

MAUDE BARLOW'S REMARKS FOR PLENARY MEETING ON THE
THEME:

HARMONY WITH NATURE: TOWARDS ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS INCLUDING ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE IN
THE POST 2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

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Dear President Kutesa and distinguished members

In our world, nature is seen as a form of property, a resource for our pleasure, convenience and profit.

The legal systems in most of our countries are not protecting the earth because they are not meant to. In fact, our legal and political establishments perpetuate, protect and legitimize the continued degradation of the earth by design, not accident.

Most laws to protect the environment and other species just regulate the amount of damage that can be inflicted by human activity.

Harmony with Nature recognizes that our current form of industrial development is doing untold harm to the earth and calls for laws that allow other species to fulfil their evolutionary role on the planet.

Harmony with Nature requires us to create human laws and governance systems that promote both human health and well-being and the well-being of the wider ecological community.

Harmony with Nature would have us develop laws and policies that put the protection of air, soil, water, wetlands, forests and other species at the centre of all practices and policies and judge everything - from the way we grow food and produce energy to global economic and trade policy – by their impact on the natural world.

The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth – which emerged from a 2010 civil society gathering in Cochabamba Bolivia -

recognizes that Earth is an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with inherent rights.

It defines fundamental human responsibilities in relation to other beings and the community as a whole.

The late esteemed Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano promoted Ecuador's ground-breaking rights of nature law. He said that, since the days "when the sword and the cross" made their way into the Americas, Ecuador has suffered repeated devastation, including massive pollution of its Amazon forests by American oil companies.

Harmony with Nature is a step toward recovering the ancient Latin American tradition of the adoration of nature, which was seen by the Europeans as the sin of idolatry and punished by torture and death.

In an anthology on the rights of nature, Galeano wrote, "Nature has a lot to say, and it has long been time for us, her children, to stop playing deaf. Maybe even God will hear the cry rising from this Andean country and add an 11th amendment, which he left out when he handed down instructions from Mount Sinai: 'Love Nature, which you are part of.' "

Communities around the world are creating a new form of civil rights movement.

They are passing local laws that assert their right to protect their local environment from harmful mining, fracking, pipeline and other invasive practices.

What we need to do is restructure the global economy into many local economies based on the needs of the biosphere.

When this happens says Shannon Biggs, founder of US based Movement Rights, communities will become true stewards of their ecosystems, protecting and upholding these natural rights.

Surely then the rights of nature need to be placed at the centre of the post 2015 SDGs, particularly SDG 12 on consumption and production.

For instance, we know that the current system of chemical-dependent, water-intensive industrial food production for a global market is consuming over 80% of the world's fresh water.

If nature's imperatives were placed at the centre of the SDGs and other policies, the current system would have to be radically reformed, and food production would be more local, sustainable and organic.

Corporate control of farming would have to be challenged.

As well, for the post -2015 development agenda to reach its objective of being just, people-centred and sustainable, the goals must enshrine - for present and future generations - the human right to water for health, life, food and culture over other demands on water resources, especially industrial consumption.

The goal must promote a hierarchy of water use that prioritizes basic human needs, local consumption, and healthy ecosystems, setting a zero target on freshwater extraction beyond sustainable supply and protecting and restoring aquifers and watersheds.

This is even more critical given the key role of water in achieving other development objectives such as sustainable energy and food production, gender equality and climate change mitigation.

The United Nations has gone a long way in stating a commitment to these goals.

In 2010, the General Assembly recognized the Human Rights to Water and Sanitation.

In 2014, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on Harmony with Nature recognizing that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that deleterious human activity is altering the dynamic functioning of the Earth System to a degree never seen before.

The UN importantly recognizes that the Earth is not simply a source of resources to be exploited, modified, altered, privatized, commercialized

and transformed without huge consequences to humankind and to the Earth.

It is also very positive that the General Assembly instructed that Harmony with Nature be incorporated into the post 2015 development agenda.

However, some states and actors are pushing for a bigger role for the private sector within a global context in which there is no binding international agreement to hold corporations accountable for human rights violations and environmental destruction.

As well, the economic globalization policies of most governments are totally contradictory to Harmony with Nature.

These include unlimited growth, deregulation of financial markets, gutting of environmental regulations, and the proliferation of trade and investment agreements that give the market great power to set policy and corporations the right to sue governments if they try to implement Harmony with Nature laws.

Simply put, we can have Harmony with Nature and a just system of sharing the Earth's bounty or we can have the above policies. We cannot have both.

It is important to note that the only enforceable international agreements we have devised are trade and investment agreements that serve to empower transnational capital. Commitments to international environmental and human rights standards are important of course, but non-binding. This imbalance must be rectified if we are to stop the plunder of our planet.

Will the dominant vision for sustainability within the SDG process be one that seeks to bring environmental strategies in line with the economic growth imperative or one that questions the impacts of economic growth on the environment? Much rides on the answer to this question.

Unless it explicitly gives priority to people and the planet above corporations, the SDG framework could reinforce and exacerbate existing patterns of human and environmental domination.

As the SDG process prepares to set the foundation for international development over the next 15 years, it must decide whether development funds and strategies will promote human rights, alleviate poverty and protect Mother Earth or whether the development agenda will be used to open new markets and give even greater corporate access to endangered natural resources.

Mother Earth is calling on us to do take the right path.

The great English Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins said,

“And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.”

Let us give our Mother a chance.