
CONCLUDING REMARKS

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Honorable delegates: It gives me great pleasure to send you this message at this eight international conference. I'm so sorry that I could not join you due to other situations but so happy to be part of this conference. I want to welcome you most warmly to Cape Town, a beautiful city.

I know how important it is for us to have laws that protect the environment. But I want to agree with my friend Durwood Zaelke that even more important is to comply. Here in Kenya we have been fighting so hard for many years to force not only the private companies, individual entrepreneurs, but even the government to comply with the laws that are in our books. For without compliance, we cannot have sustainable development. Compliance is part of good governance. It's part of having a rule of law, having an effective rule of law. Without that, you cannot have sustainable development. The two of them are important; one is not going to be effective on its own. We need both of them at the same time.

You should be very proud of the organization because you are here focusing on an extremely important area. I know that many of you are lawyers and you understand the value not only of the letter, but also of the action. I understand that one of the areas you are focusing on is climate change as part of your theme for this year. Now, climate change remains one of the greatest challenges on the planet, not only for environmentalists, not only for climatologists, but for all of us. As we all know, it's one thing to sign the treaty, it's one thing to be part of the Kyoto Protocol, but it's a completely different thing to go home, domesticate the treaty or the agreements and make efforts to have the treaty complied with, especially in the area of protecting forests.

As you know, we are very concerned about the forests because we are informed that 20 percent of our climate emissions are from cutting forests. And this is particularly of concern in Africa, where the majority of our people still use firewood and still need to clear forests and clear vegetation in order to make room for agriculture. Forests are extremely important for Africa. They really must be protected and they must be in the next treaty.

We're saying that if we cannot protect the standing forests, why should we plant? Why should we be planting when others are cutting? It doesn't make any sense. And why don't we want to appreciate the role that the standing forests and vegetation are playing in mitigating climate change? I think we want to push for this, and I'm hoping that more and more people are recognizing the value of our standing forests.

It's for that reason, I'm very proud to be the Goodwill Ambassador of the Congo forest ecosystem, and I hope that we shall continue to fight especially for this forest, for the Amazon forests, and for the great forests in Southeast Asia. These are indeed, as we all know, our biggest and most precious carbon sinks. And we really ought to protect them and appreciate them. It can't be more important to plant an extra tree than to protect the one that is already standing.

Now it's one thing to have laws and contracts that protect these forests, but as I have already said, much more important is to raise awareness on the need to comply. If we do not comply, it does not matter how many laws we make, it doesn't matter how many volumes we write. We're just talking and we're just filling our libraries and our archives. For many years I've been advocating for people to not only say what they believe in international conferences, in United Nations conferences, in NGO conferences, and even in government board rooms. There is a lot of talking, but very little action and very little complying with the laws that we have already in our books.

I want to thank your organization for trying to raise this awareness, for it is extremely important. And I want to know that although I am not in Cape Town with my body, my spirit is with you. And I want to ask you to continue this work and to count me and the organizations that we are devoted to, such as the Green Belt Movement, and the work for the Congo forests and so many other work that we are trying to do with the rest of the world, count us as one of you as we try to push not only the letter but also the compliance.

I send you my very best wishes and hope that you will have an extremely successful conference, such as you have not had before, for you are in one of the best countries in Africa, in what I think is one of the most beautiful towns and cities in Africa. And so I hope that you will be inspired and motivated to come up with the best document but also to go home extremely motivated to not only carry out what you believe, but also make sure that the rest of us, the rest of the world, complies. Best wishes and bon voyage.

Video speech presented on 11 April 2008 at the 8th INECE Conference

Excerpt from the Proceedings of the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement's (INECE) Eighth International Conference, Linking Concepts to Actions: Successful Strategies for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement, held 5-11 April 2008, in Cape Town, South Africa.

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