritual leaders help you pursue 'truth' whatever the consequences.

At Johannesburg Summit we hope that our quest to build a more sustainable future is built not only on scientific knowledge but spiritual knowledge as well. For this we will need to hear the voice of the saints and the spiritual leaders of the world, loudly and clearly.

### **Reducing Poverty: Spirituality a Vital Connection:**

"If the World Summit in Johannesburg is to lead to effective strategies for sustainable development we will have to reinvigorate the fight against abject and dehumanizing poverty", says Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General.

The World Bank, development agencies, and national governments have been trying to reduce poverty in the world, but without much success. In fact since Rio the rich have become richer and the poor poorer – and natural resources which had earlier sustained the poor have been vanishing, leaving the poor poorer and more helpless.

We had hoped and still believe that 'science and technology' will help solve the problems of hunger and poverty. Nehru said, "it is science alone that can solve the

problems of hunger and poverty, of sanitation and illiteracy.... The future belongs to science and to those who make friends with science.”

We did make friends with science, but we ignored listening to the poor and their inner spiritual concerns. It is clear from the kind of India that has emerged from our ‘scientific’ approach to the solution of poverty, that we have lost our soul, that we have become a nation of mimics, and that we have lost our sustainable way of life.

As early as 1916 Gandhi gave a lecture on economics, and raised the question “Is economic progress real progress? I take it, he said, that by economic progress we mean material advancement without limit – and by real progress we mean moral progress....” Continuing his lecture he makes the point, “I venture to think the scriptures of the world are far safer and sounder treatises on the laws of economics than many of the modern text books. And he added “I believe that Jesus was the greatest economist of his time.” And Gandhi tells his audience that persons who have exercised great influence and moulded the lives of millions were people like Jesus, who deliberately embraced poverty, as also people like Buddha, Mohammed, Vivekanand, Mother Theresa and such others.

Poverty is not the problem, wealth is the problem in sustainable development.

Slowly, but increasingly, we are recognising that reducing poverty will encompass both the material and spiritual aspects of life; that personal transformation goes hand in hand with social change and that values of communities must be woven in the fabric of development.

There are spiritual institutions in India and in other parts of the world where with a philosophy of service and salvation, institutions have been able to achieve remarkable results in removing poverty and in building sustainable communities.

Pandurang Shastri, the leader of Swadhyaya movement in India, whose work has improved the lives of millions of poor people in India describes his work ““We *Swadhyayees* try to bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots, but we are not socialists. We are engaged in removing the dirt and rust which has settled on our culture. Yet we are not reformers. We do try to emancipate women from their

oppressed conditions but we are not women liberators. We are basically devotees, i.e. *bhaktas*.”

There are many such movements in India (and hopefully in other countries as well) where the source of change and the methods used are largely spiritual in nature.

Slowly but surely development agencies too are recognising that development is a process that encompasses both the spiritual and the material aspects of life; that personal transformation goes hand in hand with social change. And there is a growing awareness that the borrowed western model of development and social change has not worked because cultural and spiritual values of communities have not been woven in the fabric of development. Therefore the new development paradigm and strategies for elimination of poverty must be holistic and consistent with the deeper spiritual traditions of the people. If we have such a development paradigm we will be able to remove poverty – without it we will flounder and fail as we have done in the last 50 years.

In Johannesburg for poverty reduction we will need a paradigm that is consistent with the culture and spiritual traditions of the people. Indeed we need a new and enlarged definition of poverty itself. The West tends to define poverty merely in material terms; the poor are the “have-nots”. Latent in this mindset is the pull to acquisitiveness and consumerism; for a person’s worth is measured by what he has or consumes, not by who he is. This brings about a neglect or devaluation of spiritual resources and upsets the equilibrium between the physical and spiritual dimensions of human personality and culture. Consumerism that assumes ritualistic overtones is a product of this existential imbalance. Such an imbalance underlies the model of development that today imperils the sustainability of our world; and as long as this spiritual reality is not addressed in practical terms we are unlikely to make any appreciable progress towards solving the poverty problem.

The key to a breakthrough to poverty eradication lies along the path of spirituality, of service and salvation.

It is a matter of concern as to why our spiritual leaders and our religious organisations are not in the forefront of safe-guarding the Earth. Development has depleted the vitality of the Earth, and it is important that spiritual communities focus their attention and their

spiritual energies on saving the Earth, its soils and forests, its rivers and oceans, its air and birds and butterflies. Restoring and healing the Earth will also help in restoring inner peace, and in helping rediscover truth and beauty, and compassion.

If we can rediscover 'spirituality', we will also rediscover truth and compassion, we can then move more meaningfully towards a more equal world, a less violent world, an environmentally safer world. In other words, with an emphasis on spirituality, on listening to the inner voice of truth, we can start moving on the road to sustainability – without it we will flounder and fail as we have in the past.

### **The Challenge at Johannesburg:**

For an age that places so much of its hopes on science and technology, and whose preoccupations are primarily wealth and weaponry, it is astonishing how much of our history of successful development, of reduction of poverty and hunger, of saving the environment, is being done by spiritual leaders and spiritual movements. For too long we have been at the mercy of those selling dreams of progress without a whisper of where it is taking us. It is the spirituality of people we must tap if we wish real change and real transformation to take place.

If we continue on our present civilizational mode of what Gandhi referred to as 'toys of civilization' and its consequences of a divided and a violent world, we may agree with Sir Radhakrishnan that such a civilization is not worth saving.

We are at the cross roads of history. It is becoming increasingly clear that if humanity is to survive we will have to reexamine our concepts of progress and development, and our addiction to having more and more.

The life and teachings of saints and spiritual leaders like Gandhi, Vivekananda, Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and many such others are essentially the awakening of a moral force in people, in awakening the conscience of mankind, in the awakening of one's spirituality and in the pursuit of one's duty and *dharma*.

Johannesburg has shown the world a new spirit of 'reconciliation'. Rio+10 too needs a new vision of reconciliation – reconciliation between economic wellbeing and ecological well being; reconciliation between the needs of the South and the life styles of the

North; reconciliation between the inner and outer strivings of man; reconciliation of 'being' and 'having'; and reconciliation of inner peace with non-violence.

The challenge of Johannesburg is 'can we move towards a 'reconciliation' between the economic and the spiritual aspect of man, and can we rediscover the sense of the sacred in our relationship with the Earth; and can we rediscover the power of compassion? For without spirituality and without compassion and without fearlessness we cannot solve the problems of poverty, violence, inequality, peace, and of sustainability in the world.

It is because we are violent inside that our concern for the poor and our environment and our concern for future generations are dying around us!

Kamla Chowdhry  
(Member, UN Secretary General's Panel of Eminent Persons for  
World Summit on Sustainable Development)

## **Sustainable Development : The Sikh Perspective**

**Dr. Surjeet Kaur,  
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We see unlimited progress around us. The only limits to progress are human creativity and policy. The whole and sole aim of our actions today is development. By development and progress we merely mean material development. Traditionally human beings have taken the view that nature is created simply for man. The philosophy of Bacon was the Charter of the Industrial Revolution. Bacon said "Let the human race recover that right over nature, which belongs to it by Divine Bequest." It was such an attitude towards nature which has led to the present development. The west was always interested in external material progress.

In contrast with this the Sikh Gurus looked down upon mere material progress. They stressed upon both material as well as internal progress . Internal progress was considered as having more value. They stressed the need to search within rather than the material world. Nature was not regarded as having merely instrumental value. God dwells in nature, " Eh Jag Sache Ki Hai Kothri Sache Ka Vich Vaas."

Therefore nature is not created solely for mankind, but it has a right of its own. The Global ecological crisis has arisen because we think we have a right to use nature as we wish to. We are unconcerned about the effects of our actions on nature. We are using more than what the earth can replace. Till now we have been closing our eyes towards the ecological threat. We have been thinking like a rabbit. We think that if we close our eyes the danger will automatically go away. Today, we cannot do that any more.

The Ecological threat faces us at three levels:

- a) There is a serious danger to the environment by factories, industries, and automobiles. But in spite of the fact that there is unbreathable air, we consider every rise in consumption as a progress.
- b) Global environmental pollution caused by the emission of greenhouse gases specially Carbon di-Oxide. Also the global warming caused by cutting down forests. The ecological threat to nature by human culture is rising alarmingly.
- c) The third level at which the ecological threat is rising is at the personal level.

We always think that something has to be done at the governmental level or by science or by someone else. We do not realize each one of us has a major role to play. Each one of us needs to limit our consumption in every way, be it petrol, diesel, water, food. It is high time that we realise the need to tread lightly on the earth. We should realise that ecological ethics is the centre stage for this millennium. We need to examine our lifestyles. We need to examine the meaning of economic growth and development. Economic growth has lowered rather than raised our standard of living, which includes time spent with family and friends, enjoyment of a rich human and natural environment. Consumption provides an entry into a complex set of problems. Impositions of gadgets and malls add to the rat race. We are so optimistic about technology that we feel technology is the answer to all our problems. We require to change our consciousness and also we need to support this change with the creation of appropriate institutions and structures that hold a genuine promise of a better life. Further economic growth and consumption are not the solution. Greater depression occurs in "precisely those countries that have experienced or are currently experiencing rapid economic growth. Friendship and other social supports are antidotes to depression. Religiosity, a turning inwards, meditation, altruism that will lead to lesser jealousy, lesser feelings of dominating the other will reduce depression.

Today all of us are releasing toxic gases into the atmosphere through our automobiles, our gadgets. These gases are as deadly and toxic as the gases in the gas chambers of the Nazis. But do we ever stop and think? Do we ever consider ourselves immoral? Are we not responsible for the increasing ecological threat to the planet? Can we merely blame others? I think it is high time we change our concept of morality. Today we require not merely traditional ethics but an ecological ethic.

Earlier greed was regarded as undesirable. Sikhism specially believed in living with minimum requirements and hoarding was looked down upon. Contentment being a desirable value for the Sikhs, the ethics of consumption is not there in Sikhism. However, today we have also started aping the west. Under the impact of Western civilization, desire is no more considered to be a state of the sick soul. On the contrary a person's status is dependent upon his material possessions. The more he desires, the more he possesses. The insatiable desire is continuously being fuelled by science and technology. We no longer are searching ourselves from within, which was a value earlier. Our aim is not to conquer ourselves but rather to conquer others. We try to

conquer others by dominating over them. Our desire to dominate and show our superiority is reaching ever-increasing levels. We dominate over the others by our material possessions. These possessions are possible only by exploiting nature. We are thereby continuously exploiting it without paying heed to its consequences.

Earlier too, there has been the affluent class, which has been exploiting. But this class could enjoy the fruits of human labour only. Therefore the pace of exploitation of nature was slow. Today, science and technology is feeding our desires at such a terrific pace that the exploitation of nature is taking place very ,very fast. The demand being placed on Earth is more than what the earth can give. Even in the east, we have started believing that ever-rising levels of consumption will solve all our problems. We are feeding our egoistic tendencies, our urge to dominate over the other. As pointed out by Erazim Kohak, limitless egoism elevated to a civilization strategy is not sustainable. We require to search within ourselves and see what are the desirable traits, which will help us to live in harmony with the planet earth.

Paul Santmire said, "The earth is in danger of destruction". A time has come today when we are all feeling the pinch of the environmental crisis towards which we are heading. This environmental crisis is engulfing us at such a rapid speed that we can no longer neglect it saying that it is an affair of the environmentalists. We all need to address ourselves to this and try to reduce if not reverse or stop the environmental deterioration.

In my paper. I shall try to argue out that Sikhism is not against development. It does not preach asceticism. It encourages progress and development. However, one point to be remembered is that if we look at the Sikh theology, it does not prescribe anthropocentric development or egocentric development. It preaches altruism.

The 'I' when it expands it not only includes the others who are belonging to my family but it includes the whole earth as my family. It prescribes co-operation in place of domination. Co-operation leads to humility. According to the Sikh metaphysics ,I am related to the entire universe. It therefore prescribes development in which the environment is not exploited or subdued. How can I be justified in exploiting that to which I am closely related?

Thus Sikhism prescribes sustainable development. Sustainability is the capacity to keep going indefinitely. Development could be defined as bringing out what is latent, bringing out potentialities. But while doing so, the present and the future have all to be taken into account. World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in its 1987 report, Our Common Future defined Sustainable Development as:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" while discussing sustainability the focus is on two issues, viz, meeting the needs of the present generation and not undermined the ability of future generations of people to achieve acceptable standards of living themselves. There are four factors that threaten the well being of the present and the future generations viz, population, pollution, resource use and consumption. An increase in any one or all these factors causes imbalance and furthers the ecological crisis causing devastation.

Sustainable development raises various ethical issues. These have two main thrusts, viz, social justice and the other concern for future generations. Sustainable development implies that we should not proceed with our development, researches and progressive plans without taking into account the needy around us and the well being of the future generations. We have a positive duty to help those in need. In this connection there are different views. Those who propound the Lifeboat ethics hold the view that if you help people who are starving there will be more people suffering half a century later. Garret Hardin holds the view that we should not attempt to equalize. If we feed people who cannot look after themselves they will produce more of their kind. Let them fend for themselves or else perish. On the contrary Peter Singer holds the view that those of us with surplus wealth should share it with the unfortunate and needy. Singer believes in helping starving babies rather than buying that new car or suit. Hardin's plan is to control human population by the policy of survival of the fittest.

Our Gurus have stressed on contentment, on inner progress and on consideration of the welfare of others. They emphasised "Pichhon bachia aap khaavanda". Thus if this is our attitude, we would automatically help the poor and the needy. They have emphasized on helping those in need. (Gau garib di Raksha) only that development/progress is acceptable which is sustainable. Not only the present needy have to be given justice but the future generations too have to be taken care of.

American population is very low as compared to the third world countries but its consumption is the biggest in the world and has increased tenfold since 1960 as pointed by Erazim Kohak in "The Green Halo" This clearly indicates that reducing population levels is not a magic solution to all our environmental problems. It requires a deeper thinking and a change of our attitude. Thus Hardin's way of thinking which is opposite to that of the Sikh Gurus, does not really help in sustainable development. Thus we need to work for a sustainable society. Population Control will definitely reduce pollution and the consumption but as seen above from the example of the Americans we require a change of our attitude.

Due to our lackadaisical attitude we use modern gadgets, technological innovations and spoil the environment. Also we deplete the resources of the environment. In this regard our Gurus have stressed Sanjam, control and moderation. Anyone who believes in moderation will not waste the resources of nature. In the name of development, we devastate nature. In this connection Guru Nanak Devji says that man is just a speck of dust in this universe. The universe is made by God and man is just a part of it like any other part. No doubt he is higher because he alone has the capacity for self-realisation, however, this does not give him a license to use/spoil nature as he desires. Nature is independent of man, exists in its own right. Man can use it wherever necessary but he must at the same time realise the intrinsic worth of nature. The universe is a complex web of relations. Each individual human being is interlinked with others, with animals as well as with the ecosphere. Whatever relation is there in the macrocosm it is there in the microcosm. Thus in order to understand the universe and its complex web of relations we have to look within our-self, realize our potential and realize our-self. The knowledge of the universe will automatically follow. Our development will be sustainable development and not selfish, egoistic, shortlived development.

Once we have knowledge of the complex web of relations, our attitudes towards nature will automatically change. We will no longer want to exploit it but will rather make friends with it, will see God immanent in it and therefore realize its intrinsic worth. Once we see God immanent in his creation, we will identify ourselves with the creation and the result would be respect, concern for nature, we would realize that we are part of nature and if we try to bring any changes in it, any changes in its homeostatic balance, it would have repercussions on us.

We can see that through the Sikh religion, one can provide a justification for unity in diversity. A self-realized person sees this unity and once he sees this unity he no longer exploits nature, he rather respects it as a 'House of the Lord in which dwells the Lord. Such a person will always vouch for sustainable development, for he cannot but think of the well being of the present , future generations as well as the entire ecosystem.

Sustainable development understood in this way would entail a positive obligation to assist present generations and a negative obligation not to hinder future generations. As regards the hindrance to future generations is concerned this could be done in a variety of ways by depleting resources, by storing radioactive waste unsafely, by diminishing biodiversity, by bringing about climate change and by causing other kinds of pollution. We all can play a role in providing a safe liveable environment to the future generation for e.g. if I use public transport, walk wherever I can instead of using my car, avoid usage of the air-conditioner or at least switch it off whenever not needed, I can reduce pollution. Every air conditioner releases CFC'S causing holes in the ozone layer which protects us from sun's ultraviolet radiation. By the holes in this layer we are exposing the people to ultra violet radiation which causes skin cancer. Similarly we can use scarce resources such as water, electricity food judiciously. We need not go back to the stone age and live in the dark but we can certainly go in for sustainable development.

Some would oppose sustainable development on the pretext that science & technology will find alternative ways, alternative resources. Yes this does seem a very attractive proposal but is it really so? The alternative to electricity may be nuclear energy but is it without its accompanying danger? The problem of nuclear waste disposal, the possibility of nuclear accidents, all these make us question such development. We cannot say it is sustainable, for it puts the future generation at a considerable risk.

Similarly the developments in genetic engineering are questionable. Gene therapy promises a very bright future to medicine. Many incurable diseases will be curable. However, is this development sustainable or does it raise ethical and religious issues? Similarly genetic engineering would make it possible for us to create clones, to engineer animals genetically so that we could use them for organ transplantation. However, it is really questionable as to would such a development be sustainable. For

one thing, by genetically engineering animals for xenotransplantation, we are not treating them as ends in themselves but as a means to human ends. Secondly, by creating new species we are trying to become co-creators with God. Sikhism questions such development. However, Sikh Gurus state "Poorai ka kia sabh kichh poora, ghat wadh kichh nahi". The imperfections that are there in the world as we perceive them are all under the Will of God. He does not need man's help to perfect the world. As regards gene therapy, before this is really made possible, there is a need to examine how much genetic pollution it would cause. Genetic engineering treats the entire plant and animal as a means rather than as an end. These species are genetically engineered to serve human purposes. As regards human genetic engineering for the purpose of cure, most scientists accept the fact that the process of human genetic engineering is risky and the process will itself generate new mutations which will be passed on to future generations. There is a need for looking back into the past and learning from the past experiences. However, we must remember that our human creativity depends upon our human brain. Any alteration of man that would injure the brain and hence his very creativity would indeed be a disastrous mutilation, especially if this were to be transmitted genetically, thus further polluting the gene pool with defects which might be hidden and incalculable.

Thus scientific advances should not be made just for the sake of mere progress or research. Sikhism prevent us from trying to be co-creators with God. Development of this type can never be sustainable but would rather be disastrous. If we start playing with Genes, we are 'playing God.' We are very finite beings knowing only our present and past. Our future too is unpredictable. It is not possible for us to know the long term consequences of our actions. When we genetically engineer organism, we are trying to create new organisms, a new type of a world. We think we have the power to create. Do we really have this power? We must be humble. We are like a speck of dust. Guru Nanak says, that we finite beings cannot know the limit of God. If we cannot know God, how can we 'play God'? How can we bring about creation. If we do so, our action would lead to disastrous results and we would not know how to reverse our action. Especially in case of genetically engineered organisms it may not be possible for us to reverse the process. Ideally man should adjust himself to the environment. He should let nature take its course and not interfere with it either by miracles or by science. This is what is called as Hukam in Sikhism or accepting the Will of God or the Law of Nature. Heidegger states "in technology we make objects according to some blueprint that

we determine. We design things to satisfy our purpose rather than allow our purposes to be affected by, and find creative expression through, the qualities of the objects themselves."

Today we are not satisfied with mere artefacts designed to serve our purposes. We are now aiming at nature, animals and humans deigned to serve our purpose. How arrogant and selfish we have become. Thus genetic engineering is questionable because it goes against the very basic principle of Sikhism viz. the world as it is created is best. God knows what is right and wrong. He has designed the laws of nature, creation and dissolution. Man has no right to interfere and bring about genetic changes.

The question which faces us today is, what is the root cause of our ecological crisis. Is it human greed or a flawed technology which is unsustainable? There are two extremes, on the one hand we have the have nots who are dying of hunger and starvation. On the other hand in the western countries and even in our country we have the haves who are becoming goods rich and time poor, dying of stress and over consumption. These people are addicted to consume the Earth itself. They consume because others consume. There is a rat race of consumption. We think that we would be happier if we consume and as Paul Wachtel claims - nothing is "as naively utopian as continuing on our present course and hoping for a deus ex machina by the name of "technology" to bail us out at the last minute." 1

Some environmentalists oppose the idea of sustainability for in this the environment does not have any intrinsic value of its own. It is only for humans, the present and the future humans. According to Sikhism, the environment exists for itself, it has its own intrinsic worth. Just as God created humans whenever He so desired under His Will, similarly, the entire universe is His Creation, created under His Will. He is immanent in it. I have a duty to look after another human being who is in need and also have a duty to take care not to harm the non-existent future generations, I also have a duty not to harm the environment. I have a positive duty to work for the sustainability of the environment. In fact to help others I need to realise that they are part of the complex web of relations found in the ecosystem. Thus I cannot help others in need without taking care of the environment or by destroying it . In this context Sikhism would define sustainable development in such a way that it includes not only human society but biodiversity, ecological integrity and ecosystemic processes. Thus even though these

processes may not appear to be directly useful, they have to be sustained. A point worth mentioning here is that with the growing human population, a time may come when human needs conflict with the needs of the environment per se. Thus sustainability of the society may conflict with the sustainability of the environment. What should take priority? If we say that humans, since they have more worth, they take priority, are we not merely paying lip the service while affirming the intrinsic value of ecosystems. Is it ethical to help the human needy by damaging the ecosystems? I feel that a deeper look and analysis of the problems would reveal to us that since we humans are merely parts of the complex whole, no good can really result by damaging the ecosystem. We have to strike a balance between good of humans and of the ecosystem although this is not an easy proposal.

To sum up, we can say that discussions on sustainable development centre around issues of social justice and the future generations. The main issues that are considered are population, consumption, resource use and pollution. In the context of all these Sikhism definitely prescribes moderation. Once moderation exercised in intimate interpersonal relations automatically the population would be controlled. As regards consumption, Sikhism prescribes an attitude of contentment, non domination over the other humility van chhakna and sarabat da bhala. With such an attitude, the spirit of competition will be subdued, will be replaced by spirit of co-operation, helping the other whether presently existent or the non-existent future generations. As regards resource use, moderation and a spirit of non-domination brings about lesser wastage of the resources of nature.

Also a concern for the others end and a recognition of the intrinsic value of the ecosystem makes us utilise the ecosystem with care so that the benefit that we and the future generations will draw from it will be sustainable.

1. Quoted in John Passmore, "Man's Responsibility for Nature .", Duckworth.
2. " Bande khoj dil har roj na fir paresani mahe,"
3. David A. Crocker and Toby Linden, from Ethics of Consumption, Lahham, Maryland; Roman and Littlefield publishers 1998, P-330
- 4.a)"Trsna virle hi ki bujhi he. Kot jorai leakh crore man na hore  
pare pare hi ko lujhi he."  
b)"Jio pavak indhan nahin dhrape."
5. Adi Granth.
6. Adi Granth.
7. Adi Granth.

# **What contribution can religious groups make to the debate on sustainable development?**

**His Eminence Archbishop Seraphim  
Archbishop of Johannesburg and Pretoria, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate**

## **Introduction**

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro produced Agenda 21, which put forward proposals for sustainable development.

On the eve of the summit of 2002, however, it seems, from the report released by the World Wildlife Fund, that development is less sustainable than it was 10 yrs ago, and that at the present rate of consumption we will need two more planets the size of earth in order to sustain development for even the next fifty years. According to this report, more than a third of the natural world has been destroyed over the last three decades. We are not getting any nearer to the goal of sustainable development: on the contrary, it is receding from us at an increasing rate.

The contents of this report may be disputed, and described by some as exaggerated and alarmist, but other reports too indicate that there has been little progress in reaching the goal of sustainable development. The World Bank's recent Extractive Industries Review (EIR) was condemned by NGO's and civil society organisations in Budapest for not merely failing to achieve its goals but for exacerbating the problems it was intending to solve.

Is there any hope that the goals of sustainable development can be achieved?

Can religious groups and organisations play any part in helping to achieve it?

## **Public participation and Religious groups**

It has been suggested that if sustainable development is to be achieved, three dimensions need to be kept in balance:

- Social Equality
- Ecological Integrity
- Economic growth

And without public participation in making decisions about various projects they are unlikely to be in balance.

Agenda 21 calls for participation by NGO's and other groups in civil society, though religious groups are not specifically mentioned.

27.1. Non-governmental organisations play a vital role in the shaping and implementation of participatory democracy. Their credibility lies in the responsibility and constructive role they play in society. Formal and informal organisations, as well as grass-roots movements should be recognised as partners in the implementation of Agenda. The nature of the independent role played by non-governmental organisations within a

society calls for real participation; therefore independence is a major attribute of non-governmental organisations and is the precondition of real participation.

27.2. One of the major challenges facing the world community as it seeks to replace unsustainable development patterns with environmentally sound and sustainable development is the need to activate a sense of common purpose on behalf of all sectors of society. The chances of forging such a sense of purpose will depend on the willingness of all sectors to participate in genuine social partnership and dialogue, while recognising the independent roles, responsibilities and special capacities of each.

It is precisely in the area of public participation that religious organisations could make an important contribution. Religious groups can make their members more aware of the issue, mobilise their members and encourage them to be more active participants.

To be effective, however, this process should have begun immediately after the Rio summit and should have continued in preparation for the Johannesburg Summit.

It would be unfair to say that *nothing* has been done in between. Many religious groups have been concerned with issues related to sustainable development, and have arranged activities to increase awareness in the orthodox church, for example, the Syndesmos youth organisation has arranged work camps and conferences for young people from all over the world, dealing with ecological and environmental themes, usually arranged in cooperation with monasteries. But such activities have not influenced the majority of church members, most of whom are not even aware of these efforts. Other religious groups could probably tell similar stories.

## **Africa**

In Africa the deterioration has probably been worse than in many other places. Poverty, disease and hunger continue to ravage the continent. Much of the economic development in Africa is concentrated in extractive industries, in which raw materials are exported to other countries for processing, and create little wealth for the Africans, except for wealthy elites. Attempts to open markets for African products in Europe and North America have been disappointing.

Diseases like tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/Aids have ravaged the continent, and have often affected the most skilled and economically active people. The death rate among economically active people has soared in the last decade, and many children are left as orphans, unable to gain skills and education for themselves.

Aid and projects for economical upliftment are often strangled by bureaucratic corruption, which is endemic in some parts of Africa. In South Africa government leaders have called on religious bodies to work for the moral regeneration of the nation. As parasitic diseases like malaria weaken the bodies of individuals and reduce their productivity and general quality of life, so corruption weakens the body politic, and reduces the quality of life of whole societies.

Ordinary people in Africa are trapped in a cycle of poverty and are unable to escape. Sometimes a whole family depends on the income of a single pensioner. When the pensioner dies, it is a disaster for the family. In Zimbabwe, there has been a deliberate government policy to encourage small-scale peasant agriculture at the expense of commercial farming, but this has resulted in great hardship for urban workers, who cannot afford the steep increase in food prices. Also, many of the commercial farms that have been subdivided are not used productively for agriculture, but are simply used as residences for people who compete for the decreasing number of jobs in towns.

“People farming” has become common in South Africa too, as smallholdings are not used for productive agriculture, but are simply sub-divided and sub-let to people for residential purposes, and so the people join the ranks of the periurban unemployed.

### **The role of religious bodies in Africa**

Most religious groups have engaged in various forms of poverty relief, and healing ministry. The poverty relief often takes the form of individual alms giving. Some have also run orphanages, clinics and hospitals.

Most of these activities, however, do not constitute progress towards sustainable development, but rather take the form of compensating for the lack of it. Almsgiving is, in effect, a redistribution of wealth and resources from the richer members to the poorer members of the community. The problem, however, is that the pool of available resources is diminishing, and even this process may not be sustainable indefinitely.

Most religions have an ethical component, and many of the problems in achieving sustainable development have an ethical root. The “moral regeneration” called for by South African political leaders is important here, but moralising sermons are not likely to achieve the goal either. A few years ago there was a study in South Africa on the moral and ethical values of a group of South African businessmen, and the study showed that there was virtually no correspondence between their religious affiliation and their values. This indicates that religious groups are not very effective in inculcating their moral and ethical values into their members. Recently there has been a lot of publicity about the failure of many religious leaders to follow the sexual ethics of their religions, and this seems to apply in other areas of ethics as well. If leaders cannot live according to their professed ethical values, how can the ordinary members be expected to do so?

### **Religion, ethics and sustainable development**

In spite of the gloomy picture of failure in the last few paragraphs, there is a way forward.

Religious groups could make a concerted effort to study the relationship between their systems of ethics and values in society that are not compatible with sustainable development. They should also study the values in society that are not compatible with sustainable development, and see how these relate to the ethical values of their members.

In some parts of Africa, for example, there is a belief that sexual intercourse with a virgin is a cure for Aids, and this has led to an increase in child rape. Rape, especially of children, is contrary to the ethical values of just about every religious group, yet this belief persists, contrary to the values that people profess.

One of the values that is widely promoted in society, yet threatens the goals of sustainable development, is greed. Much advertising is based on the premise that greed is good and that it is acceptable to most people. Yet it is contrary to the ethics and values of most religions. Recently a prominent South African sportsman, the cricketer Hansie Cronje, was at the centre of a corruption scandal, in the course of which it emerged that his religious values had been confused by accepting greed. People profess many religions or none, but one might ask whether the most widely-accepted religion of all has no name, but is based on the value of greed. We could give a name to this religion, and call it Moneytheism, since it expresses the most deeply held values of many people.

Religions and religious groups therefore need to examine their ethical values, and those of the societies in which their members live, and see which values help and hinder the goals of sustainable development, and help to make their members more aware of these. This could then provide the foundation for greater public participation, which is vital if the goals of sustainable development are to be achieved.

# THE SPIRITUAL AND ETHICAL ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Dr Jasdev Singh Rai, Director, Sikh Human Rights Group**

We live in a period of human history when development has been at an exceptional and exponential pace, outstripping our adjustment to and comprehension of a rapidly changing landscape, climate, quality and quantity of natural resources and the impact upon our selves. The fabric of society, the relationship of the individual to fellow human beings and to the natural world is fragmenting, stripping and changing continuously. Today we are being challenged by dramatic data and facts that indicate that human society is also blindly walking into a period of depleted natural resources, environmental pollution, unhealthy food production and conflicts for control and access to necessities such as water. Yet, there are other statistical and expert reports that dismiss these as hysterical propaganda. In this atmosphere of rapid change and conflicting expert reports, human society needs to stop for a minute and take stock. It needs to deal with this from a set of basic principles in which spiritual aspects must form some of the key foundations.

Never has society faced such an overwhelming number of contradictory and threatening issues on a global scale. Indeed climate change is not an issue that affects a small region. Issues such as the predicted conflicts over water in the future, for example, are matters for great concern.

The atheistic foundation of science has enabled human beings to develop, exploit and explore opportunities and possibilities without any discernable limits. However, there is a clear lack of a spiritual and ethical dimension in all this. If human society is to deal with and confront the challenges facing it, then it is important for it to recover the spiritual relationship of human life to the natural world and to develop an ethical perspective in this relentless development.

Traditionally religions and spiritual philosophies have played a key role in defining the relationship between human beings and nature. However, this has not only been marginalized by State and other institutional structures of the world, but in some spheres, it has been completely neglected. Ethical and spiritual values are struggling to find a definition in today's developments. It is not being suggested that there was a better world before or during the pre-modern era, or that the world was more spiritual. Rather, the assertion being made is that never has there been a period in known human history when spiritual and ethical values have a greater role to play in ensuring the survival of a co-dependent and peaceful society.

It is not for science to define the relationship of human beings with nature and development. Science is a non-conscientious and atheistic set of knowledge whose limits are only defined by the scope of its theories at any given time. The State too cannot really be relied on to define a cohesive set of principles to guide human life through this rapid change. The State is a function of power in the hands of economic and political forces that define its ethics by their own set of values and ambitions. Neither can international institutions hope to make a realistic imprint upon human conscious on the relationship between human beings and nature. They are the collective institutions of States and amenable to economic and political forces as much as States are.

Therefore, religious and spiritual philosophies have to assert and define their role in the development of human society now. This has to be more than a passive role that merely seeks to send a message. The role of religious and spiritual philosophies need to influence the way people think about development and form the ethical systems that evaluate the impact of development.

Irrespective of what religious and spiritual philosophies have asserted before, the new reality of a rapidly developing world needs a reinterpretation if necessary. It needs to be emphasised that no religion actively seeks to destroy the intricate relationship between human life and the natural world. Whether it is one of using nature or one of revering nature, religions emphasise the co-dependency of human beings and the ecosystem of the world. There is a concept of respect within all religion for the resources that exist and makes us survive as healthy human beings able to reach our potentials.

However, it needs to be said society has developed some extreme and unhealthy attitudes, which need examination and urgent change. Human society has an approach to nature which can almost be conceived as confrontational. It is as if there is no respect for nature and the ecosystem. This relentless development fails to incorporate any fundamental understanding of the intrinsic dependency of human life upon an ecologically sound environment.

For instance, polluted atmosphere leads to an increase in the number of children with lung disease such as asthma. This leads to perpetual dependency upon drugs, constant visits and stays in hospital and considerable drain of energy within family dynamics. Surely, the increasing number of affected children in itself is a reason to demand a safer atmosphere and clean air. Yet, the State and other institutional systems fail to ensure this because other forces, particularly commercial, overpower the will of public bodies.

Polluted water is another commodity that is undermining the health of people. One out of every five human beings lacks access to safe drinking water. It is estimated that in some regions of the world, up to 40% of disease is related to water pollution. A study by the World Bank on air and water pollution in India states that water degradation is responsible for the highest toll on health across the country, costing US\$ 5.7 billion (Rs 19,950 crore) a year. Surely, it does not make any economic sense to be constantly spending vastly on health support and producing an ill population. Yet, public institutions again suffer from inertia due to various reasons.

One asks, why do human beings destroy that upon which they are dependent? Why are the earth and its resources treated with such disdain and abuse? It is almost as if human development is indifferent to nature or in confrontation with it as suggested earlier.

This attitude needs to be changed by religious institutions. In many traditional religions such as those of the African tradition: the original Naga religion etc, have a deep reverence for nature. Yet, even these have sometimes given way to the prerogatives of development. It is as if human society is dictated by development rather than human society dictating the limits and forms of development. There is an inevitable question in all this, does human life live for development or is development for human beings. Perhaps the Sikhs, particularly in the west, have faced this question more forcefully. Commercial pressures often forced Sikhs to cut their beards and hair and remove the distinctive turban. However, the resistance to conformity has made the Sikhs challenge

these pressures and forced change in the commercial institutions in many countries. Human beings do not exist for institutions; rather institutions exist for human beings.

Thus while human beings aggressively exploit nature in the name of development, it needs to reflect that development has in fact become the new nightmare that dictates behaviour, lifestyle and attitudes. In this aggressive exploitation, human beings often appear to be at war with nature rather than in harmony with it.

This is the most important aspect of life today that needs to be re-examined by human society and in which religious and spiritual philosophies can play a significant role. We need to start respecting and revering nature. Our relationship needs to be one of a deep friendship and appreciation for the natural world rather than one of indifference and confrontation. Repeated enough times in sermons around the world, religions may have a greater impact in reversing the current trend of a commercially led attitude to the natural world. It is inevitable the ethics of society would change in relation to development, if there is an informed and ingrained respect for the natural world.

Another aspect of this relentless development that needs to be considered is the impact upon civil society. Human relations are increasingly being defined by economic interactions and perceptions. Relations based on spiritual and other similar values are breaking down fast. It is what and how much one owns that defines the individual's value within human society. Whereas this pervaded some strata of human society throughout history, it has now invaded almost all strata of human society, thus dislodging and weakening the traditional and natural forms of human relationships.

Human society is not evolved to be comfortable with this basis of interaction between human beings. Inevitably this is the result of a relentless development that has forced upon the human being, a life cluttered with work, worry about economics and dependent upon the products of development.

It is not being suggested that this needs to be reversed. Infact what is needed today is the acceptance of the obvious, that development is often a one-way track, but in this unidirectional route, there is a need to evolve ethics and conscience that can sustain the psychological and social aspects of human life. Perhaps development plans need to take into consideration the impact upon ethical and spiritual well being of human beings as much as the advance in economic and other material factors. This might influence the need by human society to view fundamental necessities such as clean air and water as revered factors rather than resources to fight wars for.

It is upon a gathering like this on which lie the responsibilities of introducing the ethical and spiritual dimensions within development at a much greater level than is present currently.

The pressing need of the time is for religions and spiritual philosophies to orientate human beings to revere nature, have ethically based development strategies and impart upon humans that development exists for the benefit of human beings and not the other way around. Perhaps with a greater role for religions in civic society and its attitude towards development, we may not need to find out whether the doomsday theories are justified or mere hysteria. Let us hope we can make that commitment here and impress it upon the world Summit as well as take it beyond that into the world itself.

The fact is that no other institution has a greater audience and impact than the total collective of religions and spiritual preachers. There are more religious platforms and

preachers to deliver and influence the world and its development than any other area of human society. Why not promote it to stop that which we all fear, a period of unhealthy and scarce resources and wars to control them.

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