

The Budapest Imperative on Surviving With The Biosphere*

1. An international gathering of some 140 scientists and other scholars from more than 30 countries, deeply concerned about the future of the human environment with its natural components, met during 22–27 April 1990 in Budapest at the invitation of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The occasion was the fourth in a series of International Conferences on Environmental Future which began in Finland in 1971, and it came to the general conclusion that five leading problems confront the world community:

- the continued rise in human numbers and the ever-increasing consumption of non-renewable and renewable environmental resources;
- the progressive degradation of the environment at local, national, regional, and even global, levels;
- the depressive loss of more and more of the Earth's biological diversity;
- the increasing disparity in wealth among nations, and the crippling poverty in many of the less-developed countries;
- the growing impediments to social advance in many countries — resulting from hunger, disease, ignorance, poverty, and strife.

2. We already have enough evidence to demand remedial action on all the five problems we have identified, although there is a great and continuing need for good environmental research, and for its results to be effectively applied.

3. Political action has lagged too far behind public concern. It *must* catch up, and move ahead. These serious problems will require concerted action among nations. Some progress has been made, as in the mounting effort to protect the stratospheric ozone shield. A major United Nations Conference on Environment and Development will be held in Brazil in 1992. But more needs doing now than was the case 20 years ago: Governments have evaded their responsibilities for far too long. Rhetoric has abounded, but relatively little effective action has been taken.

4. Governments and international agencies cannot succeed without the support of the communities which they serve. The experience of the past 20 years demonstrates that Governments need to be moved to action by the demands of individuals and groups within their countries. Action must be based on accurate information and wide understanding.

5. As the new millennium approaches, environmental matters will inevitably move increasingly into the centre of the world's agenda. The welfare of tomorrow's world will depend in large measure on how we deal with the two dominant, interlinked concerns of today: the seemingly inexorable rise in human population, and the poverty and shortages that already threaten two-thirds of the world's population.

6. Without improved economic conditions, education, and health-care, couples are unlikely to have sufficient incentive to limit the numbers of their offspring even if the means to do so are made available to them. Unless women gain access to the same general education and opportunities as men, progress will also be inhibited.

7. Disparities in wealth between nations are exacerbated because poor nations owe vast sums to the rich nations. Finding an equitable way to ease the debt burden would be a first step to reducing these disparities, thereby permitting the attainment of environmentally sound development.

8. The Governments of the world can no longer evade environmental issues. Today we stand in need of a peaceful revolution in which poverty, the rise in human numbers and environmental degradation, will be brought finally to a halt, and humanity will come to live in enduring harmony with Nature that sustains us all in The Biosphere which constitutes our sole life-support.

THE FOUNDATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
(edited version of the 5th draft, which was passed at the final plenary session of the 4th ICFE, in Budapest, Hungary, on the afternoon of 27 April 1990).

* Originally promoted through a small *ad hoc* pre-Conference committee consisting of F. Kenneth Hare, Gilbert F. White, and Victor A. Kovda, with powers to co-opt. Drafted early in the Conference by the first-named, amended and generally approved by the Thursday evening session, and subsequently amended in consultation with, particularly, John H. Burnett, John L. Cloudsley-Thompson, Martin W. Holdgate, Donald F. McMichael, Jean Medawar, Gunavant M. Oza, Nicholas Polunin, Jan W.M. la Rivière, Christopher D. Stone, Francis L. Dale, Gabor Vida, Arthur H. Westing, and David P.S. Wasawo. Passed at the final session of the Conference and subsequently edited as necessary.

The idea of an Imperative originated with Richard G. Miller and follows 'The Reykjavik Imperative on the Environment and Future of Mankind', which was drafted during the 2nd ICFE, held in Iceland in 1977, by a committee under the chairmanship of Linus Pauling and published in the proceedings thereof, while further inspiration for the Budapest Imperative was derived from the opening keynote address entitled 'Overview: Our Threatened World', by Martin W. Holdgate, and from the Third Baer-Huxley Memorial Lecture, entitled 'Building An Environmental Institutional Framework for the Future', by Mostafa K. Tolba, which is published with his permission in this issue of *Environmental Conservation* (Vol. 17, No. 2, Summer 1990, pp. 105–10). — Ed.