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Saving the World Slowly: The Johannesburg Sustainability Summit

by Hardin Tibbs



A report from the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development that took place in Johannesburg, South Africa from August 26 to September 4, 2002

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The cover photograph shows U.S. Secretary of State Colin L Powell addressing the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Photo courtesy of IISD/ENB-Leila Mead.

Saving the World Slowly: Johannesburg 2002

The most significant thing about the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002 may be that it happened at all. After all, the famous Rio Summit 10 years earlier was simply called the UN Conference on Environment and Development, or more popularly the ‘Earth Summit.’ Yet in 2002 in South Africa, the whole world met to talk about ‘sustainable’ development.

Following Rio, the idea of sustainability became a way of expressing a central insight about dealing with global problems: that poverty needs to be overcome by tackling injustice and improving economic prospects, and that economic prospects must be improved in a way that does not harm the environment, because (among other things) harming the environment only worsens poverty. This vital if fuzzy concept has a memorable slogan—people, planet, prosperity—and has become the official rallying cry under which the whole complex of major global concerns are addressed and comprehensive solutions are (hopefully) discovered.

Hundreds of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporations descended on the Summit to sell their respective versions of saving the world. Tables in the official Sandton Convention Centre were laden with foot-high piles of brochures and newsletters on dozens of topics ranging from environmental technology to social justice. Many organizations reported on progress in their areas since the Earth Summit in Rio. All of them were voting for the importance of sustainable development by coming to the one forum where all the world’s problems could be discussed.

Of course a minor practical problem is that if several tens of thousands of people turn up in one place to talk about the fate of the world it’s hard for them physically to get together, let alone talk to each other. At WSSD there were three major locations widely spaced across the city and numerous parallel events happening in smaller adjacent locations. The official WSSD inter-governmental negotiations took place in the affluent suburb of Sandton,

in the new convention center. On the other side of the city the unofficial peoples’ summit, the Civil Society Global Forum, was held at the NASREC expo center for all the NGO delegates who lacked UN accredited status and had no access to Sandton.

At the Ubuntu Village exhibition site not far from Sandton, governments, corporations and NGOs erected pavilions and exhibits related to the Summit. And at several smaller venues adjacent to the Sandton Centre, there were programs of supporting events. The most impressive of these was organized by IUCN, The World Conservation Union, an environmentally-focused intergovernmental organization with official UN observer status, a similar level of recognition to the Red Cross.

Access was a continual issue. Even for those NGO representatives with UN accreditation, access to the official proceedings was not guaranteed. With only 150 seats in the plenary hall for ‘Major Groups,’ a curious egalitarian UN category that mixes multinational corporations with NGOs, places were awarded by lottery for the more popular sessions. On the first day the participation rules were particularly restrictive. A woman from Somalia who was turned away protested in an open meeting with the organizers: ‘My village has worked and saved money for a year to pay for my participation here at the Summit.... How can I show the world the problems my people have to suffer through, when I cannot even walk through the doors to the convention hall?’ To their credit, the organizers quickly responded by modifying and relaxing the rules.

People with no summit status at all were out on the streets trying to make their voices heard, but not very successfully. As a South African participant dryly commented, the South African state has long experience of using physical barriers to control people. When Indymedia, the internet-based grassroots news network, reported a few days in advance that a major demonstration was planning to ‘take Sandton’ on Saturday August 31, it sounded like things were going to get interesting. But the police had obviously taken note. Although it was hard to tell exactly what

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happened from a vantage point on the street, word was that the demonstration had been broken up and blocked in multiple places along its intended route and was never able to achieve critical mass.

A smallish sub-group of demonstrators did arrive outside the Sandton Centre, where they were hectored in somewhat ad hoc fashion by a succession of speakers. The speakers shouted the ritual political cry 'Amandla!' and the crowd shouted the traditional response 'Awethu!' (roughly corresponding to 'Freedom!' and 'Power to the people!') Those official delegates who ventured out into the street via the carefully guarded multi-story car park and shopping center were free to mingle with demonstrators, who were wearing red T-shirts and bandanas. But when the people in red attempted to leave by walking back along the road the way they had come, their way was blocked by a row of policemen. Delegates sporting the ubiquitous large official summit plastic badges, complete with fuzzy digital ID images, were waved through by the police. The Summit had given rise to its own form of segregation, and it was so smoothly executed that no one who was waved through appeared to notice or worry what happened to the people in red T-shirts after the few interested delegates got bored and departed. Only the clatter of a low flying police helicopter repeatedly circling overhead, a large surveillance camera mounted on its side, lingered as a reminder in the sky over the Sandton Centre.

Inside the Sandton Centre, official Summit events moved in surrealistic slow motion. In the main hall on the top floor, the grand theatre of the Summit took place. Most of the hall, which seemed easily 100 metres long, was filled with row after row of tables accommodating the national delegations. On stage at the front sat the meeting chair and those leading the process. At the back, on banks of benches, sat the officially sanctioned observers. Armed UN guards monitored the doors. Everyone wore radio headsets for simultaneous translation, and for much of the time it was hard to discern if anything was actually happening.

Much of the action, such as it was, was taking place

elsewhere in the building. In a ground floor room, another set of country delegates were engaged in arcane legalistic wrangling in the so-called Vienna Setting. Here the Summit's action plan was being hammered out. Each day, successive drafts emerged, consisting of the agreed text interwoven with multiple alternative phrases enclosed in square brackets. Delegates haggled over which of the vying phrases would be included in the official statement, in the process deciding many of the Summit's most important questions of substance.

At one stage, to the consternation of the NGO community, the draft text contained unprecedented language making past and future multilateral environmental agreements subordinate to international trade agreements in World Trade Organization (WTO) rulings. Just as the chair was about to bring down the gavel on this item, the Ethiopian delegate raised his flag and said he could not find it in his conscience to bring this decision to life. Suddenly inspired, one country after another rejected the proposal, and in one of the Summit's few moments of high excitement, trade failed to gain the upper hand over environment.

Much of the tougher negotiation was taking place behind the scenes. Some of the input to the Vienna Setting was emerging from sessions in side rooms which were closed to observers. Various sub-groups of countries held meetings to decide on common approaches, including the quixotically named 'Group of Like-Minded Countries.' On the ground floor, the NGOs had their own meeting room, where various officials fronted up to take questions on contentious issues. Some heads of state actually showed up too, notably President Chavez of Venezuela, a vocal critic of the Summit's failure to make progress—not that this stopped his delegation undermining proposed targets for increased use of renewable energy. An oil producing country is still an oil producing country, even with radical leadership.

The Summit provided an educational process of sorts for world leaders. In the second week all the heads of state,

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or in a few cases their proxies, turned up and spoke for just five minutes each on the topic of sustainable development, a marathon plenary process that took the best part of two and a half days. This felt a lot like homework: you have five minutes to say why sustainable development is a good thing for the world and how your country supports it. Some of them, such as President Vicente Fox of Mexico, actually seemed to mean what they said. Others convinced no one. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, standing in for the most visibly absent head of state, was so vigorously heckled, led by U.S. NGOs, it took him fully ten minutes to finish. Even country delegates were joining in the protest against him, and when the instigating protesters were ejected by the UN guards, the media immediately scrambled to interview them.

A few thousand international journalists were present, covering the Summit from their computer-festooned bunker on the lower ground floor and constantly alert for any hint of excitement in the dark-suited circus. One journalist, from the seriously green Ecologist magazine, was benefiting handily from a misprint. Not only had he decided to get a haircut to be taken seriously at the Summit, but his plastic badge had been labeled 'The Economist' by mistake, so he was constantly being offered assistance and information by Summit participants eager to ingratiate themselves with the official organ of orthodoxy. Either the universe has a sense of humor, or it isn't taking a completely laissez-faire approach to the fate of the global environment.

For most of the time, the quality of intergovernmental process hardly seemed adequate to save a planet in acute ecological distress. When South African President Thabo Mbeki was announcing the final changes to the action plan at 8 p.m. on the final day, he did it by referring to a string of just-issued document file numbers. During the first week a significantly better approach was demonstrated by Jan Pronk, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to the Summit, and former Environment Minister of the Netherlands. As moderator of a series of 'Partnership Plenaries' on topics such as agriculture, water and sanitation,

and energy, he brilliantly facilitated panel sessions of about 20 people representing a variety of stakeholder groups ranging from indigenous people to sectors of industry. By focused questioning, moving from one stakeholder to another, he managed to draw the panel to equitable consensus on complex issues.

Unfortunately, as things stand, it's hard to imagine any of the nation states allowing their delegations to participate in a consensus building process of this type and accept the results as binding. But maybe the potential effectiveness of this approach will not have been lost on the country delegates who witnessed these plenary sessions. One day, we may have to do this in earnest.

Meanwhile, the wide range of partnership deals announced during the two weeks—between governments, companies and civil society groups—was touted by business as the great success of the Summit. Most of the 1000 or more partnerships had already been agreed, but the disappointingly narrow focus of governmental horse-trading, mainly aimed at avoiding binding targets, made it relatively easy for big business to lay claim to the high ground.

Whether or not this partnership activity can achieve real change remains to be seen, but it is beginning to look as if the enlightened end of business and the action-oriented part of the civil sector are now beginning to champ at the bit. In a panel discussion during the Summit, Philip Watts, the Chairman of Royal Dutch/Shell, declared that Shell had been ready five years ago to act to reduce carbon dioxide output, but that government inaction had wasted five years. Many Japanese corporations probably feel the same, but their voices are less audible on the world stage. Alert politicians would do well to take note of this sentiment, because once governments begin to be seen as unresponsive to clearly visible solutions, it implies that political thinking is slipping dangerously out of touch.

Most of the companies attending the Summit made it clear that they regard sustainability as an opportunity rather than an imposition. This shift in thinking has caught

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the attention of major management consulting companies, who are jumping on the bandwagon by developing sustainability practices. In the run-up to the Summit, the awkwardly named PriceWaterhouseCoopers was exhorting corporate CEOs to show they 'get it' by attending. To make the point they published a survey of 140 leading U.S. based companies, in which 75 percent said they have adopted some sustainable business practices, and 89 percent believe there will be more emphasis on sustainability in five years.

For some industries the technological path to sustainability is clear, although it may not be particularly easy to accomplish. BMW fielded a major presence at the Summit by filling Sandton Square with half a dozen futuristic exhibit structures featuring their 7 Series hydrogen-fueled car, already in use as a limited-production fleet vehicle, and destined for series production within the next few years.

The basic concept of hydrogen as a fuel is hardly new: that hydrogen can be used to replace gasoline, eliminating climate-changing carbon dioxide emissions and pollution at the same time, because it forms nothing more than water vapor when it burns. The Germans have been exploring for many years the idea of fueling their whole economy on hydrogen, and BMW showed its first hydrogen powered test car as early as 1979. And Iceland is now in the process of converting its entire energy infrastructure from fossil fuel to renewably produced hydrogen.

Still, although the basic chemistry is well understood, there are significant technical challenges in storing the hydrogen on board the car, refueling the car, creating a network of fueling stations, and producing the hydrogen renewably at a reasonable cost. BMW has borrowed technologies from the space program to solve these problems, and is partnering with energy companies to supply the hydrogen. After 20 years of development, the hydrogen economy may finally become a reality.

For other industries, it's a little trickier. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development

(WBCSD) jointly presented the findings of their multi-million dollar Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development (MMSD) study. The 440-page MMSD report is called *Breaking New Ground*. The environmental NGO representatives in the audience were quick to point out that the whole aim of using minerals sustainably would be to avoid breaking the ground. Apparently the CEOs are not the only ones not getting it—all those august technical experts hired for the study (or their publicists) obviously missed the point too.

Yet quite how the mining industry would avoid breaking the ground and still manage to be viable remains one of those pesky technical and economic puzzlers that keep strategic planners awake at night. Corporations like to proclaim their prowess at technological innovation, and the industry's NGO critics clearly believe it can crack this particular enigma in a couple of months if it puts its collective brainpower to work. The Australians, with painful recent experience of unsustainable mining at the environmentally disastrous Ok Tedi copper mine in Papua New Guinea, more safely opted to call their special MMSD country report *Facing the Future*. Perhaps 'Facing the Music' might have been a better title for the main report.

For their part, the South Africans were looking to the Summit itself as an opportunity for revenue from sustainability. The South African treasury was rumored to be holding up the value of the Rand for the duration of the Summit to maximise the gain for the local economy, and many urban facilities in Johannesburg had been refurbished in preparation for the 70,000 people who were expected. Unfortunately only about 45,000 people turned up and there was nervousness that Johannesburg would be left with a deficit in spite of the event being Africa's largest-ever conference.

At Alexandra township, not far from the Sandton Centre, the residents had also geared up for a promised tourist bonanza, spending weeks making craft items for sale. Unfortunately very few Summit participants, whether country delegates or NGO representatives, actually made

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it to the township to tour the stalls. By the last day of the Summit the vendors were in liquidation mode and any sale was better than nothing. This was a pity, because the township's resilience and level of optimistic initiative was worth seeing and supporting.

The government has been replacing Alexandra's corrugated iron shacks with a decent minimal level of housing, and there is NGO assistance with planting and gardening. One elderly woman resident was equally keen to show off both her garden and a bullet scar on her shoulder dating from factional rivalry she claimed was deliberately stirred up by the apartheid government. Both her husband and son had been killed in the fighting. Alexandra attracts a fair amount of political attention, as townships are good for symbolically resonant photo opportunities. British Prime Minister Tony Blair went to the township to plant a tree at the launch of the so-called international forest for sustainable development. He was serenaded by 100 drummers and a throng of media people as he contributed to the project to plant trees throughout Alexandra.

Whether or not world summit meetings are helpful to the local economy, they do have an impact on the environment. At WSSD a partnership initiative called the Johannesburg Climate Legacy (JCL) was created to make the Summit sustainable. JCL calculated that the carbon footprint of the Summit, from travel and energy use, was 350,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide (one thousandth percent of the world total for 2002). In response, it plans to fund 16 projects, aimed at achieving a 'sustainable development legacy' for the Summit, including energy efficiency, and solar energy and fuel from biomass to replace fossil fuel. These projects provide direct and indirect benefits including reductions in carbon dioxide, air quality improvements, reductions in operating cost, and wildlife protection. JCL's goal was to fund the initiative with contributions from individuals attending the Summit, who were offered Climate Legacy Certificates from \$10 to \$150, depending on how far the individual had travelled, and from companies, who were offered certificates ranging from \$1000 to \$10,000. JCL

lapel pins were given to anyone contributing, but to judge by the very few people wearing them and the general lack of awareness of what they were, only a minority of participants actually went to the trouble of paying for their attendance to be carbon neutral.

So, on balance, was the Summit worth a further 350,000 metric ton carbon burden on the environment? What did it achieve, and what clues does it provide about where sustainability is headed next?

As far as the direct achievements of the official negotiating process are concerned, there is not much to report. The official outcome is embodied in the *WSSD Plan of Implementation*, a document that does not move much beyond commitments made in and since Rio. In some cases the text actually constitutes a step backwards—there was a partial retreat from the precautionary principle, and the outdated concept of maximum sustainable yield was used in the agreement on fisheries. The biggest disappointment was the failure to set targets for the development of renewable energy. This failure spurred a group of 30 countries, including the European Union, to pledge at the close of the Summit that they would go further than the official declaration in increasing renewable energy production.

The main accomplishment was the agreement of a target to halve the number of people without access to basic sanitation and clean water by 2015. This will directly help the roughly 2 billion people without access to clean water, and the estimated 1.2 billion without basic sanitation, reducing water-borne diseases and providing the most basic requirement for a healthy life. Another notable achievement was the wording giving multilateral environmental agreements equal standing with multilateral trade agreements. This was at least not a step backwards, but it does not prevent the WTO from trying to make up its lost ground in another forum.

A potentially interesting accomplishment was the agreement to develop a 10-year framework of programs to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption

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and production, as this could have far reaching positive effects throughout the global economy. But in general, the official outcomes were lukewarm at best, leaving NGOs deeply dissatisfied and critical. In the words of the World Wildlife Fund, ‘The meager outcome of the meeting is a consequence of some countries’ conscious efforts to prevent the Summit from agreeing to new targets and timetables. The United States has been the most negative country in this regard, in many cases helped by countries like Australia and Canada.’

There was one significant unexpected outcome of the Summit—Russia and Canada announced that they would ratify the Kyoto Protocol. If they do [see endnote], the emissions of so-called Annex I countries ratifying will exceed 55 percent of total Annex I emissions, meeting the final threshold condition for the Protocol to come into force. This was a surprise because the Protocol was scarcely being discussed at the Summit, presumably because everyone thought it had been scuppered by the earlier American and Australian refusal to ratify it. But pressure built up on Canada and Russia, as countries that had already ratified urged the others to ratify ‘in a timely manner.’

In the middle of the first week, Greenpeace and the WBCSD made a joint announcement calling for governments to ratify the protocol. This uneasy alliance sent a signal to governments that there is no excuse for not adopting a long-term framework for addressing climate change. Bjorn Stigson, head of the WBCSD, said that members of the business coalition wanted to make it clear to the heads of state attending the Summit that, ‘they are not waiting for business to make progress on climate change, but business is waiting for them.’ Tony Blair and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder made strong calls for ratification in their speeches to the Summit. By the end of the Summit, Russia and Canada had decided to join the other 90-odd countries that have already signed up, and Australia, suddenly feeling uncomfortable, announced that it too would ratify in the next few months if the government judged it was in the country’s interests.

As for the future, there were signs at the Summit that the issue of international debt relief is slowly but surely making its way up the ladder of global credibility. There are several serious proposals that are gaining momentum, in particular the UK’s Jubilee Framework, which is a proposed international insolvency framework for indebted nations. A similar initiative by the New Economics Foundation suggests that financial debt should be balanced by the idea of the ‘ecological debt’ owed by rich countries to poor countries. The specter of countries like Argentina being driven to the wall by their international creditors closely followed by headlines around the world spotlighting the social catastrophes that result are getting a little too close to the bone for creditors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which imposes policy conditions that make the problems worse. The IMF is now beginning to pay attention to links between financial and fiscal policy and the issues of sustainable development, and a process of self-examination is under way. At a guess, it would not be surprising to see some form of bankruptcy provision for countries being announced within the next few years.

The Summit did offer some clues about the future of sustainability itself. The WSSD publicity materials were branded with the tagline ‘people, planet and prosperity,’ a variant on the original triple bottom line articulation of sustainability, ‘people, planet, profits’ coined by John Elkington, founder of the UK-based consulting firm SustainAbility. If sustainable development is about finding a balance between social, environmental, and economic issues and objectives, then many of the government participants at the Summit have in fact not yet ‘got it,’ since they exhibited a persistent reflex tendency to put economics ahead of environment and social considerations.

For instance, in the run up to the Summit, Tony Blair announced that his widely respected Minister for the Environment, Michael Meacher, would not be included in the British WSSD delegation. This immediately and unsurprisingly drew indignant protests from environmental NGOs, who embarrassed the government into a change of

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mind by offering to pay his airfare. The puzzling question about this incident is why it was not obvious to the UK government that the environmental portfolio should be a key part of the UK's engagement in the Summit.

Apparently most senior members of governments have yet to internalize the message that sustainability is focused on central concerns and its most basic message is about balance and integrated solutions. Many of them seem to regard sustainable development as a side issue, somehow vaguely related to overseas development. Very few would be bold enough to put it the way Environment Australia, the Federal Government's environment department, does on its website: 'Sustainable development issues now lie at the heart of Australia's national policy development. It has become core business.' Unfortunately, judging by its disappointing record on environmental and social matters, it is doubtful that this is what the Australian government as a whole actually believes.

In most cases, Environment Departments do 'get it' because it is at least *their* core business. They have a hard time persuading their cabinet colleagues of its importance because environment is still seen as an engine room function rather than a main bridge responsibility. And if they push too hard for a focus on sustainability, there is a risk that their colleagues will simply see sustainability as an extension of environmental issues, and decide it too is an engine room function.

Part of the difficulty is that while the environmental dimension of sustainability is at least relatively easy to articulate, the social dimension is much less easy to pin down, even for proponents of sustainability. During the Summit, the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) hosted a panel session focused on the social dimension, featuring the UK Minister for International Development Clare Short in the starring role. She was impressively well-informed on international development issues, and argued effectively for a number of important principles, but the session as a whole did not convey a cogent sense of a social agenda for sustainability.

In the past, the sense of social conviction that guided social policy came from a combination of political ideology and religion. But since the collapse of communism political ideology has been one-sided, and the global spread of capitalism has undermined the older social coherence provided by religion and culture. The loss of both ideological confidence and social coherence has led to the lack of a clear social agenda. Sustainability is well-positioned to fill this vacuum, but only if it can develop a set of social aspirations that people everywhere around the world feel they can embrace. This set of common values is unlikely to emerge through intellectual analysis, but it could emerge from the growing worldwide interfaith and spirituality movement, which is steadily reshaping and broadening traditional religious belief.

Meanwhile, sustainability theory and methodology are gathering momentum, and as they mature they could well displace economic theory as the primary source of inspiration for policy setting and strategy. At present there are multiple competing methodologies and frameworks for sustainability, including Elkington's Triple Bottom Line; the Swedish Natural Step; the concept of Natural Capitalism developed by Paul Hawken and Amory and Hunter Lovins; Robert Gilman's 'five capitals' (human, social, natural, manufactured and money capital), and a related approach used by Jonathon Porritt at the UK-based Forum for the Future; the 'BITE' framework (biophysical, institutional, technical and ethical dimensions) being used by UK's DFID; and others. In spite of their apparent differences, these approaches have much in common and point to the gradual emergence of a single worldwide model, coalescing as the existing frameworks gradually evolve.

Germany has already experienced this convergence on a national scale. The German Government now has a clearly formulated strategy for sustainability of which the Minister of State at the Federal Chancellery Hans Martin Bury says, 'Discussions about sustainability went on for years. It was not concepts that were lacking, but ways of putting them into practice. The Federal Government has made the model

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of Sustainable Development into a fundamental principle, and the Federal Government's most important projects for reform are guided by it.'

In the United States sustainability is less visible, but there are numerous progressive social and political initiatives pointing in the same direction. The social researchers Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson have identified a hidden constituency of around 30 percent of the U.S. population who combine concerns about social issues and the environment with a desire for fulfilling and ethical livelihood. This is effectively the triple bottom line agenda of sustainability. Ray and Anderson call members of this subculture 'cultural creatives' and say that they remain hidden largely because they tend to see themselves merely as isolated individuals whose personal values differ from the mainstream. Ray describes the emergence of this group as creating a new political dimension distinct from the old left and right categories, resulting in what he calls a 'new political compass.' The unfamiliar political orientation formed by this emerging social perspective requires a new kind of political message. So far, Ray says, the U.S. politician who is consciously and best articulating this message is **Democratic Representative Dennis Kucinich, of Cleveland, Ohio.**

All this suggests that sustainability might be set to become a substitute for political ideology. The most recent—and under-appreciated—attempt to forge an entirely new political ideology was the Third Way, articulated by sociologist Anthony Giddens, and espoused by Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. In the UK it became an attempt to embrace corporate globalization while taking active counterbalancing steps to ensure 'social inclusion,' but failed because the electorate was not persuaded that it was any more than a cosmetically-enhanced version of laissez-faire capitalism on a global scale. In effect, we have reached the same stage globally that the individual industrialized countries had reached within their own borders 100 years ago. The deep-seated need for a new message of hope means that in the future a combination of sustainability

and spirituality may eclipse political ideology and religion in the hearts and minds of the world's citizens.

Is this possible? The lasting legacy of the Johannesburg Summit may be an echo of the message South Africa itself sends to the world. Nelson Mandela introduced an IUCN presentation with the words 'You can't bluff me.' After waiting a few seconds for uncertainty to take hold, he continued, 'I know you have only come here to see what an old man looks like.' That particular old man knows only too well the cynical duplicity that goes on behind closed doors in the corridors of power, but he also knows about the power of hope. The remarkable thing about South Africa is that it made the transition from repression to democracy almost without bloodshed. The many ordinary black South Africans working in and around the Summit provided service without resentment in spite of the immense past injustices they had suffered. Far from being fearful of future change, they had embraced it.

South Africa has been through an enormously difficult period, but the lasting feeling remains one of goodwill and optimism. The revolution has not simply been political, but is an unfolding revolution of the spirit. Throughout the Summit, African culture in the form of dance, drumming and music was a constant presence, opening hearts and feelings. Black Sangoma women spoke about the African peoples' relationship to the Earth, to 'the mother,' presenting a very different voice from the dry debates in the plenary sessions. National delegates, who spent the day scrutinizing endless tedious document revisions, danced together in the evening to irresistible African rhythms. And as the drumbeat faded into the night, the haunting message from Johannesburg was that all of us around the world can go into this huge change together, with hope, and that we need not be fearful because no one has to be hurt. The stakes may be high, for we have a world to lose, but we also have an entirely new world to gain.

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Endnote: Canada ratified the Kyoto Protocol in December 2002, followed by Russia in October 2004.

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