

## **Holy See's U.N. Address on Human Ecology**

"Too Little Effort Has Been Made to Safeguard Moral Conditions"

NEW YORK, MAY 15, 2006 ([Zenit.org](http://Zenit.org)).- Here is the text of an address delivered by Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations, during a session of the U.N. Economic and Social Council's Commission on Sustainable Development. The address was given Thursday.

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Mr. Chairman,

Let me first of all congratulate you and the bureau, and commend you for the organization of the work of this year's CSD.

Recent progress in sustainable development reported in the commission's preparatory documentation is to be welcomed, but these are modest successes when placed beside a sobering global picture. Only the integration of environmental and developmental concerns into policy-making and a committed political follow-through will lead to the essential improvement in living standards for all, while assuring our world's environmental future.

In addition to the irrational destruction of the natural environment, there has been the more serious destruction of the human environment. Although people are rightly worried about preserving natural habitats, too little effort has been made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology. Such an ecology will place the human person at the center of environmental concerns, while simultaneously promoting an urgent sense of human responsibility for the earth, be it at the level of states, commerce or individuals. Happily, as the essential symbiosis of life on the planet becomes plain, there is already a growing acknowledgment that good environmental policies are by extension good people policies too.

One such area is that of water. Within 20 years the reserves of water per person will be a third of what they were in 1950 and, by 2025, a third of the world's nations will have catastrophically low levels of water. Even today, 34,000 people die every day for lack of clean water: One and a half billion people do not have access to clean water, a figure which could rise to 3 billion by 2025. This is already a humanitarian and environmental crisis, as well as a question of social justice.

Encouraging change in consumption patterns and in increasing access to water supply and sanitation is also a matter of developmental common sense, since both yield very high rates of return, making them extremely attractive from a social investment standpoint. For this reason, my delegation is pleased to salute the Ministerial Declaration of the Fourth World Water Forum in Mexico City which

reaffirmed the critical importance of water in all aspects of sustainable development.

Related to this is another essential question, that of food security. From sub-Saharan Africa to the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States], there has actually been an increase in numbers of hungry people in the last three years although, in world terms, the general picture appears to have improved. There can be little doubt that changing climactic conditions have had an impact here. We can no longer pretend that human activity has little or no impact on these matters.

Energy is central to achieving sustainable development goals. With more than 1.6 billion people still lacking access to electricity worldwide and 2.4 billion using traditional biomass, improving access to reliable, affordable and environmentally-friendly energy services is a major challenge to poverty eradication and the achievement of the MDGs [Millennium Development Goals].

There is also an urgent need to transform global energy systems, as current approaches are causing serious harm to human health, the earth's climate and ecological systems on which all life depends, and because access to clean, reliable energy services is a vital prerequisite for alleviating poverty.

While the absolute amount of worldwide renewable energy use has been rising significantly, the overall share of renewables in the world's total primary energy supply has increased only marginally over the past three decades. Some renewable energy technologies are already mature and economically competitive, but the development of renewables continues to be a human, ecological, economic and strategic necessity and should have a priority in public research projects. For example, in heating, lighting and eventually transport, solar photovoltaics appear to offer almost unlimited sustainable potential. Research in this and other fields should be vigorously pursued.

The transportation sector is rightly found in all of the focal themes of the 14th and 15th sessions of the commission, as it accounts for a large proportion of worldwide energy demand, is a major source of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and is an important element of industrial development.

The continued market penetration of various innovations needs to be encouraged through appropriate economic incentives and ongoing research, development and deployment. Reliance in industry, transport, commerce and defense upon traditional combustion engines is already a century old. For several reasons, their replacement with clean, renewable alternatives is long overdue.

The earth's climate system has demonstrably changed on both global and regional scales since the pre-industrial era. Agenda 21 recognizes the legitimate priority needs of developing countries for the achievement of sustained economic

growth and the eradication of poverty, but this clearly cannot be achieved at any price. Even if greenhouse gas emissions were to be stabilized at present levels -- an unlikely eventuality as things stand -- the global warming trend and sea-level rise would continue for hundreds of years, due to the atmospheric lifetime of some greenhouse gases and the long time-scales on which the deep ocean adjusts to climate change.

In such circumstances, moves to turn the United Nations Environment Program into a more robust United Nations Environment Organization appear both prudent and welcome, in order to achieve a truly integrated approach to sustainable development in which both halves of that term are given their due weight.

Mr. Chairman, the dovetailing of environmental and developmental concerns with commercial and industrial policy-making will surely lead to a safer, more prosperous future for all. No nation can achieve this alone, but member states working together can and must do so, if sustainable patterns in these fields, essential to our common future, are to be assured.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

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