



Address to

World Summit on Sustainable Development

By

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Prime Minister of New Zealand

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(Check against delivery)

The New Zealand delegation has come to this summit to lend its voice to the cause of sustainability.

We come knowing that the ecosystem of our planet is under considerable stress.

The world's population is rising steeply, and all our natural resources are under pressure.

Greenhouse gas emissions are affecting the world's climate, with more extreme weather patterns and more human suffering resulting.

In terms of human health, the old killer diseases like malaria and tuberculosis are still with us, while the new killer, HIV-AIDs, is devastating the worst affected populations and causing radical drops in life expectancy.

The world continues to experience extremes of poverty and wealth which contribute to international instability.

These problems cry out for urgent action on an international scale. No one nation can resolve them, but all nations, all communities, must be part of their resolution.

As New Zealanders we come to this Summit in the belief that the problems can be solved. But doing so will require a far greater international commitment to action than there has been to date.

Like all nations New Zealand aspires to grow its economy.

We aim to do that in a way which is both environmentally sustainable and socially beneficial.

My government believes that there can be no long term benefit from growth based on low environmental standards which degrades our natural heritage, or which fails to lift the quality of life for our people. And we have made a particular commitment to working in partnership with the indigenous people of our country so that they too are able to reach their full potential.

We are drawing together our many existing economic, environmental, and social strategies to form an overarching sustainable development strategy for New Zealand

We take our international commitments seriously, and we aim to ratify all United Nations conventions which contribute to sustainability.

We have taken the decision to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, and legislation to enable us to do that is presently before our Parliament.

Over the past year, New Zealand has refocused its development assistance programme so that poverty eradication becomes its key objective. That means a renewed focus on access to adequate healthcare, food, water, shelter, and basic education. It also means promoting access to work, and to supporting sustainable resource use, agriculture, and trade.

Our aid programme also supports good governance, recognising that sustained development is impossible without it.

New Zealand is a small developed nation in a region with many needs. We have made the development of the small South Pacific nations a first priority for our development assistance budget, and we have worked with them to see the needs of small island developing states prioritised at this Summit.

Small island nations are especially vulnerable to sea level rise, to degradation of the marine environment and the overexploitation of fisheries, and to the scarcity of fresh water. These are all core issues for this Summit.

Inevitably a summit on this scale invites cynicism. Contrasts are drawn between the opulence of this convention centre and neighbouring hotels on the one hand, and the poverty of the nearby townships on the other.

As we meet here to discuss sustainable development and poverty eradication, thirteen million of our fellow world citizens face starvation to our north, following prolonged droughts and failed harvests. In one case this disaster has been made much worse by deliberate and cynical government policies.

Yet the very existence of these contrasts compels people of conscience to meet here at this time. We have it within our power as an international community to set and meet achievable targets for the reduction of poverty, for access to clean water and sanitation, for renewable energy, for conserving our fisheries and forests and maintaining our biodiversity, and phasing out the export subsidies on agriculture which are so damaging to the developing world.

The last two years have seen a number of remarkable international meetings resulting in strategies beneficial to development. But what distinguishes this Summit from the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, the agenda set at Doha by the WTO, and the Monterrey Consensus is its focus on sustainability. A push for trade and development which ignores the planet's ecological limits will ultimately fail. A push for trade and development which fails to meet basic human needs will also ultimately fail.

New Zealand is looking for firm commitments on sustainability from this Summit. The problems are well defined, and the solutions are reasonably obvious.

What has been lacking is the political will to act. We owe it to future generations to deliver.