

THE CHALLENGE OF PROTECTING THE BIO-ENVIRONMENT

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I feel especially privileged to be among this honourable gathering, where scholars, academicians, public figures, scientists, senior civil servants and diplomats have convened to discuss one of the most important and crucial issues facing modern civilisation: the protection, maintenance and cultivation of our bio-environment which will ensure the well-being, development and progress of mankind at present and in the future.

In the Ecclesiastes, Chapter 7, 28, it is written: "When the Holy One ... created the first man, He took him and warned him about all the trees of the Garden of Eden, saying: 'See My works, how beautiful and perfect they are, and all this I created for you. Beware, lest you spoil and destroy My world. For if you spoil it, there is no-one to repair it for you'."

Indeed, a heavy responsibility lies on the shoulders of all the citizens of the world, especially on the intellectual, scientific, political and international leadership, to ensure that the world we live in, and were privileged to be brought into, will be preserved to the best of our ability, for the sake of all its population, as well as for the generations to come.

It is in this light that I wholeheartedly congratulate the President of the Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.), Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, for her blessed initiative, her inexhaustible efforts, dedication and, beyond all, vision and determination in establishing and activating this remarkable organisation, and for her endeavours in stimulating so many influential, scholarly and professional personalities, some of whom are present here, to get involved in meeting the meaningful challenge ahead of us in this significant domain.

The subject with which we deal, the bio-environment, touches on essential and fundamental ingredients which are vital for our existence: the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the land we live on, and the natural treasures-forests, lakes and the seas - that not only provide us with ecological balance, but also protect and play host to birds and animals. And yet, despite this reality, the awareness necessary for the protection of all these elements is not strong enough among ordinary citizens, policy makers, public leaders, and the moulders of public opinion.

Sometimes, it seems as if the well-known impulses of self-destruction and short-sightedness, ignorance and greed, are motivating the human race in mishandling valuable treasures, riches and assets of the bio-environment. Instead of protecting the bio-environment, maintaining its beauty and safeguarding its components, damage is created by indifference, lack of understanding and brutality. There is also the misconception that oversensitivity towards the protection of the bio-environment may jeopardise technological and industrial development, modern urbanisation, and scientific accomplishments, thereby hindering the rise of the standard of living. Such misconceptions should be totally rejected.

The first prerequisite for safeguarding our bio-environment and its ingredients, is to ensure that scientists, architects, builders, mayors and ministers appreciate that the protection and maintenance of the bio-environment is basically not against economic and industrial development and construction. On the contrary, the quality of bios (life) depends, in the long run, on the state of the bio-environment and its components: the quality of the air we breathe, the purity of the water we drink, the state of the land we live on and the natural treasures that provide the human race with a source of relaxation, meditation and enjoyment, which are very important in this technological era.

Since the International Stockholm Conference on Human Environment held in 1973, various governments and the general public have become more aware of the crying need to protect the bio-environment. Some governments and parliaments, including those of my country, took practical measures to institutionalise protection of the bio-environment by introducing legislation on the issue and forming voluntary and semi-governmental organisations to meet the challenges involved.

However, these measures, which have been taken in some countries, are not enough. There is a pressing need to include concepts of bio-environmental protection as an integral part of the formal curricula into the educational systems at all levels of study. This will raise the awareness of citizens towards the present demolition of the bio-environment.

In addition to literature, history, religion, science, arts and natural studies, there is definitely a justified place in curricula for studying the problems of bios in general and the bio-environment in particular. It should be stressed that human behaviour on the land, in the forest, along the beaches and in the sea, has a direct impact upon the bio-environment.

The younger generation should be taught that polluting the bio-environment may lead to irreversible damage. Such efforts should be expressed

particularly by the mass media with vigorous, systematic and continuous programmes on television each aimed at a particular age group.

Enlightenment and education about the environment are bound to produce positive results. Furthermore, it is advisable to initiate voluntary organisations which will inspire understanding of and love for nature and help protect the environment. However, protection of the bio-environment should not be solely the responsibility of voluntary organisations. The problem has to be tackled not only by legislation, laws and by-laws of the central and municipal authorities, but also by a system of awards and penalties.

The following should all be implemented by legislation:

- The prevention of air-pollution by the inspection of public and private transportation and the location of heavy industries
- substitution of fossil fuel by solar energy and other non-polluting sources of energy
- prevention of marine pollution
- proper disposal of toxic substances
- prevention of soil erosion
- protection of the forests-recently these have become targets of arson in various countries, including Israel.

In order to achieve the vital balance between industrial, economic and urban development, in relation to protection of the bio-environment, there is a need for cooperation between representatives of all branches of society. They should be encouraged to provide the planning and execution of industrial and economic development neither hampering nor jeopardising bios and the bioenvironment.

While dealing with schemes for industrial and urban development, municipal and central governments should always reflect upon bio-environmental considerations. This has already occurred in Europe and the United States. In my country, a special Ministry of Environment has recently been established for initiating, coordinating and inspecting environmental protection and overseeing the activities of all other branches of the government.

It is in this context that the emergence and formation of parties and lists in some industrialised countries, which ran on a one-issue ticket of the protection of the environment, should be mentioned. Such parties were established as "environment lobbies" and manifest the genuine worry, sensitivity and care for the environment and the desire to exercise pressure in Parliament and on the governments, to preserve and maintain the bio-environment.

However, it must be stressed that it is desirable, possible and even essential, to involve the general public and all circles of society, disregarding political party and social affiliations in the struggle to protect bios. This is a challenge which does not exclude one segment or trend in society, but is a common denominator of all mankind.

Caring for and protecting the bio-environment calls not only for educational, national, legislative and political actions, but also for international cooperation. The world is shrinking and the protection of the earth, the seas, the air, are interdependent: one nation can be influenced by what is happening in its neighbouring countries. There is a growing realisation that research regarding the bio-environment and its protection should be shared by the international community, for the benefit of all nations. The wealthier industrial nations should not take advantage of the poorer in their efforts to ensure their own clean and healthy environmental conditions by causing the disposal of toxic substances and fuel transport, resulting in leaks of one billion gallons of oil daily.

An international effort should be made to avoid oil spills, the kind that was dramatised in Alaska recently, and might recur in the future. Obviously, international cooperation on environment should reflect the united endeavours of the whole world on this common issue, and be challenged among the rest by the United Nations through the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).

During the second meeting of UNEP in Nairobi, attended by representatives of 70 countries it was proposed that a high-level ecological security council be established by the United Nations and a centre will be built to provide emergency assistance during environmental catastrophes. It was also recommended to use satellites more often to monitor environmental developments and form a special committee of arbitration to settle international environmental disputes. It was also suggested that highly-industrialised countries will help Third World countries lacking means and finances, to carry out projects to protect their environment. One suggestion proposes that this assistance will be given by the developed countries at the expense of cuts in their military budgets.

All these developments show the growing and expanding awareness in the struggle for the protection of the environment. Efforts should be continued and intensified and become the common challenge for the totality of the human race.

Ancient Athens is known for its contribution to modern civilisation: democracy, oratory, theatre, aesthetics, and creative arts, were promoted in past times in this city, while at the same time, in my country, my forefathers simultaneously spread the concepts through prophets and the Bible, of monotheism, social justice and international peace.

I therefore feel especially privileged and honoured to be here in Athens, among you. It is natural that after the monumental contributions in

Athens in the past, Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis is presently making another contribution important for civilisation as a whole. But this time, there is a small difference (vive la petite difference). While during the ancient Athenian democracy, the voice of women was not heard, today, this movement of the Biopolitics International Organisation has been established and activated by a woman. This indicates the importance and weight of women in society in general and in Greece in particular. It proves that the 'gentle gender' has become really an equal part of our environment, working for the bios ideals and society.

Let us hope that this gathering, under the leadership of Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, will constitute yet another milestone in the continuous efforts for the protection of the world's environment. When safeguarded by creative action, this environment of ours will hopefully be filled with positive virtues, aspirations and by continuous endeavours promoting progress, prosperity and peace.

His Excellency, Ambassador **Moshe Gilboa**, the former Ambassador of Israel to Greece, was educated at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and served as director of information for the World Zionist Organization and led the Entebbe Fund. He has engaged in Israeli diplomatic missions in Atlanta and Chicago, and Tehran, and served as Israel's Ambassador to Zambia. He advised minister Shimon Peres on international affairs, directed the World Jewish Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem, the Israeli Foreign Ministry and in 1986, he was promoted to Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He has published articles and essays, mainly on international, Middle Eastern and Jewish affairs in Israel and in international periodicals, publications and newspapers, and was invited to lecture in various countries, communities and universities in the U.S.A., Europe, Canada, Africa, and Australia.