



BIOPOLITICS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION



Biopolicy – In Search of Enlightened Leadership for Sustainable Development

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Biopolicy for Sustainable Development

Global climate change, life-saving “greenbelts,” international environmental policy, new ethics, and a vision for enlightened leadership to ensure the continuation of bios on our planet, were some of the issues addressed at an event organised by the **Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.)** at the **Athens Hilton**, on Sunday, **January 21, 2007**. The event was attended by motivating and leading personalities who convened to spark our thinking on ways of facing the most important and urgent environmental challenges of our time. The event also marked the European premiere of The Greenbelt Reports, which document efforts to balance the conservation needs of coastal greenbelts with the socio-economic needs of communities in countries hard-hit by the 2004 tsunami. B.I.O. is cooperating closely with TVE Asia Pacific, the producers of The Greenbelt Reports, in an environmental education project in Sri Lanka, supported by the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Department of Hellenic Aid**.



The discussions were chaired by the B.I.O. President, **Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis**, who explained that the aim of this initiative is to promote **biopolicy** – a vision beyond sustainable development – to provide the necessary guidelines for every sector of society and every profession to engage in environmental appreciation and action.



“Time is running out, and bios (life) is threatened by a serious crisis in values. We need to inspire society with a vision of environmental cooperation and peace, and expand the horizons of environmental thinking by promoting environmental ethics in every human endeavour. Today, the world faces an unprecedented crisis of environmental degradation. The continuation of life on our planet is threatened by global warming, climate change, a declining resource base, the loss of species and habitats, inadequate water supplies, desertification – all these are global problems. They do not respect national boundaries and they are all related. Addressing them will require a new level of international cooperation. If we are to solve the problems of our world, nations must redirect their efforts away from conflict toward environmental restoration and the eradication of poverty, hunger and disease. This is the goal and vision of biopolicy.

Our common enemy is the destruction of bios, and we need to join forces to mount an adequate response to the environmental crisis. The Asian tsunami catastrophe showed us that we cannot keep overlooking the warning signs. International collaboration is key in securing the well-being and survival of future generations. Education through the International University for the Bio-Environment, public participation in the form of a World Referendum to save bios, awareness-raising and the involvement of every individual on the planet in the race to save the environment, are some of the initiatives launched by the Biopolitics International Organisation in the struggle to protect bios.

Humanity has been given a final opportunity to respect the close relationship that exists between its actions and the environment. In order to promote equity and improve quality of life, we need a vision that can help us to set an international agenda for correcting the inequities of the past. Protecting and managing the global environment rationally will be the most challenging task for the new millennium. Technology has become infused in every field of human endeavour. Like a new Prometheus with sensitivity and prophecy, it has provided light and fire and has made possible the advent of a new era. This ability must be tempered with a solid base of fundamental values in order to lead to a better future. The current crisis in values is a great threat, not only to the environment but also to peace. This is why there is a pressing need to apply the vision of biopolicy to motivate every member of society towards the conservation of the environment and the fulfilment of a better life for all.”



A special address was delivered on behalf of **Evrpidēs Stylianides**, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, by **Prodromos Markoulakis**, the Director of the Department of Hellenic Aid.

“It is a great pleasure for me to address this important event, organised by the Biopolitics International Organisation. Unfortunately, despite my keen personal interest, it was not possible for me to be present owing to prior commitments. I would like to congratulate the Biopolitics International Organisation, and especially its President, Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, on their commendable scientific and social work in the promotion of biopolicy for the protection and conservation of the environment and the quality of life of the citizens of our planet.

There is a continuous need for the development and implementation of environmental protection policies. Governments and civil society need to place the environment at the core of their activities. By realising that environmental threats do not recognise national borders, ethnic or other dividing lines, we need to empower and intensify international cooperation in environmental protection. We also need to develop networks of environmental education, accessible to every citizen on this planet.

Within this framework, the Hellenic Aid service of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs is cooperating with the Biopolitics International Organisation in the implementation of an educational project for the development and reconstruction of Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. The goal is to develop educational material for the better understanding of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, and to help the assimilation of sustainable development in government policies, as part of the greater project for the reconstruction of Sri Lanka launched by the national government. Greece was one of the first countries that provided humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka, and is continuing to do so through the construction of hospitals, schools and other basic infrastructure. The above-mentioned educational programme implemented by the Biopolitics International Organisation is carried out within the framework of this humanitarian assistance.

The environment is our neighbourhood. It is our home and affects us all. We must support and enhance all efforts for environmental protection, while, at the same time, raise public awareness of the importance of these issues. Public awareness and information concerning sustainable development, as well as environmental education and training, are valuable allies in the struggle for the protection of our planet. Once again, I congratulate you on the organisation of today's event and wish you every success in the pursuit of your mission.”

The discussions continued with a message from **Nalaka Gunawardene**, Director and CEO of TVE Asia Pacific, the producer of The Greenbelt Reports.



“Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis and I are part of a select group of environmental educators and communicators from all over the world who meet once a year in Rome at the Greenaccord International Forum on the Protection of Nature. At the last Greenaccord Forum, held in October 2006, I made a presentation about the new television series we were then finalising, called *The Greenbelt Reports*. And I was especially delighted when the Biopolitics International Organisation offered to organise the European launch of the new series. In doing so, Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis and her colleagues recognised that the conservation messages we are trying to communicate are relevant not just to the Asia Pacific region, but also to Europe and the rest of the world.

The Greenbelt Reports is a multi-media, Asia-wide educational project launched in 2005 by my organisation, TVE Asia Pacific. The project aims to journalistically document our region’s efforts to balance conservation needs of coastal ecosystems with the socio-economic needs of coastal communities. Shortly after the tsunami disaster of 2004, we heard reports from almost all tsunami-affected countries of how coral reefs, mangroves or sand dunes had helped protect some villages and communities. It turned out that these ecosystems had acted as “natural barriers” buffering the impact of the Tsunami waves, saving many lives and reducing property damage. The socio-economic reality in developing countries in Asia is such that we cannot fence and guard all the remaining coastal greenbelts, declaring them as protected areas. Tens of millions of people, many of them very poor, depend on these ecosystems for their jobs and sustenance.

As journalists, we investigated if this is feasible. We looked for evidence of where this is already happening, even on a small scale. Based on what we found, we are pleased to report some good news: “there is hope yet for saving our region’s remaining coastal greenbelts.” It is a big challenge, but the knowledge, skill and enthusiasm for rising to that challenge are now available. The discussions today, and our action everyday, can help create a sustainable future for all of us.”



In the implementation of a project on environmental education to assist the tsunami victims of coastal Sri Lanka, B.I.O. is cooperating with the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) Sri Lanka. In her presentation at the event, **Thyagee De Zoysa**, Project Officer at CEE Sri Lanka, mentioned that:

“I arrived in Athens two days ago to discuss the joint initiative that the Center for Environmental Education (CEE) Sri Lanka is going to take up with the Biopolitics International Organisation, which, as we understand, aims to reverse destructive trends, protect the environment, and ensure the continuity of bios, or life, on earth. The aim of CEE is to promote and strengthen education and communication for the environment and sustainable development in Sri Lanka, through innovative

programmes, the development of educational material, capacity building, and demonstration projects in education and communication. We, at CEE are very much willing to take up this joint initiative with B.I.O. within the framework of the project on “Environmental Education for Sustainable Development and Reconstruction” in the Galle district in Sri Lanka. An education project for which the need was left after the devastating tsunami that struck our coasts two years ago. We are willing to cooperate with B.I.O. as the need of the hour is to create awareness of environmental issues and to share the lessons learnt.

I, myself, am particularly willing to participate in this project, as I was at my home on the 26th of December 2004, with my parents, until we heard a young man crying “Run to the temple, run to the hill, the sea is coming.” We ran and it saved our lives. The young man told me later that he knew that the sea was going to come with full power because of a film that he had seen. A film, which was about a meteorite impact with earth and how a tsunami happens after that. He knew that, if there comes a day when the sea goes back towards the horizon, it then comes back again to take your life. It does not matter in what way you create awareness on the environment, be it books, films or the Internet. What matters is that you do it and make somebody understand the possible actions to take up. Believe me, I am grateful to this young man for saving my life and that of my family, and I am grateful to Dr. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, to B.I.O, to the Department of Hellenic Aid, and to Greece.”



Rodney Perera, Ambassador of Sri Lanka, proceeded to comment that:

“I am glad that my visit to Athens has allowed me to make a contribution to an important dialogue process. I appreciate B.I.O.’s association with Sri Lanka and congratulate the President for her leadership. This is a very timely issue, since just a few hours before this meeting, a very strong earthquake took place in Indonesia. Although there was no report of a tsunami warning, the Greenbelt Reports that we just watched are very important in showing us how to be prepared in the case of such an event.

Sri Lanka has a proud history and an ancient civilisation. Our forefathers lived in harmony with nature. Our ancestors skilfully utilised ecological balances in the use of natural resources. Sri Lanka is in the south Asian region, which harboured some of the most ancient civilisations in the world. Long before the advent of industrialisation, a vibrant community lived in perfect harmony with nature, by developing agriculture, as well as flourishing

urban centres of trade and commerce. The challenges faced by local communities led them to develop their own mechanisms to reduce the impact of such events within the limitations of their capabilities and human resources. Cultural and religious traditions, fostering values of conservation and protection of the environment, are enshrined in the religious beliefs and constitutions of societies in this region and have led them to protect natural resources. Traditional knowledge is passed down through poems, songs, dances, and practices. Civil society groups and universities are helping communities to document this knowledge and revive practices by making them relevant to present reality. It is the community that has developed its own resilient system to cope with disasters. This is how the region has survived devastating floods, droughts and landslides; the knowledge and skills passed on by the local communities are our inheritance of the common intellectual property resources.

For Sri Lanka, the devastating consequences of the tsunami of 2004, represent a serious setback for the communities of the coastal regions, which are some of the country's poorest. We have learned that environmental degradation as a result of overexploitation of resources for development, under various social pressures and consumption patterns, has a cumulative effect of aggravating the vulnerability of the people. I warmly thank the government of Greece, the Hellenic Aid agency and the people of Greece for the very useful assistance offered to Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the tsunami. This gesture of goodwill has strengthened the bond of friendship between our two countries and helped the people of Sri Lanka overcome this tragic calamity.

Sri Lanka's national agenda recognises environmental protection as a priority issue. We recognize sustainable development as a process by which to mobilise the active participation of all stakeholders. We will continue to draw inspiration from the past to raise awareness of issues and deploy strategies and mainstream policies for sustainable development. As members of the international community, we continue to explore ways and means to prevent this world from falling apart. Each one of us has a regional, national and global role to play towards this new big task. In our continuous effort for sustainable development, we cannot function as rivals. It is friendship, and friendship alone, that will help us in our endeavours."



Dr. Bhaskar Balakrishnan, Ambassador of India, presented some important dimensions concerning environmental challenges and opportunities in India:

"India's development pace has accelerated in recent years, and, given the country's relatively high population density, traditional economic growth paths have put unbearable stresses on our environment. Severe environmental problems in India include deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution and land degradation. Urbanisation is straining municipal services. Environmental degradation has a particularly severe impact on the rural poor, and tribal societies when such degradation impacts soil fertility, quantity and quality of water, air quality, forests, wildlife and fisheries. Damaged ecosystems can mean loss of livelihood for them. Certain groups of people can

become destitute, even if the economy as a whole shows strong growth. More than 20 cities in India have populations of over one million, and some of them are highly polluted. Improving the quality of air, water and land, and protecting the environment becomes an urgent priority.

Public awareness, concern, and articulation of environmental issues have been growing, and will continue to do so as education and communication improve. This is a very welcome trend. Growth arising from the ongoing massive restructuring of India's industry, infrastructure and agriculture sectors offers unprecedented opportunities for environmental conservation and improvement through green technologies and practices. The right application of natural fertilizers and pest controls, sensible water and soil management, and application of information technology and biotechnology will make this possible. Industry and infrastructure can be re-engineered to make them environmentally friendly, economically competitive, and socially responsible. These are the challenges before India.

The Government of India has established an environmental legal and institutional system to meet these challenges. Recently in May 2006, the Government approved a new National Environment Policy, which provides a guide to action in regulatory reform, environmental conservation, and enactment of legislation by government agencies at all levels. The National Environment Policy is intended to be a guide to action in regulatory reform, programmes and projects for environmental conservation, and process of legislation by government agencies at all levels. The dominant theme of this policy is that, while the conservation of environmental resources is vital for the lives and well-being of all, the most secure basis for conservation is to ensure that people dependent on particular resources obtain better benefits from conservation rather than from degradation. The policy also seeks to stimulate partnerships of different stakeholders, such as public agencies, local communities, academic and scientific institutions, the investment community, and international development partners, in harnessing their respective resources and strengths for environmental management.

The speedy and effective translation of the national Policy into action in partnership with every citizen of India will transform and improve India's environment and make it into an enviable place to live and work in."

Rashed Saleem Khan, Ambassador of Pakistan, focused on the environmental consequences of the devastating earthquake that affected northern Pakistan in 2005.

"I am very happy to be participating in this important event, organised by the Biopolitics International Organisation, since I believe that environmental issues unite us all and need to become a priority in



formulating the strategies for the future. The environment serves as a link and recognizes no borders. Therefore, this meeting provides a great opportunity to expand our understanding of mutual problems, such as environmental catastrophes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and floods.

A devastating earthquake, measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, hit Northern Pakistan on October 8, 2005, and devastated an area of 28,000 square miles. The earthquake-affected area carries significant environmental importance for the entire country. Most of the forested area falls in this region. The needs of the affected population in terms of fuel and shelter are resulting in further pressure on dwindling forests. The affected areas are also major contributory watersheds for the Tarbela and Mangla dams. Both areas are known for their scenic beauty and attract large numbers of local and international tourists during the summer season. The earthquake, apart from causing huge losses to life and property, has also resulted in considerable damage to an already fragile biophysical environment.

The impact on wildlife and biodiversity is yet to be properly assessed. The region affected is rich in fauna, particularly endangered species. Migration of wildlife to other areas has not been reported yet, but will probably appear as a long-term impact on biodiversity of the affected areas. While natural resources are already under serious stress due to the earthquake, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of housing, roads, health, education, agriculture, livelihoods and irrigation systems, will put additional stress on the physical, as well as on the natural environment of the area, through increased use of water, waste generation, solid waste dumping, quarrying for sand and stone, increased transportation of construction material, and dumping of debris in dry water courses and on river sides.

A special national environmental strategy has been developed with the objective of turning challenges into opportunities to protect natural resources, prevent environmental degradation, restore damages, arrange for the safe disposal of debris, and establish principles and practices for environmentally-friendly rehabilitation and reconstruction in the earthquake affected areas with the sustainable use of resources. This vision has been developed through wide-ranging consultation with a number of organisations and internal stakeholders, thus helping to shape priorities and vision statements.

My participation in the present event has provided me with a unique and rare opportunity to update myself on environmental issues and problems, which are posing serious threats to the welfare of the entire humanity. I look forward to working with B.I.O. in the realisation of its noble objectives and would like to express my full support of its endeavours for a safer and beautiful world for future generations.”



Rigoberto Tiglao, Ambassador of the Philippines, stated that nature's shields have weakened by environmental degradation and that environmental protection needs stronger support.

“I will be focusing on the lessons that The Philippines has learnt in reversing environmental degradation and protecting the environment, especially in protecting what is now called “the greenbelt.” I am very much honoured to participate in this launching of The Greenbelt Reports produced by TVE Asia Pacific. TVE Asia Pacific indeed answers to the need for all people on this planet to realise the urgency of environmental protection by listening very closely to Mother Earth and respecting her. As a result of the abuse of Mother Earth for the past decades in many parts of Asia, we have belatedly realised that the shields Mother Earth has given us against the dark side of nature's forces have weakened and even vanished in some areas.

We in the Philippines, in the past several years, have realised that the destruction and thousands of deaths brought on by typhoons, such as the one that occurred last year, were really not caused by nature acting alone. Devastation in the form of massive torrential floods and landslides from adjacent mountains were due to man-made deforestation. Mother Nature's forests would have absorbed or slowed down much of the flood waters in parts of populated areas, but the forests are no longer there. Mother Earth's shield has been destroyed by man himself, both by huge predatory companies, as well as by poor farmers seeking new agricultural areas. The damage is so extensive that we still do not know whether the former forestland can ever be forested again.

The Greenbelt Reports draw attention to the shields Mother Nature has given us and which man has been unwittingly demolishing. The media plays a very crucial role in environmental protection. The reason for this is that the media force governments to work to protect the environment. The media also magnify the role of NGOs and build up support for environmental protection.”

Global warming and the fate of our common future were the focal points of the presentation given by **Sverre Stub**, Ambassador of Norway.

“Climate change and global warming are all of a sudden on everybody's mind. Nobody in the so-called developed world can any longer pretend they do not know what is going on. Yet some, even



in key political positions, refuse to take science and facts seriously. They continue to avoid necessary action.

I would like to commend the Biopolitics International Organisation and its President and Founder, for their very valuable contribution to a better tomorrow for our world. NGOs are generally better than governments at mobilising the public and in eliciting action required for our future, common or none at all. Nations and citizens can only secure their future through common commitments and actions. Never has interdependence in our world been more obvious than today, when we are faced with an increasing loss of biodiversity and a life-threatening climate change.

One of the personally most meaningful tasks I have had in my diplomatic career was to work on the follow-up to the UN Report on "Our Common Future," also called the Brundtland Commission Report on Environment and Development, as Norway's former Prime Minister, Mrs. Brundtland, had chaired the Commission. Norwegian diplomats were actively working to introduce the report's key concept of sustainable development in the UN system. I was counsellor at Norway's Permanent Mission in Geneva at the time and it was not an easy task to have this new concept of sustainable development implemented in the work programmes of Geneva-based UN bodies.

Some important progress has been made but, overall, there have been too many missed opportunities. We have not witnessed the long-term, comprehensive, strategic leadership that is required to make necessary changes in modern life's unsustainable behaviour. We have not seen sufficient solidarity either, between the rich and the poor whether they are individuals or countries. Nor has there been sufficient solidarity with future generations.

Overconsumerism is of major concern in the developed world, and I am stressed and even scared when young people list shopping as their favourite pastime activity, especially when we know that there are hundreds of millions of people in the world who have to survive on less than one Euro a day. We also create mountains of waste and garbage, however, it is encouraging to see that in more and more countries, garbage is seen as a valuable resource, and resorted and recycled. If we think globally and act locally, we can all make a difference in our local community, at work or at home, and private companies can make a positive contribution through what is labelled as corporate social responsibility. Increasingly, many companies realise that short-term profit for the owners should not be their only concern and priority. Social responsibility can be a long-term asset rather than a liability.

As recently stated by a group of prominent senior Norwegians, we have been silent for too long and we can no longer allow old habits and short-sighted political priorities undermine the lives of our grandchildren. No one has all the answers on how we should respond to the environmental challenges of modern society, but our common future depends on action and on a common strategy."



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