

**ENVIRONMENT, ETHICS, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**  
**INCLUDING SOME PROFOUND THOUGHTS THAT EMERGED ON THE ROAD TO RIO AND  
IN RELATION TO UNCED 1992 (THE EARTH SUMMIT)**

By

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**The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has problems, which cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them.” .....Albert Einstein**



# A Sense of History

- In 1972 the UN convened a game changing meeting --the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden;
- The catalyst for this meeting was that scientists all over the world were saying that the global environment was in serious trouble and needed a political focus both domestically and internationally (Canada created the DOE 1971 as did the US (EPA) during the UN Conference preparatory phase);
- The next major step forward was when Gro BruntLand, the Norwegian PM, initiated the global "call to arms" in 1987 (Our Common Future -- the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development), and called for the global integration of Economic and Environmental considerations. Planning for UNCED then commenced.

# *A Sense of History Continued*


- UNCED was expected to reach global agreement on a plan to create sustainable livelihoods and sustainable futures for all people on this planet.
- UNCED content was developed (over 2 years) lead by a Canadian, Maurice Strong, and was designed to be a process review of ongoing processes; or, from another viewpoint, a strategic plan for learning to live off the planets ecological interest;
- UNCED held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 3-14 June 1992 became "code" for the emerging debate regarding the survival of the planet;
- The products emerging from UNCED were: Agenda 21; The Rio Declaration; Forest Principles; Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

# *The Nature of the UNCED Debates*

- UNCED brought together for the first time the leaders of the world to discuss the world's ecological future.
- There were fundamentally three camps participating in the debates: the deep ecologists; the ethicists and the economists;
- The intellectual debate centered around the proper role and structure of economic activity;
- The economic argument was: poverty is at the root of environmental destruction and increased wealth is needed to combat poverty;
- The debate centered on the point that the discipline of economics is predicated on growth .... but ....we need finite economics for a finite planet!



## *Key Observations from UNCED on Economics as a Key Determinant*

- There can be no economy in the absence of a viable ecosystem;
  - Economic activity must be ethically driven and structured to protect the essential life support systems of the planet;
  - There can be no successful human economy apart from nature, or in defiance of nature.
  - “We all live by robbing nature and our standard of living demands that the robbery continues. Environmental destruction occurs when people have too little or too much.” (*Wendell Berry*)
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## *Some More Key Observations*

- “Global warming and stratospheric ozone depletion is a form of feedback from the earth’s ecological systems to the world’s economic systems” ... *Jim MacNeil*
- Some ethicists asked during the debates, is the hole in the ozone layer one example of nature’s veto?
- An ethically-based mega root question was, and still is, ...how much is enough?
- If wants remain insatiable can there ever be such a thing as enough?
- A child asked ....does the hole in the stratosphere now mean we are now polluting the universe?

# Definitions of Ethics

## The Oxford dictionary

- A set of moral principles; the science of morals in human conduct; the rules of conduct.

## From Dictionary.com

- A system of moral principles: eg. the ethics of a culture;
- The rules of conduct recognized in respect to a particular class of human actions or a particular group, culture, (medical ethics; Christian ethics, etc.);
- Moral principles, as of an individual (Example, His ethics forbade betrayal of a confidence);
- That branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and end of such actions.

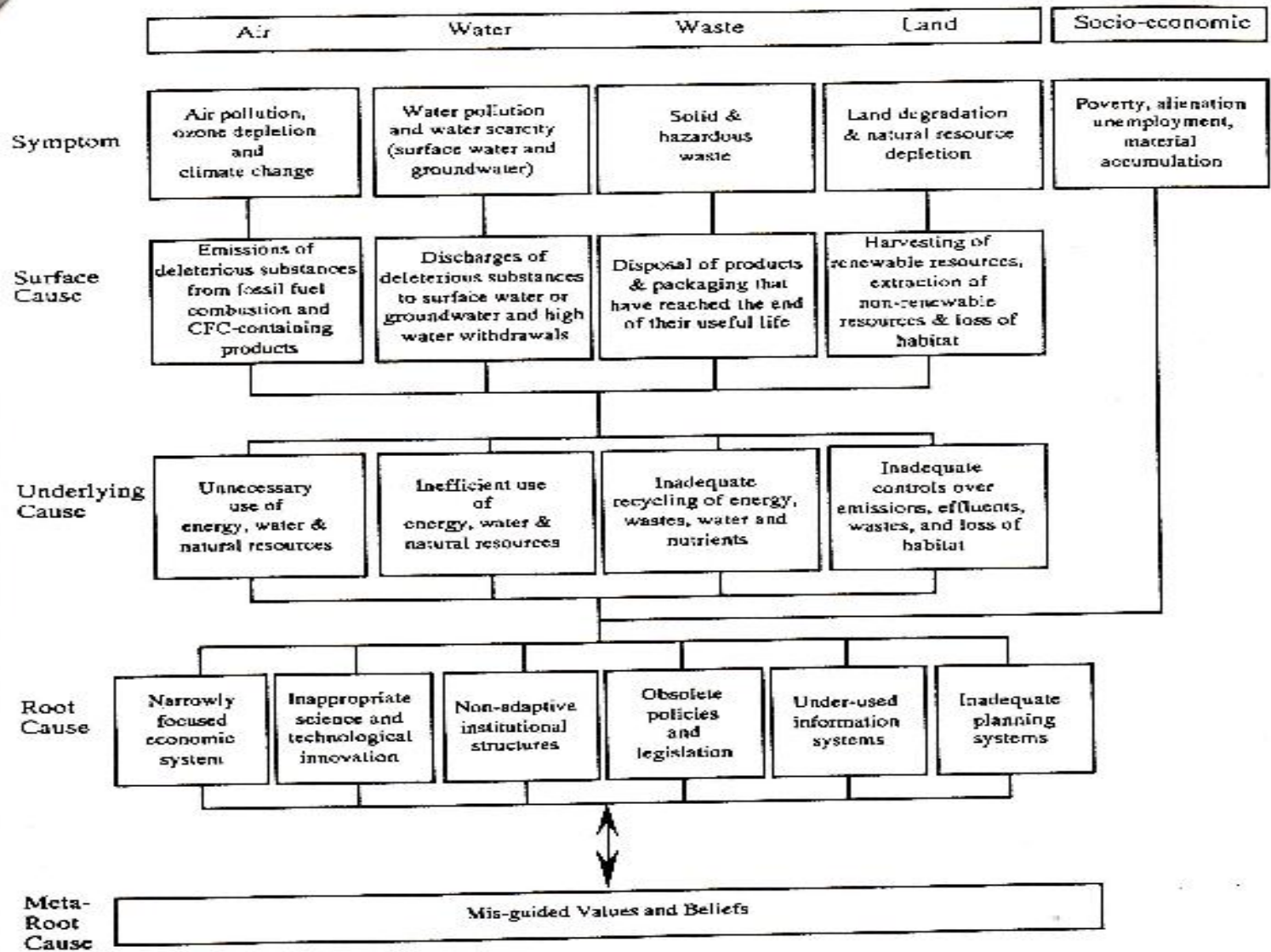
# Ethics --- CCPA 1995

- Reconstituted ethics has to be recognized as the long term basis for survival;
- Ethics must be recognized and accepted as the mega-root influencer of behavior.

The Old Ethic	The New Ethic
Do the minimum the law requires	Exceed the letter and spirit of the law
Keep a low profile	Be seen to be doing the right thing
Limit product related obligations	Exercise life cycle stewardship
Assumption of product / process innocence	Risk-based precautionary approach
Supply hazard info when required by law	Public & employees right to know all risks
Defensive approach to new regulations	Lead in public policy process
Every company for themselves	Mutual aid and peer pressure
Ignore or fight advocates	Seek advocate input
Bottom line & laws guide decisions	Integrate all into decisions
<i>From a presentation by the Canadian Chem. Prod. Assoc. -</i>	<i>March 1995</i>



**Unit IV-1**  
**symptoms and causes of environmental degradation**



# *UNCED Preparations*

- As noted, the preparations for UNCED were of a 2 year duration. I was a co-head of the Canadian delegation preparing Agenda 21 along with a senior member of Global Affairs;
- There were five 5-6 week “prepcoms” where the real debates and negotiations took place over the 2 year period creating an Agenda 21 to be agreed upon in Rio;
- A deep, intellectual and fundamentally an ethical debate emerged over the WEB (now the internet) amongst participants and at the margins of the meetings;
- When it came time to convert the composite final negotiating texts to decisions 118 Heads of Government (HOGs) attended to finalize and agree on Agenda 21, and sign off on the Rio Declaration and several other conventions negotiated in advance of UNCED;

## *The Sustainable Development Linkage*

- SD discussions became popularised at the time of the 1987 Gro Bruntland Report, the World Commission on Environment and Development as previously noted;
- There were two major viewpoints; the expansionist or technological view (reliance on technology to address pollution and resource shortfalls); and the steady state or ecological viewpoint (earth has finite resources and ever expanding production and consumption will exterminate natural systems).
- The ecological viewpoint holds that ecology and economy are inextricably linked.

# *Sustainable Development Criteria*

Herman Daly (formerly World Bank) and other proponents of the ecological world view suggested there are three conditions to be met to achieve planetary sustainability;

- 1) The rates of renewable natural resource harvesting must not exceed the rate at which those resources are generated;
- 2) The rates of non-renewal resource extraction must not exceed the rates at which resource substitutes are developed;
- 3) The rates of pollution and waste generation must not exceed the rates at which they can be assimilated in the environment.

## *SD and Env. Observations*

- SD implies and requires resource management of production and consumption patterns and environmental protection must have a special place in the struggle for SD;
- Like democracy, environmental protection must be accepted as being essential to everything else...not just one good cause among many;
- Environmental protection must have a special focus in the struggle for SD;
- SD implies and requires a fundamental shift in resource management and consumption patterns;
- Canada was a key promoter of a new paradigm of relations with developing countries. One characterized by equality, dialogue trust and partnerships acknowledging mutual need.

# Important SD Observations

- SD are simply the buzzwords that conceal the cry for an altered mindset;
- The response mechanism to secure our future is SD, but governments alone can not bring about SD. Industry and their ethical behavior has a major role to play;
- We can't let the profit motive contaminate our pursuit of environmentally appropriate SD;
- If we wish to make incremental progress with our environmental issues, we have to design programs which both relate and respond also to political, geo-political, current economics and societal impacts;
- SD is a cry for an introspective look at what really is important and what truly matters. It is a call to arms to all sectors of society especially industry.
- Those responsible for decision making can no longer isolate the consequences of decisions from a consideration of the world at large, both present and future.

## *Key Observations and Lessons Learned*

- You can't fit environment into an econometric model and assume that SD is in hand;
- Environmental protection can no longer be seen as a profit drawdown in the rate of return for investment equation because there can be no sustainable industry without a healthy environment.
- We have to learn how to best determine the extent to which we are living off the earth's interest and drawing down its capital and there must be a full accounting of environmental costs;
- We have to learn how to better communicate the indisputable scientific evidence and how to communicate; coordinate, and empower the poor both at home, and abroad to participate meaningfully in the sustainable development process;

## *SD Lessons To Be Learned*

- We have to learn how best to incorporate societal issues into decision frameworks and support leaders who have care and concern for the preservation of the planet above all else.
- SD cannot be achieved in the short term...only pursued. Nonetheless, we must cope with a concurrent evolution of expectations, values and knowledge;
- We have to better organize government in a manner that integrates the various ministerial responsibilities in a planetary well being construct.
- There must be a full accounting of environmental damage in economic terms and we must uphold the polluter pays principle; We must struggle to move beyond an environment and human health focus to one of a consideration of ecological carrying capacity and planetary sustainability.
- There must be a full accounting of environmental damage in economic terms and we must uphold the polluter pays principle;



## *The Efficacy of UNCED*

- |As noted, the most substantive output from UNCED was Agenda 21 which has 39 chapters and is 700 pages long. It was known from the onset that this was just a start.
- Some attached the utmost importance to UNCED perhaps because it initiated efforts to transcend parochial interests and strove to garner the political will to create a better world for all of its inhabitants;
- One thing is for certain..the world is both enriched and enlightened as a result of UNCED but the fight is still continuing and it is proving to be a very steep uphill battle;
- UNCED's probably most important achievement was that it instilled within the UN hierarchy the notion of multisectoral partnerships predicated on the concept of mutual need;
- UNCED was not without its disappointments. I'll now share just a few.

## *Failures of UNCED*

- Nothing was agreed at UNCED that guaranteed change or even the required partnerships;
- There was no agreement to formally integrate the environmental and development agendas;
- The critical global economic agenda remains arms-distance from the UNCED process and will require constant political pressure to see change;
- Government's obligations to preserve, protect and enhance the environment are state specific ongoing responsibilities.
- Unfortunately, environmental protection is still seen in many quarters as luxury programs only suitable for good economic times.
- The Earth Charter was watered down to become the Rio Declaration.
- We are still not moving far enough, fast enough.

## *Some Related Quotes*

### **Messages to our Political Leaders brought out at UNCED**

- We don't inherit the earth from our parents, we borrow it from our grandchildren ... *Hopi Aboriginals*
- When making decisions, always consider the impacts out for at least seven generations ...*Algonquin Aboriginals;*
- The time has come for all persons in authority to consider their environmentally-related decision making first from an environmental perspective then again after the economic consequences are considered .. *Vic Buxton 1997*
- Today's decision makers are the stewards of our children's and their children's future and they have no moral right to mortgage their future ..*Vic Buxton 1997*

Globally recognized Ambassadors such as John Denver and Olivia Newton-John create issue recognition, public awareness and often political will.



During the UNCED preparatory process, Canada pressed for a short, concise Earth Charter embodying principles on which could be grounded the international pursuit of sustainable development and other ethical and equality issues. However, this Charter was not supported by the G77 and some Arab States so the final agreed result of the negotiations and compromises at Rio in this context was the Rio Declaration. The draft Earth Charter that Canada played a lead supporting role on is attached for future viewing on YouTube. The Rio declaration is available on line.

Thank You

## *Earth Charter -- Later to be Watered Down to the Rio Declaration*

- **All States and people share the responsibility, which is common but differentiated, to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem, including its, air, land, water and biological diversity;**
- **All States and people shall, for the benefit of future as well as present generations, have the opportunity to achieve full development and equity, while living within the capacities of the Earth's ecosystem;**
- **All States and people shall strive for the elimination of poverty as an indispensable component of sustainable development;**

## *Earth Charter continued*

- All States and people shall treat the environment of other States, and people, the global commons, as well as the Earth's ecosystem, in a manner as least as favorable as their own environment and consistent with international law and this Charter;
- All States and people shall recognize and encourage cultural diversity, particularly indigenous lifestyles with a sustainable relationship to the Earth;
- All States and people, when undertaking activities that may affect the Earth, shall adopt precautionary and preventative approaches. including assessment and management practices which take into account the intrinsic value of the environment;

## *Earth Charter Continued*

- **All States and people, when using the Earth's resources, shall adopt the most appropriate environmental technology in order to minimize waste and harm to the environment;**
- **All States and people shall strive to ensure that economic activities reflect their full environmental and social costs and benefits;**
- **All States and people shall cooperate to promote trade relations that are supportive of local, regional and global sustainable development;**
- **All States and people shall promote public education, scientific research and monitoring, and the availability of information concerning the Earth's ecosystem and development, and the relationship between them;**



## *Earth Charter Continued*

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## *Earth Charter Continued*

- All States and people shall ensure public participation in the decision-making processes concerning the environment and development;
- All States and people shall pursue and encourage the implementation of the principles of this Charter, in cooperation and in accordance with their respective responsibilities and capabilities.

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- One last quote from close to home. "The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. If we continue to develop our technology without wisdom or prudence, our servant will become our executioner." *General Omar Bradley USA Army Corp.*