

## **Chirac Foundation Launch, 9 June 2008**

### **Speech from Dr R K Pachauri**

It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to be part of the Board of the Foundation set up by one of the greatest statesmen of our time, President Jacques Chirac. The purpose and philosophy of the Foundation demonstrate how President Chirac, through his rich experience as a world leader and his unique set of human values, identifies with the main challenges facing the world today and the interconnections between them.

In an increasingly globalized world, dominated by growing disparities of wealth and income, and an insatiable desire to produce and consume more and more, human society has to deal effectively with the importance of preserving cultural diversity, eradicating poverty, protecting the environment, and ensuring worldwide peace and security. Each of these challenges is daunting in itself, but to tackle them on an integrated basis requires unprecedented levels of international cooperation, superior intellect and vision as well as exemplary leadership across the globe. Action on any one of these issues will inevitably affect the others, and, continued neglect of any across or within nations could lead to conflict and strife on a larger scale than we have witnessed so far. At the same time, there are existing developments in the world which would increase the magnitude of each of these challenges, such as the growing threat of global climate change which would exacerbate existing stress levels arising out of increased scarcity of natural resources; increased malnourishment and hunger; greater spread of disease and threats to human health; increase in the numbers of the poor; and enhanced potential for conflict and disruption of peace.

Human society has flourished and advanced along the scale of what we measure as human progress only because we have been able to harness for our benefit the services that nature provides. However, in the process we have neglected preserving the very source from which we have derived these services, and have thus degraded and damaged the bounty of natural resources that our ancestors valued and even treated with religious importance and reverence. By not assigning a monetary or ethical value to the use of natural resources in recent human history, we have created conditions by which we not only impose risks on the very survival of a wide range of living species but also threaten the potential of further economic progress. The condition of diverse cultures, which evolved over several millennia in the past, was defined by the state of natural resources from which they obtained life-supporting services. Different people, living in

different geographical areas, learnt how to adapt to the conditions related to changes in the environment, thus giving birth to various traditions and cultures. Progress came to societies from learning how to use the environment and natural resources sustainably with deeply ingrained wisdom and respect. The belief of animism, which attributes souls to animals, plants, and natural phenomena, was argued by the British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871) to be the most basic and essential part of religion.

Today, we are coming to a crisis of civilization because we neglect the past, forgetting our ancient roots and philosophy, and because we do not look at the implications of our actions for the future for all living systems, pursuing short-term gains that lead to crises in the long-term. The uniformity of global culture spreading progressively, as President Chirac mentioned earlier, has allowed western countries to achieve a level of prosperity never experienced before. But that prosperity has come at a significant cost, most notable among which is the depletion of natural resources and extensive pollution of the air, soil, and water. This globalization of culture is progressively eclipsing ancient cultures, and the knowledge and traditions that have evolved over millennia ensuring conservation of nature and protection of the environment.

Some of these ancient cultures and traditions are still alive. Deep respect for nature is at the core of religions practiced in Africa and Asia. On these continents, indigenous and rural communities are directly dependent on the services provided by natural resources and the benefit of precise knowledge on, for instance, medicinal plants and agricultural practices, transmitted from generation to generation. Such interdependence between man and nature and traditional knowledge has continuously inspired among communities the inevitability of using natural resources with wisdom. Today, indigenous and rural communities and their resources are being exploited under the pressure of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. In my own country, India, it is estimated that all the indigenous populations may disappear by 2020 in pursuing the modern path of development.

Today, all over the world, countries aim at following one single path of development. People aspire to one single way of life. They are lured by one single culture. And this culture is based on over-consumerism and over-exploitation of natural resources. Gandhi was once asked if he expected India to attain the same standard of living as Britain. He replied, 'It took Britain half the resources of the planet to achieve this prosperity. How many planets will a country like India require?' As a matter of fact, the whole world will simply not be able to follow the example of the

20% of the world population who consume 80% of natural resources and contribute to an overwhelming share of global GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions.

Our emissions of GHGs have led to one of the most challenging and serious consequences of our path of civilization: the challenge of global climate change. The Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), which was completed in 2007, highlights the fact that warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising global average sea level. Without specific measures to address the issue, GHG emissions are projected to continue to rise at an alarming rate, and climate change is projected to severely compromise the ability of entire populations to satisfy their basic needs.

Water availability will be significantly affected by changes in precipitation patterns and increasing salinity of groundwater due to increases in sea level as well as decreasing river flows due to glaciers melting. A total of 120 million to 1.2 billion people could experience increased water stress in South and South East Asia as soon as the 2020s as a result of climate change. If coupled with increased demand, this will adversely affect livelihoods and exacerbate water-related problems.

Increases in the frequency of droughts and floods are projected to affect local crop production negatively, especially in subsistence sectors at low latitudes. It is projected that there could be a possible reduction in yields in agriculture of 50% by 2020 in some African countries. In Africa, crop net revenues could fall by as much as 90% by 2100, with small-scale farmers being the most affected. This would further adversely affect food security and exacerbate malnutrition.

Sea-level rise due to climate change will exacerbate inundation, erosion and other coastal hazards, threaten vital infrastructure, settlements and facilities, and thus compromise the socio-economic well being of coastal communities. Sea-level rise will seriously affect the aquaculture industry and infrastructure particularly in heavily populated mega-deltas and compromise the sheer existence of many small islands. The Maldives are already experiencing the plight of inundation caused by sea-level rise, forcing to regular evacuations.

Marginalized, primary resource-dependent livelihood groups are seen to be particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts and have lower capacities to adapt. In developing countries,

this vulnerability is exacerbated by existing stresses and developmental challenges, such as endemic poverty, limited access to infrastructure and technology, ecosystem degradation, disasters, conflicts, and incidence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS. The impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable communities could prove extremely unsettling and threaten world security. Climate change could translate into a large number of displaced people in response to water stress, famines, floods, and sea-level rise. And migration is a critical source of potential conflict. By jointly awarding the 2007 Peace Nobel Prize to the IPCC and former US Vice President Al Gore, the Norwegian Nobel Committee sent a strong signal on the now well-established link between the potential for disruption of peace and climate change.

Climate change will exacerbate existing environmental pressures caused by human development since the industrial revolution. Eroding soils, collapsing fisheries, falling water tables, and increasing demand for biofuels and food are converging to cause severe food shortages. Grain shortages are already leading to rising prices, thus making it life threatening for world's poor who spend most of their income on food. The headlines recently showed several food riots that turned into violence in countries such as Haiti, Bangladesh, Mozambique, and Egypt.

Increasing demand for food is leading to the destruction of tropical forests, due to widening practices of slash-and-burn and other methods of subsistence farming necessitated by famines. Deforestation, over-grazing, over-cultivation, and river dams are contributing to the desertification of land in many developing regions. Desertification has been recognized as a major threat to biodiversity, which worsens the plight of poor, resource-dependent communities. In Africa, if current trends of soil degradation continue, the continent might be able to feed just 25% of its population by 2025.

As far as water is concerned, to keep pace with the growing demand for irrigation, increasing amounts of freshwater will need to be withdrawn for agricultural purposes, leading to tensions and conflicts among users. Access to fresh water is bound to become a major cause of conflict in the years to come, as testified by the situation in several parts of the world, such as the conflict centred around the river Jordan in the Middle East. Moreover, the poor quality of water in many areas of the world is responsible for the spread of several diseases and for the death by diarrhoea of 1.6 million children under the age of five years each year.

Access to energy remains a crucial issue in developing countries. Approximately 1.6 billion people, or 27% of the world population, have no access to electricity. In consequence, more than 75% of households in Asia and Africa use traditional fuels such as wood, coal, or waste for their cooking needs. Burning of those fuels produces respiratory infections and at the same time leads to growing deforestation and desertification.

The Chirac Foundation focuses on the objectives of peace, cultural diversity, poverty eradication, and environmental protection because they are intrinsically interlinked and inadequately addressed by our current path of development. But herein lies a formidable opportunity to overcome the current crisis and build a sustainable future for humanity. Only the simultaneous pursuit of those cardinal objectives will lead to effective, sustainable solutions. Environmental protection must become the paradigm for a new source of revenue for local communities based on encouraging traditional knowledge and peaceful cooperation between people and nations. I believe the principle of inclusiveness is designed to be embedded in all the projects to be supported by the Chirac Foundation.

As President Chirac rightly underlined, technology development will not be enough to meet the environmental challenge. Meeting the challenge will require cultural changes. It will require another conception of development, a conception of development where diversity is encouraged and not replaced by uniformity, where long-term considerations are rewarded and not the mere pursuit of short-term goals, where inequalities are reduced and not widened. This is the only path to a peaceful and sustainable world for us and for generations to come. The Chirac Foundation, I am sure, will become an influential institution to lead the way in this direction.