

Acceptance Speech
Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation's Award Ceremony
David Suzuki

Thank you so much for this great honour. I am humbled because I know there are so many great warriors like his Serene Highness fighting to protect our species and our environment.

It took a lot of people and effort to bring out my books and radio and television programs but I get all of the credit. My family especially, had to endure long absences, even when I was at home locked in my office and I am so grateful for their support. I accept this award on behalf of all those who have made it possible for me to spread the message.

Today we face a crisis that is far beyond economic meltdowns or political revolutions, our survival as a species is at stake as we undermine our very life support systems – the air, water, soil, energy and biodiversity - that keep us alive and healthy.

Born a mere 150,000 years ago on the plains of Africa we were not very impressive because our great evolutionary advantage was hidden – the human brain. That brain invented a concept called the **future** so that we could look ahead and see where dangers and opportunities lay and thus choose to avoid hazards and exploit opportunities. **Foresight** gave us a huge advantage.

And now suddenly, we have become an unprecedented force in number, technology and consumption and we are driven by an economic system that demands constant growth forever. But in pursuing the impossible dream of endless growth, we fail to ask the critical questions:

- what is an economy for?
- are there no limits in a finite world?
- how much is enough?
- are we happier with all this stuff?

Collectively, we are altering the physical, chemical and biological properties of the planet on a geological scale. The Nobel prizewinner, Paul Crutzen, has defined this as the **Anthropocene epoch**, the age of humanity as a geological force. Yet we also have the increased ability to look ahead – leading scientists armed with supercomputers have been warning us for decades that we are heading along a very dangerous path and we must change direction. But now we turn our backs on this foresight.

Why are we unable to confront the real environmental dangers like climate change that threaten us? I agree with the late German economist and politician, Hermann Scheer, that the barriers to sustainability are not technological, economic or political; they are **psychological** because the way we see the world, shapes the way we treat that world.

Until very recently, human beings knew we were deeply embedded in and utterly dependent on nature for our survival and well being. A hundred years ago, most people lived in rural villages. We were a **farming species**. And farmers know very well that we depend on nature for our survival and well being. Even today, aboriginal people still speak of Earth as our Mother who creates us with Earth, Air, Fire and Water. But to most of us now that seems like a quaint, almost superstitious way of seeing the world because we have become big city dwellers where our highest priority is our **jobs**. We need a job

to make money to buy the things we want and thus, the **economy** becomes our greatest concern.

The word economy comes from the Greek word, *oikos*, meaning household or domain. Ecology is the “study” of home while economics is its “management”. Ecologists study the conditions, principles and laws that govern a species’ ability to survive and flourish, so you would think any government, corporation or group about to begin a new program, would first ask “What were those conditions and principles of sustainability? We don’t want to violate them.” But they don’t.

We live in a world governed by laws and principles of physics, chemistry and biology. Other things like borders we draw around our countries, provinces, cities and property and notions like capitalism, economics, corporations, markets, currency, are not forces of nature, we invented them. We can’t change laws of nature, but those things we can change are concepts we create and develop.

Two years ago, 192 nations met in Copenhagen to discuss the fate of the atmosphere that sustains all life on the planet and belongs to no one. Delegates negotiated the fate of the atmosphere through the lenses of 192 national boundaries and 192 different economic priorities and tried to force the atmosphere to conform to them. These negotiations are bound to fail because they place human agendas above the very things that sustain all life on Earth.

The human story has been an astonishing one. A naked ape emerging from nature and exploding across the planet. An infant species with the precocity to explore the underlying structures of the cosmos that enable us to live and to exploit our knowledge in powerful ways. But like a child without the maturity to be careful with the force of fire, we have burned ourselves and now the house is on fire. Can we demonstrate our maturity as a species and rediscover our home, not as a source of endless resources and opportunity, but as a **sacred place**, the source and sustenance of all life, a place of beauty and magic and wonder, the only place we know in the universe that nurtures and sustains life. That is the challenge of our time.

Thank you.