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GENERAL ASSEMBLY » PLENARY  
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GA/11075  
20 APRIL 2011

**Not Too Late to Change Unsustainable Economic Growth Model, Improve Relationship with Mother Earth, but ‘Time Is Running Short,’ General Assembly Told**

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General Assembly  
GA/11075



Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York  
Sixty-fifth General Assembly

Interactive Dialogue

AM & PM Meetings

**Not Too Late to Change Unsustainable Economic Growth Model, Improve Relationship**

**with Mother Earth, but ‘Time Is Running Short,’ General Assembly Told**

**Mother Earth Day Observed with Interactive Debate on ‘Harmony with Nature;’**

**Panels: Holistic Approach to Sustainable Development; Sharing National Experiences**

The world’s current economic growth model – characterized by extreme production and consumption, slashed forests, and polluted air and water supplies — was operating at nature’s

expense and, while it was not too late to change course and improve our relationship with Mother Earth, “time is running short,” the General Assembly was told today.

In opening remarks to a day-long thematic debate on Harmony with Nature to commemorate International Mother Earth Day, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said that the world was undergoing a “tremendous change”. While hundreds of millions of people had risen from poverty, it was necessary to bring those benefits to millions more — a goal could not be achieved unless the human and natural capacity that was the foundation for prosperity was respected.

“By our very own activities and assumptions, we risk profound and potentially irreversible changes in the planet’s ability to sustain our progress,” she stressed. However, the decline in the earth’s natural capital was rarely reflected when the sum of a country’s total annual production was calculated. It was essential to revise accounting methods and to embrace a low-carbon, resource-efficient, pro-poor economic model, she said. While some worried that separating growth from pollution and resource depletion would “put a brake on development”, she reassured delegates that, instead, such a strategy would serve to make growth sustainable.

In 2002, world leaders had agreed to substantially reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 — a goal that had not been met, she recalled. Today, the upcoming Rio+20 conference presented another opportunity to assess humanity’s relationship with nature, to reaffirm past environmental commitments and to “inject new impetus and chart a sustainable way forward”, she concluded, calling for a holistic view of environmental, social and economic well-being as a route to “truly sustainable development”.

Acting General Assembly President Charles Thembanani Ntwaagae ( Botswana), speaking on behalf of President Joseph Deiss ( Switzerland), agreed that the benefits of economic progress had come at great costs to the natural world and humankind. The irreversible degradation of the natural resource base was a tragic loss. Having reached the limits of the planet’s capacity, he said, “we too are being depleted.” Indeed, consumerism was “consuming” those in the developed world, while many in the developing world could not even consume enough to meet their basic needs.

The current growth model had not yielded better conditions, but rather had succeeded in threatening all forms of life, he said. The magnitude of recent natural disasters had not been confined to national boundaries, he added, pointing to the far-reaching effects of atmospheric pollution, earthquakes and tsunamis, as well as other natural resource breakdowns including ocean holes,

slashed forests and chemical pollution of the food and water supply chain. “Extreme patterns of production and consumption have led to extreme responses from nature,” he said.

In that vein, he also stressed that “living at nature’s expense” was not sustainable, and that current values and commitments made must be reconceived in order for sustainable development to succeed. He urged that today’s dialogue be used to inspire preparatory work for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012.

“Capitalism’s mistake is not having fully incorporated nature as part of capital,” said the Permanent Representative of Bolivia, Pablo Solon, whose delegation had taken the lead in designating 22 April as International Mother Earth Day. He added that it was essential to put a price on the services that plants, animals and ecosystems offered humanity. Only by identifying the specific functions of those ecosystems and biodiversity, assigning them a monetary value, and defining their limits and the cost of their conservation in economic terms could a realistic market for environmental services develop, he said. That discussion was not a hypothetical one, he added, pointing out that part of World Trade Organization’s negotiations were focused on the trade in services and environmental goods.

There was a contradiction in recognizing only the rights of the “human part” of the earth’s systems, while the remaining parts were reduced to a source of resources and raw materials. “To think that only humans should enjoy privileges while other living things are simply objects is the worst mistake humanity has ever made,” he stressed. Nature could not be subjected to the “whims of the laboratory”, he added, calling for an end to all artificial manipulations of the earth’s climate. All new technology should also be evaluated to gauge their environmental, social and economic aspects.

Today’s thematic debate aimed to contribute to discussions on “Harmony with nature” within the context of sustainable development, as outlined in resolution 65/164 (2010), which called for continued consideration of the topic. With that in mind, the first of two interactive panels — on “Ways to promote a holistic approach to sustainable development in harmony with nature” — examined factors that had led to what panelists referred to as a global “inequity” in natural resources, as well as possible courses of action to resolve that problem.

In that context, many of the panellists pointed to imbalanced economic and social systems that had been in place for generations, and called for a fundamental global paradigm shift. New systems should be based on a partnership with nature, they noted, and not on antiquated

“domination-based” models of interaction between humans and other ecological players. Those old systems were reflected not only in the relationship between humans and nature, some said, but also in those between rich and poor, men and women and even between different races.

Moderated by Martin Khor, Executive Director of the South Center, the panel featured four speakers: Vandana Shiva, Founder of Navdanya, India; Peter Brown, Professor, McGill University, Canada; Cormac Cullinan, Environmental Attorney, South Africa; and Riane Eisler, Author of *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*.

In the second interactive panel, on “Sharing national experiences on criteria and indicators for measuring sustainable development in harmony with nature”, panelists explored the more tangible intersections of economics and natural resources. Those included the “biocapacity” levels of States, as well as the savings rates, quality of life and the overall well-being of individual households.

Several panelists discussed the uses — and limitations — of a variety of statistical indicators, including human life expectancy, fiscal deficits, rates of particular environmental changes, and others. New statistical methodologies, which focused on building a better understanding of environmental assets and the complex effects of their depletion, were also presented.

Also moderated by Martin Kohr, Executive Director of the South Center, the panel featured four panelists: Paul-Bertrand Baretts, Head of the International Economic Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France; Gilberto Gallopín, Regional Advisor on Environmental Policies of the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America (ECLAC); Ivo Havinga, Chief of the Economic Statistics Branch, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division; and Mathis Wackernagel, Executive Director of the Global Footprint Network.

In closing remarks, Sha Zukang, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and Secretary-General of the 2012 Rio+20 Conference, said that the Assembly’s discussion left no doubt that humanity must urgently rebalance its relationship with nature. In a matter of months, he noted, there would be 7 billion people on the planet — yet many still lacked enough resources for their basic needs.

“World consumption and production needs to converge toward a sustainable range,” he added, calling for developed countries to take the lead in that transformation. As the main cause of

the planet's degradation, it was the responsibility of humans to take decisive action to reverse it. "We must be remembered as the generation that left Rio+20 with the consensus that brought civilization back to its roots, in harmony with its source: Mother Earth," he concluded.

Mr. Ntwaagae, the Acting General Assembly President, also delivered concluding remarks.

The General Assembly will reconvene in plenary at a time and date to be announced.

### Background

The General Assembly met today to hold a one-day thematic debate on harmony with nature, which aims to support the goals set out in resolution 65/164 (2010) and contribute to discussions on harmony with nature in the context of sustainable development. That resolution requested, among others, an interactive dialogue focused on ways to promote a holistic approach to sustainable development in harmony with nature, and sharing national experiences on criteria and indicators to measure sustainable development in harmony with nature.

The interactive dialogue is also intended to inform preparations for the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, slated to be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 (Rio+20).

### Panel 1: Promoting a holistic approach to sustainable development

Moderated by Martin Khor, Executive Director of the South Center, the panel featured four speakers: Vandana Shiva, Founder of Navdanya, India; Peter Brown, Professor, McGill University, Canada; Cormac Cullinan, Environmental Attorney, South Africa; and Riane Eisler, Author of *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*.

Opening the panel, Mr. KHOR said much of the world's resources had been used to produce goods and services that were not required, while too little had been left for the poor. Equity was not only a principle; it had a causal relationship to the current environmental crisis. Today's panels would examine factors in the economic, social and cultural systems that had led to the crisis, as well

as how people could recognize their own role within the environment and take action, individually and collectively, to resolve the problem.

Launching the panel, Ms. SHIVA said recognizing the rights of Mother Earth had become a survival imperative for humanity. One year after the oil crisis on the Gulf Coast, and amid serious events at the Fukushima nuclear plant, forest fires in the Russian Federation, and extended drought and intense flooding in Australia, the world was seeing that disasters were much more costly than any one negotiation could address. Wars were being fought over the idea that limitless growth and exploitation could be achieved in a world with environmental limits. But the burning of fossil fuels for more than 400 years had shown there was no way that the planet's recycling capacity could absorb such pollution. The laws of Earth and nature were being violated, as were the laws of humanity.

Universal humanity was derived from nature, she explained, and there was a joy of living that stemmed from being a part of nature. Images of mastery and domination, premised on the idea that nature was dead, had allowed an unconstrained exploitation of the very basis of peoples' lives. Quoting Bengali novelist Rabindranath Tagore, she said the civilization of the West — the industrial civilization that knew no limits of exploitation — had in it the spirit of the machine, which must move. To that movement, human lives were offered as fuel. Indeed, the tragedy of disharmony with nature had become one of peoples' rights. The "resource grab" had led to movements in defence of the Earth, and in defence of peoples' rights to its gifts.

"Earth rights are human rights they are not separate rights," she said. The Millennium Development Goals could not be met without living in harmony with nature. Each time soils grew toxic and dessertified, each time the climate became so unstable that it did not yield crops, or that dead rivers carried the burden of pollution, a child was being deprived its rights to food and water. Sustainable development in harmony with nature was also a justice imperative. The act of taking too much also meant that someone else went without. That was especially true in Africa, where "we should be learning how to tread lightly on the planet." The rights of Mother Earth were where another future for humanity could be shaped. Free-market economies had reached their limits across the world.

Broadly agreeing, Mr. BROWN said: "Whatever green economy means, you can't get there from the neoclassical model." Today, a holistic approach to nature challenged the Cartesian synthesis that had evolved during the European Enlightenment. In the post-Second World War period, there was a different interpretation of the universe, which now was seen as an incredibly

creative process, ever advancing into novelty. It was a dynamic process in which people were an extremely small part; people had co-evolved with other species. “We are fellow travellers on a very small planet,” he said.

Against that backdrop, he said neoclassical economics had no serious connection to scientific understanding of the last 1,700 years. United States Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke noted that economic indicators did not adequately capture the economy in relation to the Earth’s natural systems. “This is like flying a very large airplane with no map,” he said. Societies had already exceeded planetary boundaries in terms of climate, biodiversity laws and overproduction of nitrogen. A “de-growth” agenda was essential. “We have to get discourse about de-growing the economy going, especially in North America,” he insisted. The sustainable development discourse should be grounded in the Earth Charter, a document developed over a decade of international consultations.

There were a series of goods not captured well by a neoclassical model or the notion of cost internalization, he said; for example, the preservation of the planetary life support system, oceans, atmosphere and soil. There were sacred goods and cultural fiduciary obligations. Equity had not been well served by market forces. Once such “constraints” had been addressed, then tools of the neo-classical paradigm could be re-introduced, like using prices to change behaviour. With that in mind, he argued for the creation of a world environmental organization charged with setting boundaries for the human economy. It would ensure the protection of common goods by, for example, allowing States to sue each other for harm to common goods. It also would allow States to sue on behalf of the environment. “We’re part of a vast dynamic process that is older and wiser than we are,” he said.

Taking the floor, Mr. CULLINAN agreed that profound changes were needed in human production and consumption patterns, and further pointed to the challenge of making those changes in a way that respected the sovereignty of States and communities. The best way to reorient human societies with regard to the natural world, he said, was by adopting an international declaration on the inherent rights of the earth. “We are living on borrowed time,” he said, referring to the state of current human activities. Those actions were degrading the earth at an accelerating rate, not only in the short-term, but on the “geological scale” of millions of years. “What we are talking about goes far beyond balances of power,” and the self-interest of States, he said. The decisions that hung in the balance were “unparalleled” in the history of the human species.

One reason that current systems — including laws, treaties and other attempts at environmental regulations — were failing was that “we are trying to answer the wrong question”. The guiding question should not be as narrow as how to reduce carbon emissions, for example. Climate change was only a symptom of a far deeper systematic problem, namely, that developed countries had established “exploitative and unsustainable” relationships with nature. Instead, the overarching question should be the very one before the Assembly today: “How do we live in harmony with nature?” Answering that question would require a fundamental shift in world view, he said, from the erroneous notion that the earth revolves around humans to one that accepted the reality that people only played a role in the earth’s community.

Present governmental systems were flawed in that respect, reflecting as they did the idea that nature existed only for human benefit. Nearly all legal systems, for example, defined anything that was not a human or a corporation as “property” — or objects incapable of holding rights. That belief had entrenched a relationship between humans and nature that was akin to that of a slaveholder and a slave. That “colonial” attitude was not sustainable on a global scale, he said, noting parallels with the now-defunct apartheid system of his own native country, South Africa. Recalling the landmark 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, he emphasized that the fundamental challenge now facing the United Nations was that of facilitating a change in the philosophy, structures and content of the world’s governmental systems. Indeed, he said, as the 2012 Rio+20 approached, “we urgently need a bold way forward,” and that bold action was the adoption of a universal declaration. He hoped that the United Nations would “rise to the challenge” of adopting such a resolution, and urged all States to support it.

Ms. EISLER echoed the assertion made by other panellists that it was impossible to achieve harmony with nature in the context of present world systems. That issue went much deeper than matters of politics, production and consumption, and instead required thinking “outside the box” of conventional political and social categories. “What we need is a major cultural shift,” she said, stressing that much of the suffering, hunger, poverty and violence that challenged the world today was in fact a symptom of an underlying dysfunction — namely, the “domination paradigm” of race over race, man over woman, and human over nature. When combined with today’s highly developed technology, she said, that paradigm would lead to a “dead end”, and was simply not sustainable.

Another major problem inherent in the global economic systems currently in place was the devaluation of the “caring” and “care-giving” spheres of human work — in particular the work of women, which had long been viewed as “re-productive”, in contrast to the “productive” work of men. New systems were needed which granted more value and visibility to that essential work, she said, adding that “the real wealth of nations must consist of the continuations of people and of



nature.” Including the “life-sustaining” activities of work in nature, work at home and work in the volunteer sphere in economic indicators would give a more realistic appraisal of economic health. It was estimated, for example, that if properly valued, that type of work would account for a full 70 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Switzerland.

Moreover, building the foundation for that new, holistic “full-spectrum economics” policy was essential, and required fresh thinking. In that vein, she commended the Government of Bolivia, which had long been pushing for such a transformation. In fact, that country’s constitution specifically recognized the value of life-sustaining “women’s work”. Given the enormous economic return in investments in caring and care-giving, she said, the non-governmental organization Center for Partnership Studies was developing “social wealth economic indicators”, and was presently in conversations with the Government of the United States to develop a system of metrics that went beyond traditional indicators.

In the ensuing dialogue, delegates focused on the challenges of ensuring a holistic approach to sustainable development, underscoring that drastic changes to current consumption and production patterns, especially in industrialized countries, were essential requirements for such work. That call came amid widening economic and social imbalances among countries and regions, exacerbated, in large part, by the damaging effects of climate change and increased levels of man-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, particularly in expanding consumer economies. Changing the collective future would mean taking a less-is-best approach to individual daily living today. “The earth is our common home,” one speaker said.

Against that backdrop, some speakers blamed capitalism — and its predatory patterns — for the current situation, underscoring the need for a new economic paradigm that was in harmony with nature. Drastic changes in the Arctic, an area that had been stable for millions of years, only underscored the urgency of that point. Humanity should not be allowed to put such strain on nature. Biodiversity loss, desertification and the disruption of natural cycles were other indications of the irreparable costs of the ongoing disregard for nature.

For indigenous peoples, another speaker said, identities were formed around a deep spiritual relationship with traditional lands, customary laws and practices, making access to and the protection and preservation of lands and natural resources extremely important to societal well-being. The gap between mistreatment of the planet and assumption of responsibility — especially for human-induced environmental change — must be bridged.

Moving forward, the starting point for dialogue hinged on the first principle of the Rio Declaration, other speakers noted, which stated that human beings were at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. As such, they were entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. There was a great distance to be covered on that front. Other speakers said new indicators must be established that both measured economic growth and captured its relation to the natural world.

Still others said countries must be assisted in their efforts to “green” their economies and encourage their consumers to adopt more sustainable lifestyles. The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development would provide an opportunity to come up with a comprehensive plan for global cooperation. Governments must show more political will, assume their responsibilities and take action in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. One delegate stressed that her country would prefer to engage with existing bodies and forums that attracted substantial political will — like the 2012 Conference — as they were more meaningful venues than that provided today for developing policy measures. New environmental instruments were unnecessary.

Responding to the comments from the floor, Ms. SHIVA said that much of the “old paradigm” was based on the erroneous idea that humanity would benefit from the exploitation of nature. In fact, the more that humans worked with ecological processes, instead of fighting against them, the more food could be produced. Meanwhile, that old paradigm was blocking the ability of humanity to provide for its poorest and most vulnerable, she said.

In that vein, she added that “the earth has enough for everyone’s needs”, and stressed that the international community could not afford a roll back in the gains already made in environmental policy.

Mr. BROWN worried that the comments from the floor “didn’t really take up the challenge” of the current dialogue. One statement in particular, was “alarming”, as it pointed to a disconnect between the country’s words and its behaviour.

“If you’re in a hole, the first thing to do is to stop digging,” said Mr. CULLINAN, calling for the international community to dig itself out of the deep hole created by its environmental policies. He urged any representative present that remained unconvinced of the urgent matters being discussed

today to spend time in a forest, and them to reconsider whether the only purpose of that forest should be to offer material resources to human beings.

Ms. EISLER told the speakers that it was necessary to consider how devalued the “inextricably linked” activities of caring for people and caring for nature had been.

Participating in the discussion were the representatives of Iran, Spain, Venezuela, South Africa, China, United States and Ecuador.

A representative of the European Union also spoke, as did representatives of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Mary Knoll Sisters.

### Panel II: Sharing national experiences for measuring sustainable development

Also moderated by Martin Khor, Executive Director of the South Center, the panel featured four speakers: Paul-Bertrand Baretts, Head of International Economic Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France; Gilberto Gallopín, former Regional Adviser on Environmental Policies, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); Ivo Havinga, Chief, Economic Statistics Branch, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and Mathis Wackernagel, Executive Director of the Global Footprint Network.

Launching the discussion, Mr. KHOR said an integrated approach to sustainable development required improving the measurement of sustainability. Gross national product (GNP) measured what a country produced; it did not indicate whether capital or wealth — notably environmental wealth — had been “overdrawn”. Nor did it capture voluntary work, self-work, housework or the value of nature. To correct such deficiencies and portray an accurate picture of development, efforts had been made to place a value on the environment, including through the concept of an ecological footprint.

Panellist Mr. WACKERNAGEL said the human development that people sought would not be achieved without the necessary resources. The world used 50 per cent more resources than could be replenished. As such, he proposed an agricultural world view that accounted for the area that was needed to support economies. For example, Italy had been in a “biocapacity deficit” for 45 years, meaning that it wanted to consume more and more resources in a world that generated fewer and

fewer of them. Italy's purchasing power, compared to world average, was declining. If a country was maxed out in financial debt, what was the way forward?

Italy was not alone, he said, noting that several European countries — Spain, Portugal and Greece included — all had seen rapid increases in their biocapacity deficits. Those deficits could not be sustained, which was why countries had encountered severe economic problems. The point: there was a link between resource constraints and financial performance. Countries must ask themselves how they could outperform others in a world where they had to compete aggressively for resources. What kind of assets would be useful today and would they be more valuable in the future?

“We behave as if we have a huge hole in our boat and won't fix it until others do so, as well,” he said. Perhaps the world's biggest failure was that people did not see the value of nature. The ecological footprint could be used as a key measure of growth. The story was being framed: Countries wanted high human development and, further, for that development to fit within the limits of one planet. Governments must consider how much biocapacity they had — and how much they used. Not understanding the world from an agricultural perspective undermined opportunities. The link between economic stability and nature was key.

Next, Mr. BARETS offered a Cartesian approach to the question of harmony with nature, adding that France was working to put in place recommendations offered in the Sen-Stiglitz-Fitoussi report, which argued that national accounts should not be reduced to a single measure of gross domestic product (GDP). In terms of per capita GDP, European countries and Japan were 25 per cent below the United States. But, such indicators measured economic activity, rather than well-being. When household income took into account public services, such as education, France saw an improvement in its status. Adjusting GDP would allow for a different assessment of national wealth. The report suggested paying more attention to inequalities and perception of those inequalities, as they impacted the perceived quality of life. In France, 20 per cent of well-to-do households accounted for 40 per cent of the disposable income. Consumption differed less than income.

The savings rate was also different, he said, adding that households with lesser income had a negative savings rate. Among those households with a higher income, the savings rate had hit almost 35 per cent. Those were examples of inequalities taken into account by French citizens when they decided how well off they were. Moreover, redistribution policies sought to maximize household income. Redistribution-in-kind was also important, and not considering those factors ignored a

significant part of peoples' well-being. As to whether enough was being left for future generations, the report stated that economic sustainability must be separated from environmental sustainability.

With that in mind, he said that the net adjusted savings rate, for example, could include net capital accumulation and depreciation, and also take fossil fuels into account. Work was also under way to measure adjusted net savings. Another recommendation in the report was to understand carbon emissions differently. Traditionally, carbon footprints were measured using carbon generated by national production, rather than consumption. But consumers also emitted carbon and France was working to change that view by examining how consumption led to carbon emissions. In France, carbon emissions in 2005 from production were 6.7 tons per year per capita — representing 1.3 per cent of global emissions. But, France's economy represented 3 per cent of global GNP.

Taking the floor, Mr. GALLOPÍN explored the difference between the concepts of sustainability — the “value” of a system over time — and that of “sustainable development”, a mainly qualitative change in the trajectory of development. He reviewed a general systemic framework assessment, currently under way, which was studying progress toward sustainability in the Latin American and Caribbean region. That “holistic” socio-ecological framework took into account a variety of institutional, economic, social and environmental indicators, he said, including both development indicators” such as life expectancy at birth and GDP growth, and “sustainability” indicators, such as fiscal deficit, demographic dependency ratios, ratios of the rate of change between forest and urban areas, and others.

Pointing to the case study of Honduras, he noted that some of those indicators had been used to determine social, economic and related trends. The resulting holistic summary of Honduras had showed that development was more or less constant and that social sustainability was strong, but that problems had arisen in the areas of environmental sustainability and the interaction of environmental systems with other subsystems. The case of Honduras illustrated that that a holistic view was necessary to identifying areas where a country's sustainability was having problems, he said.

Mr. HAVINGA said that statisticians were increasingly being called upon to provide information beyond numbers, as numerical data could sometimes be too complex for use in international discussions. Resulting changes in statistical methods had allowed for dialogues like the one being undertaken today.

In that vein, he said, a newly created System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) was now available, he said. The System — “an internationally agreed framework for official statistics for the measurement of economic impacts on the environment and the environmental impacts on the economy” — had evolved in parallel with global environmental policy over the past few decades. It also served as an organization of economic, financial and natural assets, and helped to compare environmental and socio-economic data. Moreover, while individual indicators could sometimes make it difficult to see the “whole picture”, he said, the System’s network of environmental accounts could help to make sense of that larger picture and to identify missing pieces.

Building on existing systems of national accounts, including GDP and rates of saving and borrowing, among others, SEEA helped to bring its network of complex environmental and economic indicators to policy-makers, he said. The System expanded access to knowledge on environmental asset boundaries, such as coastal areas, energy and minerals, forests and fish. It included physical valuations of environmental assets and flows, and linked monetary with physical information. Additionally, SEEA provided environmentally-adjusted aggregated data for depleting environmental assets in terms of GDP and other common economic indicators. SEEA indicator categories were varied, and the types of indicators included in the system were flexible enough to reflect future policy changes. The System was currently being incorporated in consultations with 192 countries and several intergovernmental organizations. It would also be adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission for use, beginning in February 2012.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates discussed the way forward for measuring economic progress, with several agreeing that GDP indicators must be complemented by other tools for measuring social well-being and environmental sustainability. One speaker went as far to say that love and solidarity must be at the centre of all human activity. While progress had been made in implementing sustainable development policies, it had been uneven, globally and even nationally. Promotion of the three pillars of sustainable development as mutually reinforcing also had yet to be fully achieved.

While the role of national Governments in promoting equity was paramount, international cooperation was also important for enabling sustainable development to unfold. In that context, some speakers pressed developed countries to follow through on pledges to allocate 0.7 per cent of their GDP to official development assistance. Others urged solving entrenched intellectual property rights issues, so they no longer provided an excuse for withholding technology transfer. Still others noted that “we have enough finance and technology to turn things around. What is needed is political will.”

Many Governments outlined national commitments to achieve balanced sustainable development based on the human being. Governance, some speakers said, was carried out in their countries with a focus on direct citizen participation and social equity — both of which were needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Other speakers offered suggestions for the 2012 Conference, saying it should identify areas where adjustments must be made. A framework for action that translated political commitment into achievement of internationally agreed development goals, in harmony with nature, should be adopted.

One delegate drew attention to the fact that the concept of sustainable development in harmony with nature had not yet been defined, which had led to confusion. It was true that poverty brought about pressure on natural resources, but it was not necessarily linked to the destruction of nature. The sacredness of forests must also be appreciated as repositories of peoples' knowledge.

Speaking in the discussion were the representatives of Nicaragua, Brazil, Cuba, Benin, Georgia, Solomon Islands, Argentina and China.

Representatives of Partnership for Global Justice, Information Habitat, Anglican Observer and the Center for Women, the Earth and the Divine also spoke.

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