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The Hague Address: Forces for Sustainability
March 14, 2007

J. Gabriel López, PhD

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FORCES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for inviting me to address the opening session of this important conference on Peace and Sustainability.

My thanks also to the organizers for your efforts in making conceptual and practical links among these vital fields that have often operated on parallel tracks.

Today, who can doubt that peace, security, sound environmental management and sustainability are all inextricably linked?

The emphasis at this meeting should be on defining *practical* ways to mainstream these linked issues in the policies and practices of governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector.

Humanity faces unprecedented challenges today as environmental resources are rapidly degraded by unsustainable production and consumption, as the impacts of climate change accelerate, as social inequalities expand and as the intergovernmental system appears unable to adequately address these core challenges.

These trends, in turn, dramatically heighten socio-political tension and insecurity, creating a potentially downward spiral of decline and degradation; a process that disproportionately affects the poor and marginalized.

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But natural resource-based conflicts do not only occur when there is competition for scarce resources, but also where there is competition for abundant resources, especially hydrocarbons and minerals: the so-called **natural resource curse**.

Security issues where natural resource and environmental factors play key roles are the stuff of daily news reports: from Darfur; to the diamond-fueled conflicts in Sierra Leone and Angola; to oil in fueling and sustaining separatist conflicts in the Niger Delta and Aceh Province.

Though each particular crisis or conflict has its own unique dynamic based on local politics, economics and history, strong patterns are clear.

The corrupting influence of point source revenues – whether from natural resources, drugs, or weapons is one of the most powerful causes of conflict, underdevelopment and failing economies.

The World Bank estimates that over the last 40 years, developing countries without major natural resources have grown 2 to 3 times faster than those with high natural resource endowments.

Twelve out of the world's 20 most mineral-dependent states are classified as highly indebted countries and five of them have experienced civil wars since the early 1990s.

This is easy to explain, as geopolitical competition for fossil fuels and mineral resources has become the main source of tension and conflict in today's world.

Moreover, by empowering autocratic rulers against their people, this market demand creates the conditions for corruption, organized crime and violent internal crisis that destabilize governments and finance conflict.

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Indeed, as the world moves toward a tipping point, the linkage between natural resource competition and conflict is increasingly apparent.

With the demand for resources continuing to increase, combined with greater environmental degradation and increasingly disruptive climatic change, a **key question is whether this downward spiral is inevitable, or can political will and appropriate governance systems emerge to equitably address these challenges?**

The outlook is uncertain, for a number of key elements remain unclear:

What are the new tools, institutional and governance arrangements, and policy options needed to address these issues?

And where will the leadership come from?

Despite a few high profile exceptions such as the action to control trade in “conflict diamonds,” there has been a lack of concerted international effort to address the natural resource and environmental roots of instability. In a world of rising scarcity and competition, a reactive approach will not work.

Moreover, despite conceptual advances in identifying competition for key resources and climate change as main drivers of political stress and conflict; **the impact on practical action has been weak. Again, I urge us to identify paths toward an action agenda to address these pivotal challenges.**

We have a window of opportunity to accelerate the process of systemic reform and greater coherence in the coming years but a key question is: who will lead in this process?

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If effective systemic solutions are not soon constructed, the international community will face ongoing crises, and be relegated to patchwork measures (an increasingly costly combination of humanitarian and military intervention) with little chance of sustainable success.

Part of the problem is governance paralysis and fragmented fields.

There is a critical need to accelerate the process of systemic reform and intergovernmental coherence as soon as possible.

The post WW II intergovernmental architecture was designed to avoid another Great War. Today the challenges are of a different order (poverty, climate, health, security) and yet the system remains fragmented in disciplinary and professional fields with limited clarity on common goals and disjointed policies that often work at cross purposes.

To the extent that a common goal has emerged in the past 15 years, it is that of Sustainability.

That is, the holistic view that takes us towards what the *Earth Charter* refers to as '**a sustainable global society,**' which all agree cannot be achieved without with peace, human security, human rights and protection of the environment.

The challenge we face is making the various parts of the system work together toward this shared vision. And it is not just about governments taking action. Effectively responding to the challenges requires a concerted effort to engage non-state actors from business and civil society. These sectors must be effectively integrated into any global compact for creating a sustainable future.

Many institutions, including the World Conservation Union (IUCN), have addressed subsets of these sustainability issues. But narrow sectoral approaches cannot adequately address the magnitude of the challenges we now face.

All domains and sectors must become fully engaged in the creation of sustainable solutions. I invite the organizations represented at this conference to begin to forge a new global alliance for a sustainable future that bridges sectoral interests in a holistic approach to envision the strategy that will lead to a sustainable, just and equitable future for all.

In this context, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) seeks to contribute to the development of a detailed vision and strategic plan for achieving the shared goal of sustainability.

To that end, IUCN and key partners have launched **The Future of Sustainability Initiative...Shaping Sustainable Solutions**. This brings together leading thinkers, global institutions, members and new constituencies, to:

- (1) Coordinate an international consultative process to help rethink, articulate and disseminate meaningful new concepts, trends, alliances, practices, policies and metrics for advancing sustainability that are relevant to the global challenges of the 21st century.
- (2) Coordinate the development of a Challenge Paper that will be vetted and debated at the 2008 World Conservation Congress in Barcelona. This would be followed by a major text or film by 2010 (UN Year of Biodiversity) on the scale of *Caring for the Earth* or *The Earth Charter* addressing the new challenges of the 21st century.
- (3) Develop a comprehensive global public education, outreach and communications strategy to help reach out to broader audiences and new constituencies to accelerate progress towards sustainability.
- (4) Help build the global partnerships and alliances required to mobilize and revitalize the sustainable development movement.

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The biggest challenge to sustainability is systemic and lies both in devising and promoting an alternative development vision and strategy and in mobilizing broad political support for enacting the policy and governance changes required.

This means reaching beyond our narrowly defined fields and communities. It means reaching across to understand and link with complementary fields such as human rights, peace and security, education, health, development and finance, and others.

From our view, this implies recapturing and operationalizing the original concept of sustainability with the environmental component playing a fundamental role, rather than one of three equal pillars together with the social and economic.

Economic and social systems are built within ecological limits. When these limits are exceeded, crisis and conflict result.

A key element of this process will involve questioning the often unquestioned assumptions of the present political-economic model that emphasizes growth and expansion as principal objectives and that is based on metrics that continue to externalize social and environmental costs.

We must begin to develop an economic and social system that is shaped by the recognition that Earth's biosphere has limits.

The World Conservation Congress to be held in Barcelona, Spain, in October 2008 will be a key milestone in the development of the Future of Sustainability process. The Congress will bring together some 10,000 concerned global citizens to debate the key sustainability issues of our day and to begin to construct the broad Global Alliance for a Sustainable Future. I invite you all to join us in Barcelona.

Before I close, I'd like to remind us that **environmental issues offer useful opportunities for building peace.** For example, where cross-border environmental cooperation does take root, it may help enhance trust, establish cooperative habits, create shared identities around common resources, and establish mutually recognized rights and expectations.

Environmental peacemaking involves cooperative efforts, such as peace parks, shared river basin management plans and joint environmental monitoring programmes to manage resources as a way to transform insecurities and create cooperation among disputing parties.

In closing, I would like to leave you with a few simple messages:

1. The links between peace and security, human rights, the environment and sustainability have been conceptually established. The challenge now is to bring these communities together in practice.
2. In order to adequately address the magnitude of the challenges of the 21st century, governance structures must be formulated to include important roles for new actors, civil society and the private sector, not simply governments.
3. The Future of Sustainability Initiative provides an important vehicle to begin to address a number of these linked issues in a holistic manner.
4. And, to emphasize that environmental and resource management issues also provide an opportunity to foster dialogue and cooperation and can serve to reduce tensions between conflicting parties.

Thank you.