

# The Future We Choose

## Declaration from the High-level dialogue on Global Sustainability

17 June 2012, Rio de Janeiro

**We are concerned.** The scientific evidence is unequivocal. We are on the threshold of a future with unprecedented environmental risks. The combined effects of climate change, resource scarcity, loss of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience at a time of increased demand, poses a real threat to humanity's welfare. Such a future generates unacceptable risks that will undermine the resilience of the planet and its inhabitants. We have generated our own geological epoch, the Anthropocene. In this epoch, there is an unacceptable risk that human pressures on the planet, should they continue on a business as usual trajectory, will trigger abrupt and irreversible changes with catastrophic outcomes for human societies and life as we know it.

**We believe.** With bold and courageous leadership, determined action, a transition to a safe and prosperous future is possible. But both will be essential and time is running critically short. Every delay now closes off opportunities for progress and increases the burden of inequity and poverty, not only for future generations, but for those who are alive today. Yet, our generation is the first to have the privilege of understanding the full complexity of the challenges that confront us and we already have at hand the knowledge, technology and finance required to ensure a sustainable future. Indeed, the application of these tools and with a focus on addressing social and economic inequalities, empowering women and ensuring good governance, is a prerequisite to living within safe planetary boundaries.

**We Agree.** A fully integrated science-based approach is necessary to tackle the very real risks that confront us. This approach must be built upon a partnership between the public and private sectors and with civil society. It will require the full use of humanity's capacity for innovation and creativity at both global and local level and within new economic pathways that explicitly recognize the ecological limits of the planet. Such an integrated model, which reflects the scientific consensus and guided by the principles of responsibility and equity will and must provide a systemic solution that ensures the wise stewardship of the planet and its peoples.

A new narrative for a prosperous future is needed. The time to act is now!

**We call upon** world leaders to move beyond aspirational statements and exercise a collective responsibility, seizing the historic opportunity offered by the Rio 2012 summit to set our world on a sustainable path by:

- **Ensuring responsible planetary stewardship** by strengthening the multilateral assessments and institutions for sustainable development at all levels, from global to local, including all stakeholders, and taking an integrated approach to equity, the economy and the environment.
- **Taking urgent action to meet the global needs** for food, water and energy in a sustainable manner, avoiding dangerous climate change, safeguarding biodiversity on Earth, and managing the oceans sustainably.
- **Rethinking the economic model**, as well as patterns of production and consumption, by decoupling growth and prosperity from resource use, moving beyond GDP as a measure of society's progress, encouraging innovation and sustainable long-term investments, and putting a price on natural resources including carbon.
- **Starting a global transformation** - The year 2015 marks a critical juncture and a roadmap of decisive action is now urgently required. We urge the fulfillment of the MDGs; the adoption of globally agreed upon Sustainable Development Goals; and the conclusion of an adequate climate agreement, which aligned with the latest science, offer the prospect of a viable and equitable future for humanity.

FINAL UNEDITED VERSION

Signatories:

***Chairs summary of the High-level dialogue on Global Sustainability.***

The following contains the summary of key discussion point during the dialogue. It reflects the chairs understanding of deliberations.

**The need for a great transformation**

Humanity's trajectories of development and environmental change, for too long perceived as disconnected, now present unprecedented, interlinked challenges. The three Nobel Laureate Symposia on Global Sustainability give a clear diagnosis of the situation. Accelerating human activity is now the most significant driver of global change. Transgressing planetary boundaries risks moving our Earth out of the climatically and ecologically stable state that has sustained human development over the past 10,000 years. In the Anthropocene, tipping points with severe consequences for societies cannot be excluded.

Comprehensive scientific assessments show that we are already committed to unwanted future climate impacts, currently moving towards more than 3°C of global warming. Meanwhile, human welfare and the planet's capacity to buffer itself against shocks are being eroded by rapid biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.

Economic development and resource use have brought great benefits to many people, but we face serious social and environmental challenges, driven by wasteful production and consumption, skewed trading and subsidy systems, and persistent and recurring financial crises. Gross inequities persist within and between nations. Unemployment is endemic and rising, particularly among the young giving rise to tensions and unrest. The financial system has failed to generate appropriate levels of investment into sustainable wealth creation.

The United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability clearly recognize this predicament. Full and rapid implementation of the recommendations in their report will take us well on our way towards a more sustainable world.

**Towards planetary stewardship**

This is the first generation with scientific understanding and foresight of the risks facing humanity, now and for future generations. We are interconnected and interdependent. The problems we face require fundamental transformations to reverse global environmental change and move towards fair and lasting prosperity.

Global governance requires a focus on economic and social development within boundaries that respect Earth's fundamental behaviour. This governance requires closer collaboration between science, policy, the public and private sectors and civil society. Institutions must be developed and strengthened at all levels – from local societies to the world as a whole. These need to integrate the climate, biodiversity and development agendas.

To meet humanity's needs in a complex world, a new contract between science and society is required. Strongly integrated Earth system research, co-designed by science and its stakeholders, can inform robust solutions for the transformation to global sustainability. Sustainability should be a central part of all curricula, to nurture the trans-disciplinary cooperation and innovation required to resolve the multifaceted problems we face.

**Decisive action for a more equitable world** – Humanity must now move very fast on several fronts. Science plays a critical role in supporting innovation pathways towards global sustainability. Our assessment is that the most urgent priorities for immediate action are meeting the global needs for food, water and energy in a sustainable manner, avoiding dangerous climate change, safeguarding biodiversity on Earth, and managing the oceans sustainably. We urge governments to recognize now that all these challenges must be addressed together, and that adapting to unavoidable climate impacts is a crucial part of the sustainability process. Greenhouse gas emissions must peak no later than 2015 to keep global warming below 2°C. Multiple co-benefits can be achieved by combining major investments in reducing

short-lived climate pollutants with concerted investments in technologies and policies for universal access to renewable energy and elimination of climate-damaging subsidies; decisively supporting a low-carbon transition, providing major health benefits and security, and promoting development. Often, action on these fronts is portrayed as a cost or burden. Growing evidence shows that societies and businesses can benefit from early action on sustainable solutions. Energy illustrates well the large benefits across the three dimensions of sustainability.

Equal rights and opportunities are essential not only for achieving social justice and equality but also for economic growth and prosperity. Poverty remains one of the world's largest challenges. We should strive to achieve the MDG's, adopt a new global contract between and within all countries to scale up investments in poverty eradication, climate stabilization, clean technology and ecosystem management, as well as scale up investments in education, reproductive health services and credit aiming at empowering women and youth around the world. As always, those most at risk are people in low-income countries, and the poorest segments in middle- and high-income countries.

**Rethinking the economic model** – Earth's capacity to buffer the expansion of human activities has allowed continuing economic growth despite serious ecological decline. However a 'business as usual' trajectory of activities will no longer yield the historic pattern of economic growth. Global sustainability is a prerequisite for human welfare and prosperity. It is vitally important to decouple growth from unsustainable resource use, while simultaneously generating new employment opportunities. We should move beyond GDP as a measure of society's progress, apply the 'polluter pays' principle including a price on carbon reflecting the true costs, ensure the full accounting of natural capital and ecosystem services in all economic decisions and greatly enhance resource efficiency by moving production systems towards a "circular economy" that is regenerative by design. Shifting consumption from goods to services will enhance employment and wellbeing. Innovation and sustainable long-term investments should be supported by a clear and more ambitious framework, including regulations and incentives.

**A great transformation guided by Sustainable Development Goals** – Our current development path is simply too risky for humanity. In the Anthropocene, all nations must accept the inviolable necessity of living within the safe operating space of planetary boundaries. This requires an agreement between the world's governments for a fair and sustainable use of Earth's natural capital, a mandate for action with clear targets and timetables. The year 2015 marks a critical juncture. We urge the fulfilment of the MDGs; the adoption of globally agreed Sustainable Development Goals; and the conclusion of an adequate climate agreement, which aligned with the latest science, offer the prospect of a viable and equitable future for humanity.

*The Nobel Laureate Symposium Series on Global Sustainability was initiated in 2007 in Potsdam, continued in London 2009 with the St James's Palace Nobel Laureate Symposium and in Stockholm in 2011. The series unites Nobel Laureates of various disciplines, top-level representatives from politics and civil society, and renowned experts on sustainability. The UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability was established in 2010 to formulate a new blueprint for sustainable development and low-carbon prosperity. It issued its report and recommendations in January 2012. At the 3rd Nobel Laureate Symposium in Stockholm, the Stockholm Memorandum was signed by Nobel Laureates and handed over in person to the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability in preparation for the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro.*

*On 17 June 2012 the Nobel Laureate Symposium Series on Global Sustainability was continued in Rio de Janeiro focusing on the scientific support for policy action and in particular for the actions contained the General Secretary's High-level Panel final report, "Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing".*