

Fidel Castro's speech at the Earth Summit, Rio, 1992

“An important biological species — humankind — is at risk of disappearing due to the rapid and progressive elimination of its natural habitat. We are becoming aware of this problem when it is almost too late to prevent it. It must be said that consumer societies are chiefly responsible for this appalling environmental destruction.

They were spawned by the former colonial metropolis. They are the offspring of imperial policies which, in turn, brought forth the backwardness and poverty that have become the scourge for the great majority of humankind.

With only 20% of the world's population, they consume two-thirds of all metals and three-fourths of the energy produced worldwide. They have poisoned the seas and the rivers. They have polluted the air. They have weakened and perforated the ozone layer. They have saturated the atmosphere with gases, altering climatic conditions with the catastrophic effects we are already beginning to suffer.

The forests are disappearing. The deserts are expanding. Billions of tons of fertile soil are washed every year into the sea. Numerous species are becoming extinct. Population pressures and poverty lead to desperate efforts to survive, even at the expense of nature. Third World countries, yesterday's colonies and today nations exploited and plundered by an unjust international economic order, cannot be blamed for all this.

The solution cannot be to prevent the development of those who need it the most. Because today, everything that contributes to underdevelopment and poverty is a flagrant rape of the environment.

As a result, tens of millions of men, women and children die every year in the Third World, more than in each of the two world wars.

Unequal trade, protectionism and the foreign debt assault the ecological balance and promote the destruction of the environment. If we want to save humanity from this self-destruction, wealth and available technologies must be distributed better throughout the planet. Less luxury and less waste in a few countries would mean less poverty and hunger in much of the world.

Stop transferring to the Third World lifestyles and consumer habits that ruin the environment. Make human life more rational. Adopt a just international economic order. Use science to achieve sustainable development without pollution. Pay the ecological debt. Eradicate hunger and not humanity.

Now that the supposed threat of communism has disappeared and there is no more pretext to wage cold wars or continue the arms race and military spending, what then is preventing these resources from going immediately to promote Third World development and fight the ecological destruction threatening the planet?

Enough of selfishness. Enough of schemes of domination. Enough of insensitivity, irresponsibility and deceit. Tomorrow will be too late to do what we should have done a long time ago.”