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Harmony with Nature

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to the request of the Assembly in its resolution 67/214. In the same resolution, the Assembly also requested that the Secretary-General convene a third interactive dialogue on Harmony with Nature to commemorate International Mother Earth Day and that Harmony with Nature be included as an input for the discussion on the post-2015 United Nations development agenda. The report focuses on advancing different economic approaches in the context of sustainable development to further an ethical basis for the relationship between humanity and the Earth. Concrete recommendations are provided to facilitate further consideration of the theme by Member States.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 67/214, entitled “Harmony with Nature”, requested the Secretary-General to convene, during its sixty-seventh session, an interactive dialogue, to be held in a plenary meeting of the Assembly in commemoration of International Mother Earth Day on 22 April 2013, with the participation of Member States, United Nations organizations, independent experts and other stakeholders, in order to make an effective contribution to the post-2015 development agenda.

2. The purpose of the interactive dialogue of the General Assembly was to examine different economic approaches, in the context of sustainable development, to further a more ethical basis for the relationship between humanity and the Earth. In the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, “The future we want”, which recognizes the contribution of the Harmony with Nature process in advancing sustainable development, Member States and other stakeholders acknowledged that “Mother Earth” embodies a universal set of principles adopted by societies in the search to recognize the rights of nature in the context of the promotion of sustainable development.

3. Neoclassical economics **has a tendency to assume that human well-being increases with the accumulation of more goods and services. On**

the other hand, ecological economics, while recognizing that our well-being depends to a large extent on economic development, stresses the negative impact of our unbalanced relation with nature. It attempts to protect the Earth by assigning market values to nature in an attempt to pursue harmony with nature. Ecological economics thus paves the way for the recognition that sustainability is a multifaceted goal that focuses on economic, social and environmental dimensions. It points to the need to ensure the resilience of ecological and socio-economic systems by conserving and investing into in natural, social and human assets.

4. Thus, for environmental economics, the efficiency of resource allocations has to be measured in relation to collective well being. Ecological economics attaches great value to a healthy society, integrated with a thriving natural world, respectful of intergenerational equality. A number of member states have already adopted this perspective and have recognized in their laws, the rights of nature as vital in their promotion of sustainable development.

5. It is universally recognized that in order to achieve a balance between the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations it is necessary to foster a universal respect for the Earth system and its species, as well as an acceptance of our

responsibility to restore the health and integrity of the planet's ecosystems.

6. As recognized in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”, there is a need for a more comprehensive approach to determining our collective well-being and development (resolution 66/288, paragraph 38). In the years to come **ecological economics needs to inform our thinking on development, while maintaining the focus on the importance of economic growth and social well being.**

7. The Secretary-General in his statement delivered at the Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature stressed that “climate change is a real and growing problem and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, often driven by greed, is eroding the planet’s fragile ecosystems. Biodiversity is increasingly being lost; more and more species are disappearing; short-sighted commercial practices are depleting fish stocks; and acidity, in the oceans is threatening the whole marine food chain.”

8. **It is therefore necessary, if** development is to be truly sustainable, and if humankind is to co-exist in more holistic relationship with the Earth **to take into account natural capital and manage natural resources in a**

sustainable way, which has been recognized in all major summits and conference dealing with this issue from Rio in 1992 to Rio+20 in 2012.

9. **At the same time we must continue to seek economic efficiency and good economic decision making, which is not possible if all the costs and benefits are not considered. These externalities, such as the depletion of natural resources or impact of human well-being due to pollution or climate change or loss of biodiversity, are not defines as costs. They are, therefore, not included in the price of a product. Capturing this cost in the market would provide a powerful incentive to move towards sustainability. This would also make good economic sense, while preserving the Earth within its planetary boundaries. For this to happen, the international community needs to discuss these issues and embrace sustainability as a guiding principle in development.**

10. **The following chapter will address how nature has been somewhat marginalized in the international discourse on the environment and how the development and economics has proceeded without due regard for nature and made the achievement of a holistic form of sustainable development more difficult.**

II. The social construction of nature

11. There are many conceptions of nature. They range from the basic elements of the natural world, including trees, rivers and animal life, to how our world came into existence, to the world that exists without human beings or our civilizations, and to the universe beyond our home planet, in all its staggering complexity. Nature refers to life in general and its presence is found everywhere - in the metaphysical, subatomic and cosmic realms. As a concept, it has existed since the beginnings of human history.¹

12. To most observers, nature is difficult to conceive in any simple, objectifiable way. Given all the interconnections between what is conceivable to our senses and what is only conceivable to the mind, regaining and maintaining harmony with nature requires knowledge not only from scientists, but also from philosophers, poets and others whose studies, imaginations, intuitions, as well as spiritual revelations and inspirations, offer insights into nature's intrinsic value.

13. In his most recent work, philosopher Ronald Dworkin holds that what we call nature, the universe as a whole and in all its parts, is something of

¹ Barbara Baudot, "Nature: As the Lost Sheep in the International Discourse on the Environment," delivered at the New Hampshire Institute of Politics, Saint Anselm College (April 2013), and, at the Fletcher School of Diplomacy (September 2012) (unpublished).

intrinsic value and wonder. Nature is the locus and nutrient of our physical lives, and providing a transcendental value in what may seem otherwise transient and dead.²

14. Defining nature concretely **is challenging** because its physical and metaphysical dimensions are inseparably intertwined. It is the scientist, the philosopher, the poet and the sage **that have evoked** a sense of nature **and it continues to be shrouded in** mystery and enchantment. **It is** the international community, with its **growing knowledge and understanding**, soul and reason, to seek different ways of healing the planet.

15. There is a residing hope that the damage done to the Earth can be reversed, and that hope has found a home in the science of ecology. Ecology includes within its purview the non-living world, on the one hand, and the world of humans, on the other. Thus, any ontological difference between what was once called the mineral kingdom, the plant and animal kingdoms, and the kingdom of man has vanished: the scope of the idea of ecology is universal.

16. In the early 1970s, after three decades teaching philosophy at the University of Oslo, Arne Naess, one of the founding fathers of

² Ronald Dworkin, "Religion without God" (2013).

environmental philosophy, and the man who coined the term “Deep Ecology”, published a short paper called “The Shallow and the Deep: the Long Range Ecology Movement”, in which he stated that there are two ecology movements. First is chiefly concerned with pollution, the depletion of natural resources and the usefulness of the Earth for humans (anthropocentrism); and the second is concerned with the richness, diversity and intrinsic value of all the natural world – this is deep ecology.

17. Deep ecology is rooted in the basic concept that every living thing – animal and plant – has an equal right to live and flourish. Mr. Naess, in one of his last essays, published before his death in 2009 at the age of **96**, stated: “We are living on an incredibly beautiful little planet; but our human existence is threatened. If we are to survive we have to learn to think differently. The thinking for the future has to be loyal to nature. It must encompass all humans and all living creatures, because everything alive, in itself, has a value.”

III. The emergence of the environment as a human construct

18. The environment as a concept is much more recent than nature, and it is one that views nature as comprising a set of instrumental values for humankind. Use of the term is dated to the early years of the 19th century

and emerges with the industrialization and modernization of the world's material economy. "The environment" as a concept has stronger political implications than "nature", and nature, in the shadow of that concept, has been **somewhat** relegated and taken for granted.

19. Yet it is precisely the values **associated with preserving** nature inspire **a recognition that** commercial exploitation of the natural world is **harmful**. Nature can inspire an appreciation of the value of happiness and satisfaction of the human spirit. Moreover, once nature is accepted as the source of life, as life itself, we might be brought to realize that it cannot be protected in a piecemeal fashion.

20. In the 19th century, numerous thinkers and political figures, East and West, documented their appreciation of the intrinsic value of nature. Their work was addressed in detail in the two previous reports of the Secretary-General on Harmony with Nature (A/65/314 and A/66/302). At the dawn of the industrial revolution they warned that rapid changes in agricultural and industrial technology posed serious threats not only to the quality of life on the planet but also to civilization itself.

21. Max Weber, the German sociologist, foresaw **that** a general disenchantment **would emerge in** the modern industrial era notably in the

Western culture. **In the words of Richard Jenkins, "Disenchantment"** means that "humankind believes that it can, in principle, master all things by calculation".³ Disenchantment is the result of the evolution of science and technology where nature has been reduced to a tool for human improvement and material development.

22. Compounding this widespread disenchantment is the recognition **that some key segments of population, notably city dwellers, end up with** "nature deficit disorder". Lacking exposure to and experience with nature, **city dwellers given their surrounding** have grown up without compassion for wild creatures and without appreciation for the beauty and grandeur of the natural world or its multi-layered complexity and wonder. The situation raises serious concerns for the future.

23. Richard Louv, the journalist and founder of the Children and Nature Network, who coined the concept of "nature deficit disorder", offers that our children **are prone to such deficit disorder which is likely to pose a bigger problem in the future. Quote from his work illustrates the point with more clarity:** "An increasing pace in the last three decades, approximately, of a rapid disengagement between children and direct experiences in

³ Richard Jenkins, "Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium" (2000).

nature... has profound implications, not only for the health of future generations but for the health of the Earth itself".⁴

24. Symptoms of this disorder are to be found not only in rich developed countries, but also in developing countries. Surely, many of the strongest environmental advocates are those who had a great deal of exposure to the wonders of the natural environment in childhood.

25. In response to the excesses of contemporary society, as reflected in our unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, initiatives are in place to promote sustainable living by organizing human life according to ecological resilience. The idea of "Transition Towns", forwarded by Louise Rooney and Catherine Dunne, are a response to the relentless exploitation of natural resources – an alternative offering smaller, local scale communities that are less reliant on long supply chains and fossil fuels. Transition town initiatives vary, but in general they are intended to counteract the idea that growth should not continue to be the **sole** goal of economic choices. Supporting local and community-shared production and clean energy strengthens community relationships and stimulate well-being, social justice and resilience. **Such considerations clearly justify the growing realization that economic growth must be inclusive and respect the environment.**

⁴ Richard Louv, "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder" (2005).

26. As of May 2013 more than 1,100 Transition Towns' initiatives were identified in 43 different countries.⁵ Some initiatives like the Kinsale Energy Descent Action Plan 2021,⁶ written by the students of Kinsale Further Education College, establish practical and detailed steps towards a more sustainable livelihood, **notably in relation to** energy and fossil fuels reduction, food and education, among others.

27. **Thus** it is possible to find practical solutions to our current issues, shifting from a consumer society to a broader, community-oriented sustainable lifestyle, in harmony with nature.

IV. Environment on the international agenda

28. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972, **brought the environment to the international agenda.** The conference was first proposed by Sweden, at a time when concerns were high about acid rain, pollution in the Baltic Sea and the rising levels of pesticides and heavy metals in fish and birds. The world realized that industrial wastes **have cross-border implications.** Countries

⁵ <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>

⁶ <http://transitionculture.org/wp-content/uploads/KinsaleEnergyDescentActionPlan.pdf>

discovered that they were not self-contained units, but contingent on actions taken by others.

29. The different implications of environment that are being addressed in international negotiations are physical, social **and political**, and thus lend themselves to empirical assessment and measurable progress. The following three different worldviews regarding the use of the word “environment” further explains this political reality.

Environment: our surroundings

30. The use of the term Environment **referring to** objects or regions surrounding anything was not registered before the 19th century and only then when it was used to convey aesthetic appreciation of one’s surroundings. It was not until the second half of the 20th century that the term evoked concern for exhaustion of resources and contamination. Politically, this conception is now manifested in environmentalism, defined in the Oxford Dictionary of Environment and Conservation as “concern with the preservation of the environment, especially from the effects of pollution; the politics and policies associated with this.” **Thus, scientifically stated, the environment refers to the “physical, chemical, and biotic conditions surrounding a living organism”.**

Environment: the aggregate of the social and cultural conditions that influence the life on an individual or community (translated in this context to mean sustainable development approach to peace, justice and the environment)

31. This **approach**, though not explicitly within the realm of modern environmental politics, was in currency in the 19th century. **It** draws a distinction between the discourse focused on changes in natural resources and the biosphere **in** industrialized countries and the discourse introduced in the North/South dialogue. **It was enshrined** in principle 1 of the Stockholm Declaration adopted in 1972 **at** the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment:

“Man has the right to freedom, equality, and adequate conditions of life in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and wellbeing, and bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations. In this respect, policies promoting or perpetuating ...discrimination, colonial, and other forms of oppression and foreign domination stand condemned and must be eliminated.”

32. Subsequently, socio-economic development was inextricably linked to debates on international environmental policies. It is embodied in the idea of sustainable development, which joins protection of the environment with socio-economic progress in a strategy for change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all working together to enhance society's current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.

Environment: Physical, chemical, and biotic factors that impact on an organism or an ecological community ultimately determine its form and function

33. The third perspective builds on an ecological vision of the environment. This understanding derives from notions of ecology, emerging only in the late 19th century. The Oxford Dictionary of Environment and Conservation definition of ecology captures this view. It defines ecology as “the science of the economy of animals and plants—that branch of biology which deals with the relations of living organisms to their surroundings, their habitats and modes of life, etc.” This vision sees earth's inhabitants and the environment in a symbiotic relationship that must be preserved.

34. Thus a new category of problems, the “global issues”, emerged. The Stockholm Conference was the prelude to a series of large United Nations meetings through the 1970s that **recognized that country situations are interrelated and that this** interrelated world **operates** under a number of common constraints.

35. It was only in the course of the 1970s, **with** the additional impact of the oil crisis that Governments **started to recognize** that continued growth depended not only on capital formation or skilled manpower but also on the long-term availability of a viable natural world (or natural “resources.”) In introducing her report “Our Common Future” to the General Assembly in 1987, Gro Bruntland described “the environment” as the place where we all live; and “development” as what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode.” Her characterization of the environment combined economics and ecology.

36. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 served to develop a programmatic approach to pursue environmentally sound and sustainable development through Agenda 21. The principles behind Agenda 21 are set out in the Earth Charter, which “seeks to inspire in all peoples a sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human

family, the greater community of life, and future generations."⁷ Humans remained at the centre of the idea of the environment.

37. The next important international conference that addressed Environment was the World Summit for Sustainable Development in 2002, in Johannesburg. This conference reaffirmed **that** humankind's survival is dependent on a healthy environment.

38. Ten years later, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development served as another reaffirmation of the approach to sustainable development, recognizing that this must build on economic, social and environmental considerations and priorities. **Its** perspective **emphasized** a human-centred view of the environment.

V. Development through environmental transformation

39. Development describes a process through which the potentialities of an object or organism are released, until it reaches its complete, full-fledged form. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Justus Moser, the conservative founder of social history, used the word *Entwicklung* to allude to the gradual process of social change.

⁷ The Earth Charter (1992).

40. In the 1800s, *Entwicklung* began to appear as a reflexive verb. Self-development became fashionable, and development became the central category of the work of Karl Marx: revealed as a historical process that unfolded in the same way as natural laws. **To some extent, both the Hegelian concept of history and the Darwinist concept of evolution were interwoven into our concept of development.**

41. Development soon became a powerful force, employed by politicians to catalyse the industrial mode of production. Development became the definition of the **ultimate** stage of a linear approach to social evolution.

42. English publications between 1875 and 1900 framed Development in the context of the evolution of, for example, the development of the Athenian constitution, the English novel and the transportation system in the United States. A number of authors preferred “evolution” in the title of their books, notwithstanding the fact that they maintained the use of development in the text as the principal operative term.

43. By the beginning of the twentieth century, a new use of the term became widespread. “Urban development” has stood, since then, for a

specific manner of reformulation of urban surroundings, based on the massive, homogenous industrial production or urban spaces.

44. Throughout the century, the meanings associated with urban development and colonial development concurred with many others to transform the word “development”. It is now a word whose significance depends on the specific context in which it is employed.

45. Development cannot de-link itself from the words with which it was formed – growth, evolution, maturation. Similarly, those who now use the word cannot free themselves from a web of meanings that impart a specific blindness to their language, thought and action. The word indicates that one is doing well because one is advancing in the sense of a necessary, inevitable, universal law towards a desirable goal. Development retains to this day the meaning coined a century ago by Ernst Haeckel: “Development is, from this moment on, the magic word with which we will solve all the mysteries that surround us or, at least, that which will guides us towards their solution”.⁸

46. For two-thirds of the Earth’s population, this positive meaning of the word “development” – profoundly rooted after two centuries of its social

⁸ Wolfgang Sachs, “The Development Dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power”, ed. (2012).

construction – is a reminder of the current undesirable and undignified condition of many societies. **In trying to escape this, there has been a tendency for societies to** strive to become part of the mass production and consumption system.

VI. Economic growth as the current paradigm of development

47. The word economy can be traced back to the Greek word *oikonomos*, “one who manages a household”, derived from *oikos*, “house”, and *nemein*, “to manage”. From *oikonomos* was derived *oikonomi*, which had not only the sense “management of a household or family” but also senses such as “thrift,” “direction,” “administration,” “arrangement,” and “public revenue of a state.” The first recorded use of the word economy, found in a work possibly composed in 1440, is “the management of economic affairs,” in this case, of a monastery. Today, the frequent use of “economy” refers to the neoclassical economic system of a country or an area, which was not developed until the 19th or 20th century.

48. Over the centuries, **development** was **increasingly** reduced to economic growth. Development consisted of growth in the income per person in economically underdeveloped areas. It was first proposed by W.

Arthur Lewis in 1944 and incorporated into the Charter of the United Nations in 1947.

49. Lewis' 1955 dictum "First it should be noted that our subject matter is growth, and not distribution" reflects the mainstream emphasis on economic growth which permeated the whole field of development thinking. Paul Baran, an influential development economist, wrote in 1957 on the political economy of growth and defined growth or development as the increase in the per capita production of material goods.

50. The United Nations Development Decade of the 1960s considered the social and economic aspects of development separately. **There was a change with** the UN International Development Strategy of 1970, which called for "a unified approach to development and planning, which would fully integrate the economic and social components in the formulation of policies and programmes."⁹

51. The above notwithstanding, the 1970s saw a slow evolution in the opposite direction: dispersion. Major issues, like the environment, population, hunger, women and employment, were successively brought to

⁹ Ibid.

the forefront. Every “problem” followed for a time an independent path, concentrating both public and institutional attention.

52. The question for a unifying principle continued on different terrain. In 1974, the Declaration of Cocoyoc emphasized that the purpose of development “should not be to develop things, but to develop man.” “Any process of growth,” it added, “that does not lead to the fulfilment of basic needs – or even worse, disrupts them – is a travesty of the idea of development.” Some of these ideas were expanded in the proposals of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, which suggested in 1975, another “development”, that of human-centered development.¹⁰

53. The next decade, the 1980s, was called “the lost decade for development”. The “adjustment process” meant for many countries abandoning or dismantling most of the previous achievements in the name of development- **understood in a narrow fashion**. By 1985, a post-development age seemed to be in the offing.¹¹ 28 years later, we are **again** calling for a **new**-development agenda, the post-2015 development agenda.

54. The 1990s, by contrast, gave birth to a new development ethos that followed two clearly distinguishable lines. In the North, it calls for re-

¹⁰ “The Cocoyoc Declaration on the pattern of resource use, environment and development”, October 1974.

¹¹ Wolfgang Sachs, “The Development Dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power”, ed. (2012).

development – that is, to develop again what was ostensibly poorly developed or is now obsolete. In the North, public attention was captivated by the speed and the conditions under which what was previously developed may be destroyed, dismantled or substituted (e.g., nuclear plants and poisonous pesticides). In the South, re-development also requires dismantling what was left by the “adjustment process.”

55. Conceptually and politically, re-development took the shape of sustainable development as defined and described in the Brundtland Commission’s report “Our Common Future”. But in its mainstream interpretation, sustainable development has **sometimes** been conceived as a strategy for *sustaining* economic development, not for supporting the flourishing and enduring of an infinitely diverse natural and social life. Sustainable development, as originally conceived, did consider the concepts of holism, resilience, and equity; however, where we are failing is in how we operationalize a version of sustainable development that embraces these fundamental concepts. And that is primarily because we have retained economic models that ignore these principles. For example, our current economic models **generally** discount the future cost of goods and services based on their utility in today’s market. This ignores the incalculable values that nature affords us, both today and for future generations.

56. The founding fathers of economics saw in scarcity the keystone for their theoretical constructs of economics. Scarcity connotes shortage, want, insufficiency, frugality.

57. The “law of scarcity” was construed by economists to denote the technical assumption that man’s wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited though improvable. The assumption implies choices over the allocation of means (resources). This “fact” defines the “economic problem” whose “solution” is proposed by economists through the market.¹²

58. Another key deficiency of the current market system, as Ian Mason, Principal of the School of Economic Science (London) explains, is that key factors of production such as land are considered as irrelevant. This is simply not the case, as material wealth, the things we use to satisfy material desires as well as to feed, clothe and shelter ourselves, has only one common source: it is all produced by human effort applied to land. Every single atom of material used for human production and consumption has its origins in the Earth. This was well-known in ancient times, and in the same way it is still understood by many indigenous cultures.¹³

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ian Mason, “One World, One Wealth: Economic, Justice and Rights for Nature”, Third Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature, 22 April 2013.

59. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the food production sector. According to the ETC Group (Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration), for the past half-century we have bought into the uncontested assumption that the prevailing western model of food production and consumption, i.e., the industrial food chain, is inevitable and the answer to food security. **This has fuelled** increases in meat and dairy consumption, obesity, and the need for fertilizers and pesticides that harm humans and Nature. And yet, we do not realize that only 30 per cent of all food consumed is produced through the industrial food chain, whereas the remaining 70 per cent is produced by small farmers.¹⁴ **Surely, this prompts us to reflect on how best to achieve food security.**

VII. Constructing a new paradigm: Harmony with Nature

60. An important aspect in the construction of a new paradigm is the redefinition of humankind's needs, **and the recognition of the need to move beyond the** unsustainable pursuit of ever-increasing economic growth **without concern for social development and nature.** Harmony with Nature implies that people do not assume unlimited resources or means. Rather, we must accept **that there are certain** limits to growth **on a finite**

¹⁴ ETC Group, With Climate Chaos, Who Will Feed Us? The Industrial Food Chain/The Peasant Food Web, July 2013.

planet. This was pointed out by Donella Meadows and others first in 1972 and that **is** echoed today by ecological economists.

61. Harmony with Nature also calls for a rehabilitation of the human spirit – the concept of holism - and for its relevance as a factor in the pursuit of a lifestyle that respects the rights of Nature. Human lifestyles must be **respectful of** ecological limits **and** Nature's. This means **adopting a** new paradigm **that** includes harmonious relationships **with nature**.

62. Advancement of fuel-efficient machines, environmental risk assessment analyses, the close **review** of natural processes, and other practical actions for greater sustainability, **are quite needed to help protect Nature. Though they are important, it has to be recognized that societies have inherent tendencies to** test Nature to her limits and the exploitation of Nature **is optimized to serve the goal of enhancing growth without due regard for consequences for present or future generation's well-being.** Calls for securing the survival of the planet are often, upon closer inspection, **aim for nothing less than compromising the aggressive growth of markets.**

63. Our practical actions for **enhancing** sustainability should be embodied within the framework of a new economics, **addressing** the market

failures **that ignored the ecological implications and resulted in** increasing deterioration of Nature as well as the well-being of many human populations around the world.

64. A paradigm for a new economics must go beyond neoclassical and environmental economics and instead learn from the concepts of Deep Ecology, rights of nature, and systems theory¹⁵. **Serving Nature and recognizing its inherent significance should be integrated in the** foundations of new economic models that **ought to factor in** the complex dynamic interplay between all key drivers of sustainability, e.g., justice, equity, and rights for all worlds' citizens and the natural world from which they derive their existence.

65. Ian Mason further notes that economics as currently understood produces many injustices, including great accumulations of wealth alongside **widespread** poverty, and a natural environment systematically destroyed to maintain profit margins. This calls for a thorough revision of contemporary understanding of economics, and **recognition of the problem that** **assuming** infinite economic growth is **not** possible in a finite world. **As a result there is need to** re-orient our economic system to **better** serve people

¹⁵ Arne Naess, "The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess", June 2008; Robert Frazier Nash, "The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics", University of Wisconsin Press, 1989; and Donella H. Meadows, "Thinking in Systems", 2008

and planet, as is recommended by ecological economists. He further recommended the adoption of a duty of care for nature and each other as central to ethical economics, and that we implement that tenet through recognizing and enforcing rights for Nature, just as we do human rights.¹⁶

[66. It has been well proven that the damage to nature's intrinsic regenerative capacity is impaired not only directly by overexploitation of a particular element of the natural world but also, indirectly, by damage caused to other related natural elements through ecological processes. For example, hydraulic fracturing, commonly referred to as fracking, is the process of drilling and injecting fluid into the ground at a high pressure in order to fracture shale rocks to release natural gas inside. Each gas well requires an average of 400 tanker trucks to carry water and supplies to and from each well. It takes 1 to 8 million gallons of water to complete each fracturing job. The water brought in is mixed with sand and chemicals to create fracking fluid. Approximately 40,000 gallons of chemicals are used per fracturing. Up to 600 chemicals are used in fracking fluid, including known carcinogens and toxins such as lead, uranium and mercury, among others. Groundwater pollution has already been documented as a result of the fracking activities, despite engineering safeguards, threatening

¹⁶ Ian Mason, "One World One Wealth: Economics, Justice and Rights of Nature", Third Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature, 22 April 2013.

dwindling fresh water supplies. (suggestion to delete para; may be sensitive? Marion)]

67. In recent years and in light of such pervasive activities, citizens have reached a new level of consciousness when confronted with the manner in which nature continues to be treated – and violated - despite the dire warnings by the scientific and medical communities regarding the health of both, planet and humans. Citizens are acknowledging that nature has its own rights to exist and thrive, just as humans do. People have begun to realize that nature’s limits are inviolable and human action has to be restrained accordingly. This relationship is both science- and ethics-based.

68. The United Nations Secretary-General in his statement delivered at the Dialogue stated: “When we threaten the planet, we undermine our only home – and our future survival. Fortunately, millions of people around the world recognize this problem. They are part of a growing movement for sustainable development. More and more governments are hearing their calls for action. Bolivia has adopted a legal framework that specifically protects Mother Earth. Ecuador’s Constitution recognizes the rights of nature. Many other communities around the world are translating their respect for the environment into measures that protect it.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Third Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly, 22 April 2013.

69. Linda Sheehan, Executive Director of the Earth Law Center (California), states that “the ethical qualities that create happy, prosperous homes – love, cooperation, friendship, duty – arise from and create strong relationships. We have discarded these ethics, however, in favor of an economic system premised on separation and greed. An essential element of this shift in perspective is realizing that relationships can flourish only if we recognize the inherent rights of their participants. Over time, we have learned that the denial of rights create separation. As we came over time to acknowledge the rights of people who were formerly treated as property, we began to have full, thriving relationships with them. These lessons also extend to the natural world. We are first and foremost Earth citizens and must recognize the rights of ecosystems and species to exist and thrive, if we are to flourish ourselves”.¹⁸

70. She further recalls that when the United Nations was drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the drafting committee observed that “the supreme value of the human person...did not originate in the decision of a worldly power, but rather in the fact of existing.” So too must

¹⁸ Ibid.

we recognize the supreme value and rights of the natural world as arising from the fact of existing.¹⁹

71. In other parts of the world sub-national including municipal laws have been passed that recognize the rights of local natural systems to exist, thrive and evolve. Significantly, these laws also reject the rights of corporations who would conduct unwanted harmful activities, over the rights of local community members to live in harmony with each other and their environment. These laws support a community's rights to nurture its home, rather than witness its destruction.²⁰ For example, New Zealand recognized the rights of the Whanganui River and its tributaries last summer.²¹

72. For a new economic system to be sustainable, it is essential that it truly sustains nature. Sustainability in this context involves the recognition of the limits of nature, the rights of nature and the necessity for humankind of adhering to them. A new economic system can no longer treat Nature as the continued supply of raw materials for industrial production, the ongoing flow of ever more commodities, and the indefinite accumulation of capital.²² Limits are not unidirectional. They work reciprocally between nature and society. Recognition of the limits of nature implies limits on society, and

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ <http://www.celdf.org/section.php?id=39>

²¹ Linda Sheehan, "Caring for Home through Nature's Rights", Third Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature, 22 April 2013.

²² Ibid.

notions that no limits are necessary in society imply a breakdown of limits in nature.²³

73. Fander Falconí, National Secretary of Development Planning (Ecuador), advances that recognizing Nature in our economic and social processes would translate into two fundamental aspects. The first would be to acknowledge the effects that thermodynamics have in our human economic activity, effects that have been thoroughly studied by ecological economists. Scholars in this field believe that it is necessary to place biophysical limits to the irrational aspects of economic growth – which are unsustainable from the perspective of science - and instead visualize an economic system that operates with thermodynamics logic. The key aspect in this approach resides in establishing limits to human economic growth to acknowledge the rights and limits of Nature.²⁴

74 The second aspect is to take into account social and individual behavioral patterns, particularly those found in the South, given their very specific wealth, points of social fragility and rich cultural heritage. In this context, he referred to the Constitution of Ecuador as being the first one in the world in granting rights to Nature and implementing them through a

²³ Vandana Shiva, “Resources”, the Development Dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power, ed. (2012).

²⁴ Fander Falconí, “La Naturaleza como titular de derechos constitucionales en el Ecuador y su posibilidad de ejercicio en el marco de la responsabilidad compartida”, Third Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature, 22 April 2013.

National Plan for Well-Being, which already contains a set of indicators, such as the ecological footprint, to monitor consumption levels across the population.²⁵

75. Jon Rosales, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies at St. Lawrence University (New York), further explains that the economy's proper relationship with nature is one of Nature as parent and economy as sub-system and as such science has already identified Nature's limits, stating that economic activity must remain safe within those limits. The foundation of this relationship is best reflected in subsistence indigenous cultures that live in true harmony with nature, respecting ecological thresholds and living under a "home economics" system embedded in the land. Sharing is particularly important to many subsistence cultures, which is the reason why such cultures are often called the "moral economy." Indigenous cultures long ago acknowledged the rights of Mother Nature, her nurturing abundance, her structural integrity, and her limits.²⁶

76. On the occasion of the 128th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Quito, members of parliament came together for a discussion on the theme "From unrelenting growth to purposeful development" "Buen

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Jon Rosales, "Where We Meet Nature: Two Options for the Development Agenda", Third Interactive Dialogue of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature, 22 April 2013.

Vivir: New Approaches, New Solution”. The Quito Communique adopted by the Assembly on 27 March 2013, stated that “in a finite world, the perennial cycle of increasing consumption and production that is at the heart of the current economic model is no longer sustainable. Growth alone is not the answer to the social, economic and environmental challenges of our time; in fact is becoming part of the problem. A different approach that focuses on well-being in all its dimensions is required if we are to evolve as a global community able to fulfil core human values of peace, solidarity and harmony with nature.”

77. Lin Harmon, Dean of Environmental Law at Pace University School of Law (New York) recalls that the 1982 World Charter for Nature (GA resolution 37/7), in its principle 1, states that “Nature shall be respected and its essential processes shall not be impaired” and in Principle 14 “the principle of the World Charter for Nature shall be reflected in the laws and practice of each State – as well as at the international level.” “However, it is clear that the world community is still not abiding by the non-impairment principle. Laws and the current level of law enforcement are not sufficient to keep global temperatures from climbing and to keep ecosystems and species from collapsing.”

78. Environmental lawyers and scholars see that along with the human right to a healthy environment, the rights of Nature must be examined and implemented more broadly to ensure our collective well-being - a step that some countries have started to nurture Nature as it nurtures us.

79. In February 2013, the documentary "Earth from Space", produced with extensive consultation with NASA scientists, showcased the information conveyed by the 120 earth-observing satellites staring down at us from space. The data taken from these satellites and transformed into visual sequences exposes the intricate and surprising web of forces that sustain life on Earth. From the microscopic world of water molecules vaporizing over the oceans to the magnetic field that is bigger than Earth itself, the data reveals the astonishing beauty and complexity of our changing planet.

80. Pier Sellers from the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center states "You see the world as one huge system, all linked through the atmosphere and the oceans, rolling its way around the sun". The satellite data shows that we live in one interconnected system, and that, in different parts of the world, different processes are happening - monsoons and their effects in one part of the world, desert storms in other parts.

81. Our success as a species has resulted in rapid population growth, and today our presence can be seen across 80 per cent of the world's landmass. We, as a species, are affecting the different natural cycles that govern our planet. Many factors play a part in the dramatic changes that are taking place around us, most notably in climate patterns, but most scientists agree that human activity is the main driving force.

VIII. Conclusion

82. **Today**, we find ourselves at **another critical juncture** trying to define a post-2015 UN development agenda. **It will be critical that this** agenda sustains Nature **rather than reducing** Nature **to a** resource to feed our economic system. “Resource” originally implied life. Its root is the Latin verb *surgere*, which evoked the image of a spring that continually rises from the ground. The concept thus highlighted nature’s power of self-regeneration and called attention to her prodigious creativity. Moreover, it implied a traditional idea about the relationship between humans and nature: that the earth bestows gifts on humans who, in turn, are well advised to show diligence in order not to suffocate her generosity. In early modern times, “resource” therefore suggested reciprocity along with regeneration.²⁷

²⁷ Vandana Shiva, “Resources”, *The Development Dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power*, ed. (2012).

83. With the advent of industrialism and colonialism, however, a conceptual break occurred. “Natural resources” became those parts of nature, which were required as inputs for industrial production and colonial trade. With the capacity of regeneration gone, the attitude of reciprocity has also lost its ground: we presume, falsely, that it is now simply human inventiveness and industry, which impart value to nature.

84. In the work leading to the post-2015 development agenda, Nature must be **reinstated** at the core of “sustainable development.” We must recover the ancient wisdom that had gently cautioned that economic wealth is ontologically not convertible into life, a truth captured graphically in the Native American saying that “Only when you have felled the last tree, caught the last fish and polluted the last river, will you realize that you can’t eat money.”

IX. Recommendations

85. Drawing on the foregoing analysis the interactive dialogues of the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature and the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development entitled, “The future we want”, Member States are encouraged to take into account the following recommendations:

(a) Further build up a knowledge network of well-respected practitioners, thinkers and academicians that work in the cutting edge of their fields of natural and social sciences, including physics, chemistry, biology, ecology, economics, sociology, law, ethics, anthropology, medicine and linguistics, to advance the holistic conceptualization of a new economic paradigm that reflects the principles, drivers, and values of Harmony with Nature, relying on current scientific information, particularly from centres of excellence on space which portray findings in a visual format;

(b) Encourage universities and research establishments to further advance contemporary understanding of economics, taking into account well-being of all of humanity and nature in accordance with both science and ethics;

(c) Recognize and guide care for nature and the fundamental interconnections between humanity and nature including, as appropriate to national circumstances, through the introduction of enforceable statutes and constitutional provisions in keeping with the Rio Principles and the outcome of the Rio + 20 Conference;

(d) Support and promote indigenous cultures that are already living in harmony with the Earth and learn from them, and provide support for and promote the efforts being made by nations down to local communities who are working to reflect the protection of nature in their laws and governance systems and implement those laws for the benefit of humans and the natural world;

(e) Promote in policymaking broader measures of economic, social and environmental progress, encourage and engage in the work of the United Nations Statistical Commission on broader measures of progress and follow-up on the results and recommendations from this work;²⁸

(f) Showcase further and support, through the United Nations Harmony with Nature website at www.harmonywithnatureun.org, the work being undertaken by member states, major groups and other stakeholders and the growing knowledge network on Harmony with Nature, in keeping with paragraph 40 of “The future we want,” to develop holistic and integrated approaches and actions that will guide humanity to live in Harmony with Nature and lead to efforts to restore the health and integrity of the Earth system.

²⁸ E/2013/24, Decision 44/114.

(g) Include in the provisional agenda of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly a sub-item entitled Harmony with Nature as an input to discussion on the post-2015 development agenda.