

Earth Dialogues



Dialogues pour la Terre

The Earth Dialogues Geneva Declaration on Action for a Peaceful and Sustainable World (Geneva 3rd September 2013)

We, the participants of the Earth Dialogues 2013 have assembled in Geneva, the cradle of modern multilateralism, to mark the 20th Anniversary of Green Cross International under the leadership of President Mikhail Gorbachev. We are deeply concerned by the failure of the world community to act decisively to avert the mounting risks of ecological, environmental and climatic disaster. We conclude that innovative thinking, renewed engagement and enhanced cooperation are needed to break the deadlock of entrenched but inadequate ideas, political stagnation and international fragmentation and the re-emergence of militarisation in thinking and action. We are decided to work together to achieve the aims and actions set out in this Geneva Declaration.

Economic growth has generated enormous progress for hundreds of millions of people across the world who enjoy a standard of living unprecedented in human history. However, this undoubted progress has been achieved at a high cost in terms of environmental degradation and millions remain mired in poverty and deprivation, excluded from the benefits and opportunities of the modern world. We are today over-exploiting the resources of our planet and degrading the terrestrial and ocean ecosystems, which are the life-support systems of humanity.

The impacts of human activities are now on such a scale as to affect the behaviour of the ecological and the physical systems of the planet. To continue on the present business-as-usual path of consumer-driven, resource and energy intensive growth will very likely lead to disaster. The present unsustainable patterns of consumption and production must change. We must develop and implement more responsible strategies for growth and development.

Confronting the challenges of the 21st Century

The world community is confronted today by an array of unprecedented risks and connected, systemic challenges which will determine the prospects for progress and peace. We need new models, new patterns of cooperation and governance and carefully-considered, coherent strategies which integrate the economic, social, environmental and security facets of policy if we are to understand and manage the behaviour of the complex systems of the modern world.

- Rising inequality and unemployment, marginalisation of the poor, growing military expenditure and dangerous instabilities and vulnerabilities in the world economic and financial systems together demonstrate that our present model of economic growth is failing.
- Looking ahead, the rising demands of an increasing world population, of between 9 and 10 billion people by 2050, and of a growing middle class will exacerbate the overuse and destruction of vital resources and will intensify competition and the risks of conflict.
- A high-level Task Force on “The Urgent Realities of Climate Change” convened by President Gorbachev has reported that, in spite of 20 years of negotiations, climate change emissions have now risen to dangerous levels, with a growing risk of destabilising the global climate.

World leaders must face these realities and move beyond short-term, economic concerns to agree on concerted action for the transformational changes needed to achieve a more inclusive, just and sustainable path of growth and world development.

Realising the opportunities of a world in transformation

On the positive side, practical examples across the world - at the level of nations, states, cities and enterprises - demonstrate that there are exciting opportunities to build the resource-efficient, low-carbon, fair and inclusive economies and societies of the future. And, they show that the initial costs of transformation are small in relation to the longer-term benefits of moving towards sustainability.

As the long-entrenched belief in the efficiency of economic markets has weakened, there is now an opportunity to advance new ideas and to restore a judicious balance between the dynamism of the market and an active role of government as custodian of the common interest.

We have the scientific expertise and experience to act. Resources of all kinds – knowledge, creativity, technology, organisation and finance – could be made available if high enough priority is given to generating employment, eradicating poverty, and preserving a viable environment and a stable climate.

Revitalising Multilateral Cooperation and Action

A Green Cross review² of 20 years of efforts to move towards sustainable development shows a weakening of cooperation between the first Rio Earth Summit in 1992 – characterized by wide, high-level participation, real commitment and hope for the future – and the 2012 Rio Conference on Sustainable Development. The fundamental issue we face is that we do perceive the challenges to our survival and we do have the capabilities to resolve them but we are failing to act, perhaps because we are trying to resolve the issues of the 21st Century with the ideas and institutions of the 20th.

- Leaders should define a hopeful vision of a better world which can stimulate enthusiasm throughout society to build a better world. They should resist the efforts of vested interests to confuse and obstruct public awareness of the need for change and they should build wide support for the necessary action.
- At a time of transformation in the structure of power across the world and of intensifying environmental, economic and political stresses, the framework of multilateral cooperation must be revitalized to achieve concerted action in the face of common threats, to strengthen the global partnership for development and to avert threats to peace such as now in Syria.
- This will require an upgraded approach to multilateralism which must extend cooperation beyond governments to integrate all the stakeholders in the modern international system – to fully engage civil society and the private sector and to enhance partnerships and incentives for investment and the rapid dissemination of environmental technologies to accelerate the movement towards sustainability. Civil society groups focused on poverty, sustainability and on peace and security should consolidate their activities to maximise their impacts.
- The framework of international law must be strengthened and legally-binding agreements rapidly engaged, especially for climate change mitigation and adaptation and for effective supervision and regulation to stabilize the international financial system.

- Much can be improved through the efforts of individuals and at the local level. But this incremental change will not be sufficient. Transformational changes are needed and for these, statesmanship, solidarity, cooperation and effective governance are essential.

The issues we face are now of such a scale and intensity that those nations which recognise the seriousness and urgency of the existential threats to the future of humanity must move ahead in the common interest, leaving aside those who do not.

Building a peaceful and sustainable world

We call on governments, civil society, businesses and trade unions to recognise the scale, the urgency and the connectedness of the intensifying economic, social, environmental, political and security issues which threaten the prospects of present and future generations.

We propose the following lines of action:

- A growth model based on “economics and finance first” with people and nature considered as of secondary importance is a bankrupt strategy in the modern world. We therefore call on governments, academia and civil society to move beyond GDP as the primary measure of real progress and to work urgently towards a new approach to achieve balanced, qualitative growth, development and globalisation – with sustainable human progress at its heart.
- We underline the need to adapt national policies and budgets to take full account of the social and employment facets of policy and of natural capital and resource depletion, pollution and carbon emissions.
- We call on government, business and civil society to question the centrality of material consumption as a value in our societies: the stimulation of consumption should not be the principal driver of growth. Economic growth and finance should be seen not as ends in themselves but as instrumental to build the real economy and create jobs and thus to achieve the higher goals of society.
- There is no alternative to reining in the excessive resource use of the rich and to adopting new strategies to meet the needs and aspirations of the underprivileged within the boundaries of a fragile planet.
- We call on governments and international organisations and the corporate sector to press ahead with the structural changes in economic and energy systems and with the adaptation of incentive structures and regulations which are needed to drastically reduce resource consumption and the related pollution and waste and to cut emissions to a level which will avert the increasing risk of catastrophic climate change.
- The time has come to decouple the exploitation of resources and pollution from industrial output by radical improvements in resource efficiency, by the encouragement of a “circular” economy and through business models and fiscal and social policies and incentives which favour employment and environmental responsibility.
- We call for the strengthening of basic and applied research and of education to develop and disseminate the breakthrough solutions which will be essential to master global challenges. And we call also for explicit measures to ensure that the insights and evidence established by independent scientific research on emerging global issues are properly considered in the formulation of policy.
- We call on all countries to enhance their efforts to overcome the present blockages, failures and delays in multilateral cooperation by formulating new patterns of collaboration and new alliances of the willing so as revitalize the international system to meet the intensifying challenges of the 21st century. This will include verifiable, action-oriented, sustainable-development goals to achieve the post-2015 global development agenda.

Finally, we call on leaders throughout the world to act urgently on three existential threats to the future of humanity:

- to avert the risk of irreversible climate disruption.
- to reverse the destruction of critical ocean and terrestrial ecosystems.
- to achieve full nuclear disarmament.

These actions are essential if we are to preserve the opportunity to build together a world of progress, justice and peace.

References

1. The Climate Change Task Force. (June 13, 2012). *Action to Face the Urgent Realities of Climate Change* (Statement by the Climate Change Task Force). Presented June 18, 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
2. Green Cross International. (2013). *Action for a Peaceful and Sustainable World* (2013 Earth Dialogues in Geneva). Presented September 3, 2013, Geneva, Switzerland.

Green Cross International

Green Cross International was established in 1993 by Mikhail Gorbachev following the 1992 Earth Summit, as a “Red Cross for the Environment” to promote a just, sustainable and secure future for all. To mark its 20th Anniversary, Green Cross convened in Geneva on 3rd September the “2013 Earth Dialogues – Pathways into the Future: Triggers of Change”. This event brought together international scientific and expert participants from governments, international organisations, civil society, business and education in search of solutions to the challenges of poverty, environmental degradation and security, and to promote a more sustainable way of living.

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