

REMARKS BY
WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS
ADMINISTRATOR, UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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TWELVE YEARS AGO THIS MONTH THE DELEGATES OF 113 NATIONS MET AT STOCKHOLM TO DISCUSS, IN BARBARA WARD'S PHRASE, "THE CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF A SMALL PLANET." WHAT A REMARKABLE JOB THEY DID DEFINING FOR THE FIRST TIME AN INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC, AND WHAT A REMARKABLE JOB HAS BEEN DONE IN THE YEARS SINCE, IN PUTTING THOSE IDEAS INTO EFFECT. THROUGHOUT THE INDUSTRIALIZED WORLD WE HAVE SEEN HEARTENING EVIDENCE THAT ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION CAN BE STOPPED AND THAT THE ENVIRONMENT CAN RECOVER.

EVEN MORE DRAMATIC HAS BEEN THE CHANGE IN ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF INDUSTRIAL AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. THOSE OF US WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE INFANCY OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION REMEMBER THE DIFFICULTLY OF CONVINCING HARD-HEADED BUSINESSMEN AND POLITICIANS THAT ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION WAS NOT A TRANSIENT FAD THAT COURTED NATIONAL BANKRUPTCY. ALL DEVELOPED NATIONS NOW UNDERSTAND THAT THEY CAN, INDEED MUST, SELECT ACTIONS THAT PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH WHILE AT THE SAME TIME MAINTAINING A COMPETITIVE ECONOMY.

CERTAINLY ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY REMAINS CONTENTIOUS, BUT THE CONTROVERSY CONCERNS MEANS NOT ENDS, ISSUES NOT OF WHETHER, BUT OF HOW, HOW MUCH AND WHEN. THESE ARE MORE SUBTLE AND DIFFICULT QUESTIONS THAN THOSE WE HAD TO CONFRONT WHEN WE URGED ACTION AGAINST SCORES OF IMMEDIATE AND PRESSING THREATS. THE CRUSADE, IT SEEMS, IS NEARLY OVER; SOMETHING THAT IS A LOT MORE LIKE A CHESS GAME HAS BEGUN.

THIS NEW SITUATION, AS I SEE IT, ARISES FROM THE STATUS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AMENITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTION AS SOCIAL GOODS THAT PEOPLE IN DEVELOPED NATIONS WANT TO BUY IN EVER-INCREASING QUANTITIES. GIVEN STABLE OR SLOWLY GROWING NATIONAL RESOURCES, BUYING MORE OF ONE THING MEANS BUYING LESS OF ANOTHER. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION THUS INEVITABLY INVOLVES SOME KIND OF TRADE-OFF, A BALANCING AMONG DIFFERENT KINDS OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, OR BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND OTHER SOCIAL GOODS. OF COURSE, DIFFERENT NATIONS WILL STRIKE THE BALANCE DIFFERENTLY, DEPENDING ON THEIR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, THE PERCEIVED SEVERITY OF THEIR POLLUTION PROBLEMS, AND THEIR NATIONAL VALUE SYSTEM; THE POINT IS THAT THERE IS ALWAYS A BALANCE.

ACKNOWLEDGING THIS BALANCE BECOMES MORE AND MORE IMPORTANT AS WE BEGIN TO DEAL WITH THE REMAINING INCREMENTS OF POLLUTION AND WITH THE MANY POTENTIALLY TOXIC PRODUCTS PRODUCED BY MODERN INDUSTRY. IN RECENT MONTHS THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY HAS BEGUN TO FOCUS SPECIAL ATTENTION ON THE WAY THAT WE ANALYZE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND THE WAY WE MAKE THESE NECESSARY TRADE-OFFS. OUR GOAL IS ^{TO} MAKE OUR WHOLE SYSTEM FOR DOING THIS AS RATIONAL AND CONSISTENT AS POSSIBLE, AND TO MAKE THE HARD CHOICES INVOLVED IN THE MOST EXPLICIT AND PUBLIC FASHION. WE FEEL THAT PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF HOW AND WHY WE MAKE SUCH CHOICES IS ESSENTIAL TO THE PROPER FUNCTIONING OF OUR AGENCY, AND TO THE EFFICIENT ACHIEVEMENT OF NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS IN THE UNITED STATES.

WE HAVE BEGUN TO USE THE TERM "RISK MANAGEMENT" TO STAND FOR THE WAY THAT WE TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE PROBABLE EFFECTS OF POLLUTANTS, ON HUMAN HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL EFFECTS OF A REGULATORY PROGRAM. THERE ARE SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES THAT GOVERN THE WAY WE DO THIS. FIRST, WE ARE CAREFUL TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN RISK MANAGEMENT, A PROCESS THAT MAY LEGITIMATELY INVOLVE POLITICALLY IMPORTANT VALUES, AND RISK ASSESSMENT, WHICH IS A SCIENTIFICALLY-BASED ESTIMATE OF THE EXTENT OF THE RISK POSED BY EXPOSURE TO A PARTICULAR POLLUTANT.

BECAUSE OF THE TREMENDOUS UNCERTAINTY INVOLVED IN SUCH ESTIMATES, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THEY BE GOVERNED BY WELL-UNDERSTOOD GUIDELINES ON HOW TO MAKE JUDGMENTS UNDER SUCH UNCERTAIN CONDITIONS, AND THAT THE EVENTUAL QUANTIFIED ESTIMATES OF RISK ARE RENDERED WITHOUT INTERFERENCE FROM THE POLITICAL SPHERE. DEVELOPMENT OF SUCH GUIDELINES FOR IMPORTANT CLASSES OF RISK DATA IS CURRENTLY A MAJOR EFFORT AT EPA.

SECOND, WE MUST EXPOSE TO PUBLIC SCRUTINY THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT UNDERLY OUR ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF RISK. THE POINT OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS IS NOT COMING UP WITH THE SINGLE "RIGHT" ANSWER, BUT RATHER THE ORDERLY EXPOSITION OF THE VALUES WE HOLD AND THE REASONING THAT TRAVELS FROM SOME SET OF VALUES AND MEASUREMENTS TO A DECISION.

THIRD, WE MUST DEMONSTRATE THAT REDUCTION OF RISK IS OUR MAIN CONCERN AND THAT WE ARE NOT DRIVEN BY NARROW COST CONSIDERATIONS. BECAUSE WE ARE OBLIGED TO BE EFFICIENT WITH AGENCY RESOURCES AND SOCIETY'S RESOURCES, COST WILL ALWAYS BE A FACTOR, BUT WHERE WE DECLINE TO CONTROL SOME RISK WE SHOULD DO SO BECAUSE THERE ARE BETTER TARGETS, OR BECAUSE THERE ARE MORE EFFICIENT WAYS OF GETTING THE SAME OR SIMILAR BENEFITS. RISK MANAGEMENT IS LARGELY A MATTER OF FOCUSING RESOURCES ON THE MOST IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS.

FINALLY, WE MUST ADMIT THE LIMITS OF QUANTIFICATION. THERE ARE SOME CHERISHED VALUES THAT RESIST BEING QUANTIFIED OR SQUEEZED INTO MONETARY TERMS, BUT ARE NO LESS REAL FOR THAT. AGENTS OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES ARE RESPONSIBLE TO THE PEOPLE, BUT WE SHOULD REMEMBER THAT "THE PEOPLE" REFERS NOT ONLY TO THE WORKING MAJORITY THAT ACTUALLY MAKES CURRENT DECISIONS, AND NOT EVEN TO THE WHOLE OF THE LIVING POPULATION, BUT TO THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE US, WHO PROVIDED OUR TRADITIONS AND OUR PHYSICAL PATRIMONY AS NATIONS, AND TO THOSE WHO WILL COME AFTER US, AND WHO WILL INHERIT WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND. DECISIONS IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL ARENA OFTEN TOUCH ON THIS BROADER SENSE OF PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY, AND WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE IT AMONG THE NUMBERS.

AND INCREASINGLY, AS OUR WORLD SHRINKS FURTHER, THE DECISIONS OF EACH NATION WILL AFFECT THE PEOPLE, IN THAT SAME BROADER SENSE, OF ALL THE NATIONS. FOR THIS REASON, WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ON THE ENVIRONMENT CONTINUES AND FLOURISHES. I BELIEVE THAT THE KIND OF APPROACH WE HAVE DEVELOPED AT EPA CAN BE EXTENDED TO INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL RISK.

WITH ALL OF ITS LIMITATIONS, QUANTIFIED ANALYSIS GIVES US A COMMON BASIS FOR COMPARING THE MANY RISKS WE MUST HANDLE AND DERIVING JOINT PRIORITIES FOR CONTROLLING THEM. A COMMON BASIS FOR ASSESSING RISKS WOULD BE INVALUABLE IN DEALING WITH SUCH PROBLEMS AS THE RISKS CONNECTED WITH SUBSTANCES IN INTERNATIONAL COMMERCE AND WITH THE NATURAL TRANSPORT OF POLLUTANTS ACROSS INTERNATIONAL BORDERS.

AT MINIMUM, WE MUST BEGIN TO SPEAK THE SAME ANALYTIC LANGUAGE SO THAT WE CAN BEGIN TO MAKE SENSE OUT OF THE COMPLEX AND CONFUSING PROBLEMS THAT AFFECT OUR GLOBAL COMMONS. WE HAVE SOME EVIDENCE THAT CHEMICALS USED IN COOLING SYSTEMS AND AEROSOL SPRAYS HAVE THE POTENTIAL FOR DISRUPTING THE OZONE LAYER THAT PROTECTS THE EARTH FROM RADIATION. WE HAVE EVIDENCE THAT CARBON DIOXIDE PRODUCED BY FOSSIL FUEL COMBUSTION HAS THE POTENTIAL FOR CREATING MAJOR CLIMATIC CHANGES. ALTHOUGH THIS EVIDENCE AND THE ACTIONS IT MAY REQUIRE REMAIN CONTROVERSIAL, WE MUST CONTINUE TO EXPOSE ISSUES OF THIS MAGNITUDE TO INTERNATIONAL SCRUTINY.

INTERNATIONAL INTEREST AND COOPERATION SHOULD ALSO BE DRAWN TO THE PROTECTION OF THE MAJOR ECOSYSTEMS--THE TROPICAL FORESTS AND THE OCEANS--WHICH ARE VITAL TO THE HEALTH OF THE PLANET. WE MUST CONTINUE TO SEEK THE COOPERATION OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD IN THIS EFFORT, AS WAS DONE SO SUCCESSFULLY AT STOCKHOLM.

IN ORDER TO COPE WITH THESE PROBLEMS WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE A LONGER VIEW THAN MOST GOVERNMENTS ARE COMFORTABLE WITH TAKING. WITH THESE KINDS OF PROBLEMS IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO AND AN EVEN LONGER TIME TO DO IT. THE ALTERNATIVE TO MAKING SUCH LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS IS A SUCCESSION OF UNEXPECTED AND SHATTERING CRISES. THINK OF HOW MUCH BETTER OFF WE WOULD ALL BE IF THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD HAD LAUNCHED MAJOR PROGRAMS OF ACID RAIN RESEARCH TEN YEARS AGO.

LORD KEYNES POINTED OUT THAT IN THE LONG RUN WE ARE ALL DEAD, AND WHILE THIS IS TRUE OF INDIVIDUALS, THE HUMAN ADVENTURE GOES ON. PUTTING AS MUCH ENERGY AND TALENT AS WE CAN AFFORD INTO THE LONGER VIEW IS, I THINK, IS THE ONLY WAY OF INSURING THAT IT DOES GO ON, IN THE LONG RUN.

STOCKHOLM DEMONSTRATED THAT FROM TIME TO TIME THE NATIONS CAN TURN FROM THEIR DAILY BUSINESS AND DO JUST THAT. THIS CONFERENCE IS, I HOPE, ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION OF THIS, AND OF OUR CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO CREATE, IN THE WORDS OF RENE DUBOS, "HUMANIZED ENVIRONMENTS THAT ARE STABLE, PROFITABLE, PLEASURABLE, AND FAVORABLE TO THE HEALTH OF THE EARTH AND THE GROWTH OF CIVILIZATION."