



Speech by M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic, on the occasion of the "Citizens of the Earth" conference for global ecological governance

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The planet is sick. The symptoms are its increasingly frequent extreme reactions – hurricanes, floods and droughts. Nature is sick. Species are dying out at an alarming rate. We have proof that human activity is causing these disorders. The day is fast approaching when runaway climate change will spin out of control. We have almost reached the historic point of no return.

As Professor Yves Coppens has shown, climate change made it possible for the human race to evolve from its cradle in Africa; and climate change, racing ahead, could now spell our demise. Civilizations die out, but they do not always die as a result of war. Overexploitation of natural resources decimated the Mayans, the Vikings in Greenland, the Polynesians on the Pitcairns and the Anasazi Indians. Each of these highly developed societies lived in total unawareness and denial until almost the very last moment. Each of them is emblematic of human vulnerability and of what could prove to be the fate of humankind.

For years now, in the European institutions, in the G8, in all the international fora, France has been battling – I have been battling – to draw attention to the environmental emergency at hand. From Rio to Kyoto and Johannesburg, the international community has not remained idle. It has acquired instruments, conventions and institutions. But we must substantially step up our efforts to create awareness and resolutely do much more. That is why I decided to convene this conference in Paris on global environmental governance. And that is why I am particularly happy that you have come today and I thank you warmly.

We human beings are justifiably proud of our intelligence and our technical prowess. But in mere centuries, we have burned up resources that took hundreds of millions of years to accumulate. We are destroying ecosystems that were home to a biodiversity that has now been forever lost, and in doing so we have deprived ourselves of that which is indispensable to our future. We know this full well. So what are we waiting for? Why are we not taking the steps that



need to be taken? Because in our reprehensible selfishness we refuse to face the facts; because we are unable to shake off outmoded mindsets and an economic structure inherited from the nineteenth century; because our international policy-making structure is ill-suited to the crucial issue of the twenty-first century, namely the environment.

Given the urgency, the time for half-measures has passed. The time has come to bring about a revolution in the real sense of the term – a revolution in our thinking and awareness; a revolution in our economy; a revolution in our policy initiatives.

We need a revolution in our thinking. Humankind must stop seeing itself only as the "master and owner of nature." That ambition, which previously was needed to enable the idea of progress to triumph, is now taking us to the brink of the abyss. We must move towards a new state – a state of responsible awareness: our intelligence must be devoted to protecting the planet. We must learn to cultivate a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, a new and necessary relationship.

Our responsibility towards the earth is inseparable from our responsibility to humanity. The environmental imperative opens an unprecedented chapter in human rights. We must assert and enforce a new fundamental right – the right to a sound and protected environment. That is the meaning of humanist environmentalism.

We need a revolution in our culture. We must educate everyone, especially the very young, in environmental issues. To ensure that we all become "Citizens of the Earth", let us adopt a Universal Declaration of Environmental Rights and Duties at the United Nations. The Declaration will be an expression of our common environmental ethics, which will underpin our public and individual endeavours. France was the first country to include a reference to an Environment Charter in its Constitution. I hope that that initiative can serve as inspiration within the United Nations and that all States will include environmental concerns in their basic laws.

The revolution in our thinking will make a revolution in our economy possible. In a world in which over 800 million men, women and children are hungry, the response to the environmental challenge cannot be "zero growth". Peoples have a legitimate aspiration to a better life. That aspiration must guide our policies. But the planet will not be able to sustain for much longer our growth model. To solve this dilemma, we must invent a different kind of growth.

A new industrial revolution lies ahead – the sustainable development revolution. It will require a radical transformation in our production and consumption patterns and stewardship of natural resources and environments. It will mean cutting pollution; including environmental quality in calculating GDP; and pricing natural resources fairly. Companies must take on board their environmental responsibilities. And we must promote technological breakthroughs – develop energies that emit no greenhouse gases, using solar energy for



heating and power generation and bioenergy for heat and fuel. We must boost energy savings with buildings that generate rather than consume energy, and with clean cars and lorries. We must make progress on capturing and storing CO₂ in power generation and in cement and steel production.

This new era holds out the promise of a better life for all. The most innovative and environmentally protective economies will be the most powerful economies. To achieve that, however, we need clear and fair competition rules. Either the international community knuckles down, or there will be an "environmental war".

The burden must be fairly shared. The countries of the North were the first to build their wealth on the massive exploitation of natural resources. They must shoulder their share of responsibility by complying, within a concerted framework, with production rules and environmental standards. These are the focus of the negotiations on combating global warming within the framework of the United Nations Convention, which are to be completed before 2009 and which cover the post-Kyoto Protocol period. At the instigation of France and the United Kingdom, and with the wholehearted encouragement of the Commission, the European Union is showing the way by committing to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by a factor of four between now and 2050.

The emerging countries have many assets. They have a rich natural heritage. They must be encouraged to protect it and to gauge their new responsibilities. This is another goal of the Kyoto follow-up. The availability of "green" technologies will enable them to move more quickly than the older industrialized countries into a sustainable development economy.

As for the poor countries, we must help them to develop while respecting the environment and to protect themselves from the catastrophic consequences of global warming, to which they have in no way contributed. This applies to the islands threatened by the rise in sea levels and to countries such as those of the Sahel, which will be hit by droughts of unimaginable severity.

Let us combine the fight against poverty and the ecological revolution by rethinking the concept of a common human heritage. Innovative financing, such as an international carbon tax, would make it possible to give developing countries which commit to protecting the ecological treasures in their custody such as primary forests the means to do so; and would also enable them to gain immediate access to clean technologies. The successful solidarity levy on airline tickets to help fight pandemics gives us the example to follow and is allowing us to trial what has to be done.

The revolution in our thinking will remain a dead letter and the economic revolution hamstrung unless there is a simultaneous revolution in our policy-making. This revolution is already under way. Thanks to voluntary organizations, thanks to the participation of civil society, thanks to the growing mobilization of elected representatives, the environmental imperative is increasingly shaping local and national policies. But this struggle must be



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waged at a global level. The environmental crisis recognizes no borders. Yet we still, all too often, fail to act together.

We must build world environmental governance. In this area as in others, unilateralism leads nowhere. Just as multilateralism is the prerequisite for peace, it is the key to sustainable development. The United Nations Environment Programme is outstanding, and I want to pay tribute to it. But it does not have adequate powers or institutional clout. We must aim to transform it into a fully-fledged United Nations agency. This UNEO will act as the world's ecological conscience. It will carry out impartial and scientific assessment of environmental dangers. It will have policy-making terms of reference giving it the legitimacy to implement action jointly decided. It will lend greater weight and greater cohesion to our collective endeavours.

The goal of this conference is to mobilize all our citizens and all sections of our societies and to set up a group of pioneer countries prepared to support the United Nations Environment Organization project and to win over those who are still hesitant to join us.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends,

All of you here – representatives of States and international organizations, eminent scientists, heads of NGOs, business leaders, and committed citizens are spearheading a global environmental movement. In your discussions and your work, you will be helping to mobilize international officials and international public opinion, a task that is more urgent now than ever before. To each and every one of you I wish to express my heartfelt esteem, respect and, above all, my gratitude. Thank you./.

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