

## A MATTER OF PRIORITIES: DISCERNING AND PRESENTING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES\*

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The following are some points suggested for possible consideration as final recommendations or conclusions by the rapporteurs of the conference:

### **Priorities to be considered with respect to environmental problems:**

A. We must redefine priorities according to:

1. The importance of long-term effects for each problem, such as species extinction, climatic change etc.;
2. the irreversibility of such effects;
3. urgency "Breathing time" available before action becomes inescapable;
4. synergistic effects, combining environment and bios with other factors some well- and others not so well-known for appreciating synergistic effects;
5. assessing the importance of problems in the light of future human values likely to be adopted;
6. and staying away from fashion, panic, propaganda, mass media excitement and other cheap, inaccurate, unfounded, or misleading influences, thus remaining solidly based on scientifically proven evidence

B. Commence action as soon as possible, on the largest possible scale, involving as many people or groups as possible, and in the most effective way.

C. Firstly, present human valuesödifferent from culture to culture and from person to personöthat are changing. Try to anticipate the type of future values they seem to evolve to, and assess present problems and present action in terms of such future values.

Secondly, there exists a "New Ethics", no longer so strictly anthropo-centric. Consider the rights, per se, of all living thingsölarge or small, lovable or distasteful to man, animals, plants, microorganisms, isolated, and at still higher priorities, in large communities, populations, and ecosystems as well as forestry.

Thirdly, even further, consider the rights of inanimate objects such as the landscape, rocks, atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, resources, on earth, in space, or even on other celestial bodies.

Fourthly, an all-out effort to protect everything in nature, in the proper balance that has naturally evolved, prior to regulatory or destructive human interventions, degradation, and pollution.

D. A tentative list of priorities with respect to the first three out of four issues just mentioned:

1. Tropical forests (the largest ecosystems) No time for delay
2. Temperate or boreal forests
3. Pastures, grasslands, coral reefs, etc.
4. Animal populations, communities, flocks, packs, schools, etc.
5. Individual animals, plants, microorganisms (or in small groups)
6. Climate change: ozone hole (imminent danger)
7. Climate change: progressive warming (greenhouse effect): very important but same "breathing time" available.
8. Pollution of all sorts: air, water, (running, surface, ground), soils, dangerous wastes (radioactive, toxic etc.), acid rain, sound pollution
9. Erosion, desertification (a controversial issue), deforestation, destruction of landscapes etc.
10. Destruction of human artefacts: monuments, works of art, whole settlements (or parts thereof), engineering (major) projects, etc.
11. Protection from natural calamities: volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, avalanches, landslides, storms, hurricanes, hail, snow, fires.

### **Presenting the issues**

- whom to alert, inform, communicate, sensitise, excite, teach, mobilize?
- pupils, students, scientists, engineers, technicians, civil servants, employees, politicians, leaders, decision makers, the public at large

children, adults, old people, neighbours, friends, relatives people in (more or less) remote places, the entire population of the earth etc.

How to do it:

1. Devote much more time in curricula, mass media, campaigns, to the burning (bios and environmental) issues
2. Devote (after having trained and prepared them) and many more experts, teachers, professors, scientific journalists, psychologists, animateurs (French)
3. Devote much more money (e.g. 1% of GNP for R&D now), in any country, to tend asymptotically towards, say, 5% of GNP or more in the distant future. A constant increase of funds is necessary if we want to save the earth as our inherited planet. The funds ought to increase even faster, but, not only are there problems of availability of funds (it will increase in the distant future, with rising average incomes of humanity), and also organisational problems (we are not yet ready to spend so much, so quickly, so effectively: we need preparation, planning, etc. plus expertise, research, etc.)
4. Try to communicate conviction, persuasion, even enthusiasm to all those involved, aiming at a mass mobilisation through adequate campaigns, education, training, mass media, frequent exchange of views, debates, community action, etc.
5. Such preaching, although it should address itself to intuition, goodwill, optimism, and other human faculties, should be protected by being based exclusively on solid scientific foundations, avoiding half-baked, dubious, subjective, unfounded or even misleading recommendations and teachings.
6. Long-term perspectives should be pre-eminent, and should be properly in the minds and consciousness of those receiving the information.
7. Geographic aspects: whatever we say, and preach, should concern not only our local scale (neighbourhood, quarter, community), our town, village, our (small or large) region, not only our country, but always keep the picture of the entire earth in mind. Environmental forces, issues, problems, corrective action, etc. cannot be limited by national (worse: local) boundaries, they transcend them and affect the planet as a whole. Only in such a broad perspective can the major problems be efficiently solved.
8. Environment and Bios, important as they are, cannot and might not be considered in themselves, in isolation: they have to be conceived and acted upon, in connection with other relevant fields, such as economics, social aspects, cultural aspects, administrative and legal and political aspects, religious aspects, philosophical aspects, also, quite emphatically, with technological problems (and the efficient control of technology, which is found to keep developing very rapidly, providing lots of positive developments for humanity, provided it is kept under check.) Such control should be exercised in every aspect of the collaboration of environment and bios with any other field of action, to arrive at a balanced, efficient, and enriching way of life (of humans and all other living things) on this planet.
9. The presentation of such issues, problems, and action plans to those concerned, should start at the simplest level: to start with, develop simple (to express, communicate, memorise, etc.) mottos and slogans, (carefully chosen and formulated so as not to lead to possible misunderstandings), accompanied by appropriate signs, logos, graphic presentations, etc. (e.g. appropriate visual symbols for tropical forests, for endangered species, for pollution, etc. These could form the object of national or international competitions to arrive at expressive, efficient, and pleasing signs, logos, symbols.

## Conclusion

This first step should be quickly followed by a second step: the recipients, having been alerted to the problems (beginning of mobilisation), should now get a more explicit, more sound, progressively more detailed knowledge, and consciousness of what can and ought to be achieved, in general.

The third step could go even further, assessing what the true contribution of each individual or group concerned, could be within the general mobilisation effort: how we can help promote action (including a change in his own lifestyle) destined to make the mobilisation efficient, contributing positively towards corrective action, in all fields, collectively, that are of importance for life on this earth.

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**Professor John Papaioannou's** long and varied career has encompassed widely differing elements. As a practising musician, he has given numerous keyboard recitals in Greece and abroad, he has lectured and written on music extensively, and was co-founder at the Studio of New Music at the Athens Goethe Institute, in 1962. He is General Secretary of the Hellenic Association for Contemporary Music, and was Vice President of the Executive Council of the International Society for Contemporary Music Education in Greece. After the Second World War he

was involved, with C.A. Doxiadis, in the evolution of the new science of Ekistics, to reconstruct the urban settlements damaged by war. In 1951 he became Head of the Department for the Economic Reconstruction of Greece, being responsible for all branches of economic activity involved. In 1964 he became Director of Research at the new Athens Centre of Ekistics. Since 1975, he has acted as their adviser. He was also President at the World Society of Ekistics from 1991 to 1993.