



Remarks

by

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

**Fourth Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly
on Harmony with Nature**

New York

22 April 2014

Please check against delivery

H.E. Mr. Sacha Llorentty Solíz, Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations,

Excellencies,

Ms. Tonya Gonnella Frichner,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After the hardships of a particularly long and cold winter, it is my distinct pleasure to greet you in the dawn of a new season at this General Assembly Debate on the Harmony with Nature. We gather here on this International Mother Earth Day to honour the planet that sustains and revitalizes us, to explore how to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and to ensure that the profound and intricate connection between humankind and our home is duly reflected in the post-2015 development agenda.

The history of civilisation is the story of the sometimes complex relationship of human beings with nature and the planet. From the time man sought dominance and control over the environment, the quality of our lives as human beings has changed radically. While that change was largely positive, modern patterns of consumption and production have caused such overexploitation of natural resources that there is disequilibrium in the delicate balances of earth's ecosystems. The evidence is that the current global population is using vast quantities of natural resources at so rapid a rate that we are consuming fifty percent (50%) more resources than the planet can provide. Consequently, today's lifestyles have ushered in what scientists are now calling the Anthropocene Era; essentially this means that man's lifestyles, actions, technologies and practices can and are irrevocably and adversely impacting nature, putting the survival of many species under threat, undermining the survival prospects for current and future generations, and jeopardising the very planet from which we take our life. We cannot and must not ignore the cries of our planet to restore a more harmonious relationship with nature. Nor must we lose the opportunity to work harmoniously with each other for the common good.

Excellencies,

Nature is more than an economic resource. We cannot indefinitely extract infinite growth from a finite planet. A sustainable approach to development – one that is in harmony with the rhythms of nature – means that the needs and rights of the current generation do not encroach upon those of future generations. It also means that we must consciously and deliberately choose to evolve our purely human-centred worldview – or "anthropocentrism," – toward a more balanced, Earth-centred relationship with the planet. Under this new paradigm, nature is recognized as an equal partner with humankind, as well as a crucial ally. In other words, being in harmony with nature means being both pro-planet and pro-people, and orienting the development of our societies towards sustaining nature and by so doing, we sustain ourselves.

Such a philosophy can contribute to the elaboration of the post 2015 development agenda, which seeks to eliminate extreme global poverty and forge a single developmental pathway that is truly sustainable. Many of the issues currently under consideration in the emerging framework reflect the need to restore a harmonious relation between Earth and its inhabitants. In other words, the time has come for us to truly “talk-the-talk and walk-the-walk.” And whether we talk about agriculture, efficient use of natural resources, the protection of our forests and oceans or the development of sustainable modes of production and consumption, we need to seek ways to reconcile the needs of people with the needs and capacities of our planet. We as a human family must now learn to respect the planetary boundaries, and work towards forging a new and healthier relationship that will allow both to thrive.

Distinguished Delegates,

As called for by resolution 68/216, today's Dialogue occurs at a critical juncture in the planning for the new development agenda and will examine how the issue of Harmony with Nature can inform and enrich this ongoing process. The panel of this Dialogue is a fitting complement to the work undertaken by the Rio-mandated processes to begin defining the agenda, for which my team and I are doing our utmost to “set the stage.” I hope that the issues discussed here today, relating to science, ecology, agriculture, law, policy and planning will offer significant added-value.

Excellencies,

Sound policies and decision-making must be based on sound science. In formulating the post-2015 development agenda, it is important that Member States and stakeholders rely on the most current scientific information. Our panellists today will share their academic expertise with us, highlighting the intrinsic links between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The Dialogue shall also provide guidance for the further building of a knowledge network, the efforts of which will serve to produce this balanced paradigm for the planet and for people. The foundation for this knowledge network is the recently updated Harmony with Nature website, which also features the latest legal developments on the rights of nature, law and policy. An extensive and in-depth bibliography of academic expertise focussing on an Earth-centred relationship with Nature instead of the prevailing human-centred approach can also be found on the website.

In addition to those previously mentioned, today's fourth dialogue on Harmony with Nature will allow participants to:

1. Take stock of the four reports of the Secretary-General, as well as the three previously-held dialogues;
2. Begin the examination of appropriate strategies to operationalize and implement Harmony with Nature approaches;
3. Examine the policies, legal and institutional frameworks that must be put in place at the local, regional and international level for successful operationalization of Harmony with Nature approaches.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a global population we usually think of ourselves as being interconnected by the ability to reach every part of the globe through means of modern travel, or by our ability through technology to know what is happening a continent away as well as we know what is taking place in our own back yards. We laud the way in which the

Internet and social media allow us to communicate in real time no matter where we are. We marvelled at the rapidity and depth of the contagion of the recent financial crisis, which showed us the extent of our interconnections in a globalised economy. But we rarely pause to recognise that it is through nature that we are most connected with powerful and interwoven binds, through the air we breathe, the water that sustains life on this earth, and the ozone layer that protects our biosphere. The sustainability of current and future generations depends on our living in harmony with each other and with nature.

I look forward to hearing your views and encourage all delegations to take active part in this interactive give-and-take of ideas. May all our work here benefit the people and planet.

Thank you.
