

## Message from Elizabeth Dowdeswell\*

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THE INTERNATIONAL Conference on *Shaping the Future by Law: Children, Environment and Human Health* has illuminated the status of, and interlinkages between, three of the Earth's most precious resources: its children the health of its people and the environment in which they live. What we see under these searching lights fills us with poignance, alarm and an urgent resolve to do what we can, indeed what we must, for their future betterment. No doubt, it is this compelling desire to effect a change in the *status quo* that has inspired the Indian Law Institute to organize this timely International Conference for advancing the frontiers of law to provide for the future safeguarding of these invaluable resources. UNEP is happy to have been able to co- sponsor this important event.

The theme of the Conference underscores the people-centered nature of and approach to sustainable development which runs like a golden thread through all of the decisions and declarations endorsed by over one hundred Heads of State and Government at the Earth Summit—the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, in June 1992. The global consensus and political commitment reflected at the highest level at the Earth Summit is firmly founded in the conviction that integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improving living standards for all, better

protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future for all mankind. As if to emphasize its overriding importance, the concept finds expression in the very first Principle of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, which declares "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development."

Children constitute one of the most vulnerable groups of society. This only serves to heighten the responsibility of the rest of society to ensure for them a healthy and productive life and to desist from denying them, and generations of children yet to come the full enjoyment of the Earth's bounty the quintessence of sustainable development. The children of today are heirs to the legacy that the adults of today choose to leave to them. It behoves us to exercise that choice wisely. Like the Earth Summit, the 1990 World Summit for Children preceded by the adoption at the United Nations General Assembly the year before of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are of far reaching importance for the future of mankind as they seek to guarantee children's rights including their survival, protection, development individual growth and well-being.

UNEP, designated in Agenda 21 as the principal body within the United Nations system in the field of environment, is undergoing fundamental institutional restructuring and programme reorientation—even a change in mind set—to face up to the pressing challenge of the post-UNCED period, approaching these in a holistic, result-oriented manner

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that is at the same time sensitive to the socio-economic contexts on which they arise. Its post-UNCED mission is to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

Law is one of the most important instruments in building and further strengthening consensus among the community of nations for addressing pressing problems in the field of environment and development. The Rio Declaration, the two major Conventions coming out of UNCED and particularly Agenda 21 require the full utilization of law as an instrument to achieve the integration of environment and socio-economic development. UNEP, has been expressly mandated to include in the areas in which it should concentrate in the post UNCED period, the further development of international environmental law, in particular, conventions and guidelines and the promotion of their implementation, and coordinating functions arising from an increasing number of international legal instruments as well as providing legal and institutional advice to Governments at their request in establishing and enhancing their national legal and institutional frameworks for environmental management for sustainable development.

International Environmental Law is increasingly developing in the direction of sustainable development. The very concept of

international law on sustainable development is currently the subject of a healthy and constructive debate among lawyers, diplomats and policy makers. The process of its development will no doubt bring up many new ideas, concepts and principles. Several of these such as integration of environment and development, common concern of mankind, global partnership, common but differentiated responsibilities, anticipatory and preventive mechanisms and incentives to compliance have contributed to the elaboration and adoption of the most recent and significant international legal instruments. Environmental law thus becomes not only an instrument for promoting the realization of the goals of sustainable development but also a tool for shaping of a better future.

The International Conference on Shaping the Future by Law: Children Environment and Human Health organized by the Indian Law Institute is a significant contribution to the shaping of a better future by law. I do hope that the momentum given to this process by this conference will be kept up and the partnerships forged, further strengthened and built upon, in our common quest to achieve of tomorrow a better World where they will have cleaner air to breath, cleaner water to drink, be tended to when they are sick and have an environment in which to grow up that will allow them the fulfillment of their aspirations.

