

CONCLUSIONS OF THE GREENACCORD FORUM
PEOPLE BUILDING FUTURE: MEDIA, DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABILITY
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The international scientific community, with increasing frequency, issues warnings on the global effects of excessive exploitation of resources – from climate change to desertification, to water and food crises, to the scarcity of safe fresh water. This is no longer the world with a population of less than a billion, featuring such a wealth of unexplored natural resources and technological potentiality as abundant as to appear infinite, from which the current consumer economy rose. Today, we are 7 billion, and those resources on which our economy is based are entering a phase of progressive scarcity, moving towards depletion. Scientific analyses predict a worsening of all the negative consequences of development, leading to the risk of blowing away all of humanity's extraordinary progress, returning us to a situation somewhat similar to the early Twentieth Century, but without the potentiality of those years. All seems to confirm the dramatic conclusions of the 2004 update to the Club of Rome report "Limits to Growth", 30 years after its first edition. Therein, it is predicted that pressure on resources, and its consequences on planetary well-being, will worsen during the second decade of this century. How else should we read the current arduous, not yet even fully understood, global economic crisis, if not as a warning sign?

Financial speculation has overwhelmed the economy, compelling the political sector, in the midst of a grave global crisis, to take forcible decisions which contrast with people's actual needs. The "trickle down" of wealth from the highest class to the poorest, theorized by Adam Smith, has been replaced, via the supremacy of the financial markets, by a "bottom-up" movement of wealth, from the poorest to the richest. According to the United Nations Development Program, one fifth of the global population accounts for barely 2% of global income, while the richest fifth covers 74%. Similarly, within individual nations the income gap between the richest and the poorest is widening, reaching levels which are unacceptable from an ethical point of view, as well as generating social tensions and conflicts among nations.

We have investigated into which values, models and strategies might lend breath and body to a new economy, fair and sustainable, grounded into the awareness that our well-being today is meaningless if achieved by mining the foundations of our future well-being. Meanwhile, the current financial collapse is telling us that tomorrow is now.

To call for a boost in consumer spending, as we hear from many sides, might result in beneficial effects in the short term, leading to a rise of the GDP, but there is a concrete risk of sparking new increases in the prices of raw materials and food, which would send the crisis in a deeper downward spiral.

In the absence of the only possible realistic grounds, namely what Planet Earth is able to provide for us – in terms of resources, climate stability, primary biological production, the renewal of clean air, water and soil fertility – financial markets and their rules are reduced to a mere cynical game, in which the rich just keep getting richer. In parallel, we will see the growth of the desperate masses, already numbering in the hundreds of millions, doomed to find death in their home countries because of the lack of resources exported in order to ensure the perpetual growth of the global consumer economy, all too often verging on the superfluous, on instant satisfaction of our each and every whim.

Holding the firm belief that individual well-being cannot be separated from the overall well-being of humankind, of the environment humanity inhabits, and of all the other species which share it, we now know that it is necessary to free ourselves from the absurd paradigm of unlimited growth, which devours the environment and its people, dissolves

networks of social relations, celebrating individualism and conflict, and to replace all this with the promotion of well-being and happiness through more sober lifestyles lived within a rich and plentiful social web.

Prominent scientists from a number of different fields addressed the Greenaccord conference in Cuneo, pointing out the dangerous, and widening, rift between governments and their people, and the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

We urge decision-makers in all relevant fields to concentrate on this, and to initiate appropriate action.

The refusal of signing blank checks to the political class is felt with growing urgency, throughout the planet, especially by the younger generations living an a-temporal present, devoid of future. The political plane appears to be acting on a short-term basis, an attitude inadequate in facing those changes which are required to ensure collective, long-lasting well-being. A truly free system will be one where each individual is free to choose his or her future, to have a paid job, and live a healthy life in a socially and environmentally wholesome setting. In other words, each and every individual must have a guaranteed right to choose a personal pathway to happiness.

For this to come into being, we need to overcome those social and institutional bounds which respond to the damaging logic of the consumer economy, and are destined for failure. Citizens must be guaranteed direct participation in choices which concern their lives, their landscapes, and future generations to come.

Heads of state and of national and local governments must take a first step towards a new democracy, designed to support a sustainable future, by fully implementing participatory democracy mechanisms, beginning with the prescriptions of Agenda 21, almost 20 years after its approval by 178 Governments during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. We ask that essential resources, such as water and agricultural land, be devoted firstly to the satisfaction of the primary needs of local populations. As such, they must be protected and safeguarded against improper use and economic speculation. We also ask that any economic use of natural resources always include ways of safeguarding and guaranteeing their renewal, both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

During our workshops, it emerged that journalists are ready to take responsibility to spread correct information to the public, enabling people to understand the global effects of political decisions and to choose for their future. It emerged that there is a difficulty for journalists in understanding exactly what is happening behind the scenes in the political and economical sphere.

The practical requests expressed include the need for continuous and ongoing training and support to the specialized press; the building of a good network, with a lot of bridges to link old- and new-media professionals. Bloggers need to be in open communication with tv and radio journalists, building a global net wherein to share information all over the world, from every part of the planet. The impact of a strong, connected, team of journalists working on providing good, correct information, is a very powerful one. And these are the reasons we are all in the Greenaccord network.

Those just listed are some of the tools which we feel could enable journalists to push the agenda they believe to be most important.

- Firstly, to urge governments and business to draw clear lines between what are sustainable practices and what not.
- Secondly, to urge their governments to make R&D (research and development) of renewable energy their top priority.
- Next, to analyze and communicate the errors made by developed countries so that developing countries do not incur the same mistakes.

- And, finally, to emphasize the concept of an “ecological path” whenever possible, so as to raise awareness of clean production in all fields.

This is a time in which to organize our ideas with clarity. First of all, the democratic process needs to be defended and spread, all around the world, on several levels. Only through the involvement of civil society can we achieve well-being for all people. We need to abolish those systems which reproduce injustice, with a disparity of rights. We must recreate justice in our societies, in our political processes. To recognize that people need minimal human consumption to preserve their dignity. We need to change lifestyles, consumption cannot be unsustainable. Products must be more ecological. But it is also true that if we reduce our consumption by half, the reaction will be for companies to make their products last only half as long. Our consumption alone does not solve the problem. If we reduce our consumption of, say, a pen, the capitalists will reduce the ink. We need to change the entire system.

Young people are the first to call for a change. A very young person, Felix, showed us today that the solution is simple: if we really care for the future we must act, instead of writing lovely documents, signing excellent agreements, as was done 20 years ago in Rio, and then act them out only partially, insufficiently.

To combine the urgent request for a **hopeful future** made by the young generations, with the **knowledge of the scientific community**, and with the ability of journalists to provide **correct information** to citizens: this is our strength, the key to realizing our necessary utopia.

The lesson to be learned from this forum is that only mind free, as young people have, not “polluted” by old ideas from the past, can find effective solutions for a sustainable future.