

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by

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“Two Conferences That May Shape Our Future”

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and was attended by representatives from 172 governments of which 108 were heads of state. The conference, also known as the Earth Summit or the Rio Summit, was also attended by more than 17,000 people from all walks of life. The convention addressed clean production issues, alternative energy sources to minimize climate change, new reliance on public transportation, and water scarcity. An important achievement was an agreement on reducing carbon dioxide emissions which led to the Kyoto Protocol; however, we have not made sufficient progress in this matter.

On June 20-22, 2012, Rio +20, officially known at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, will take place again in Rio de Janeiro. The issues of the conference will be in seven key areas: 1) help generate decent jobs; 2) advance food security and sustainable agriculture with a push for zero hunger; 3) enhance support for universal access to sustainable energy; 4) endorse action on universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation; 5) provide guidance on sustainable use, management and conservation of oceans; 6) build institutions to support sustainable development at all levels; and 7) advance a process of defining Sustainable Development Goals. More than 130 heads of state and government have registered to attend; in addition, some 50,000 people, including business executives, mayors, NGOs, youth, indigenous people and many other groups, are expected to participate in both official and informal events in Rio de Janeiro during the conference.

Just a few days earlier, on June 18-20, 2012, the Halki Summit will take place in Turkey at the Holy Theological School of Halki. This conference, hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, is titled: “Global Responsibility and Environmental Sustainability, A conversation on the environment, ethics and innovation”. As opposed to the Rio +20 conference, this symposium will be attended by about 40 invited experts with keynote presentations addressing issues of biodiversity and conservation; energy and climate change; and economics and innovation. These issues will be addressed by Dr. Jane Goodall, a British primatologist, ethologist, anthropologist, and UN Messenger of Peace; Bill McKibben, author of a dozen books on the environment and founder of the grassroots climate campaign 350.org; and Gary Hirschberg, Chairman of Stonyfield Farms – the world’s leading organic yogurt producer, who recently stepped down as the CEO to focus on sustainable food for the world.

While the Rio +20 will be a huge conference with thousands of attendees, the Halki Summit will be a conversation with the small number of participants arriving at their world view through different lenses. Some of invited participants who have already been asked to respond to the three issues include Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, Chair, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; Rt. Hon. Dr. Richard Chartres, Lord Bishop of London; Dr. Anny Wallin, Dow Chemical; Mr. Gerd Leipold, Greenpeace; Amory Lovins, Rocky Mountain Institute; Dr. Marea Hatzios, World Bank; Dr. James Hansen, NASA Goddard Institute; and Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis, Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Throne.

The conversation will not end when the conference is over. The participants will be asked to prepare a short paper based on their responses and reflections, and these papers will form the basis of a publication. This conference will also be available live as a webcast by going to www.halkisummit.org. This will truly be an outstanding conference hosted by Patriarch Bartholomew following his outstanding series of ecological symposia which took place on various bodies of water throughout the world.

Look for the results of these two conferences as they may shape the future of this Earth.