BACKGROUND DOCUMENTATION

WWC MEETING BUDAPEST

CRITICAL WORLD ISSUES AND TRENDS REPORT

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
POPULATION GROWTH
TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT
GLOBAL GOVERNANCE
VALUES AND ETHICS
ECOLOGICAL TRENDS

--Current Status;
--Probable Conditions if Current Trends Unfold Without Major Change;
--Actions Required to Positively Transform Current Trends

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This Report is submitted to the Members of the World Wisdom Council for consideration at the meeting of the Council in Budapest on December 18-19, 2004.

NOTE. *The present General Report lists a number of major areas that are of concern to the human community as a whole, and hence also to the World Wisdom Council. Members are asked to prioritize the areas to which they suggest the WWC should give consideration at its next meeting, or add further areas to those discussed here. The Draft Agenda of the meeting, which will include discussion of the two Special Reports as well, will be prepared according to the priorities expressed by Members.*

Ervin Laszlo

The undertakings pledged by states at the UN Millennium Summit in the year 2000, the promises of increased development assistance, fair trade, market access and debt relief for developing countries have not been implemented. Poverty continues to be the world's most widespread and dangerous scourge. Millions of people become victims of hunger and disease and entire nations suffer from feelings of frustration and despair. This creates fertile ground for extremism and terrorism. The stability and future of the entire human community are thus jeopardized. Further, scientists are warning us that failure to solve the problems of water, energy and climate change will lead to a breakdown of order, more military conflicts and ultimately the destruction of the living systems upon which civilization depends.

Statement of the 5th Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates
November 12, 2004

We may be in a race between the increasing proliferation of threats and our increasing ability to improve the human condition. This situation drives many people around the world to fight destructive fatalism by implementing innovations benefiting humanity. Yet the emergence of world consciousness strategically focused on global challenges is too often distracted by trivia in the media, government pettiness, valueless marketing, the daily complexities of survival, and all forms of information pollution. After eight years of accumulative global futures research it has become increasingly clear that humanity has the resources to address its global challenges; what is less clear is how much wisdom, goodwill, and intelligence will be focused on these challenges.

State of the Future Report 2004

Overview of Critical World Issues and Trends

1. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Current Status

Humankind continues to face many daunting global challenges in 2004: 1.1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water, more than 1 billion people live in slums and squatter communities, 3 billion people live on less than two dollars a day, 25 countries are facing food emergencies, and about one out of every three children under five (150 million) is malnourished with millions of children dying unnecessarily every year, and 2.4 billion people lack adequate sanitation. Yet the current population of 6.4 billion is forecast to grow to 8.9 billion by 2050, with 98% of the growth expected to occur in the developing countries. The developed countries are suffering from aging, declining populations and the need to provide retirement benefits, while the developing countries are suffering from growing populations with extremely limited opportunities. More than 30 new and highly infectious diseases have been identified in the last 20 years such as AIDS, Avian flu, Ebola, SARS, and cross-species viruses in Africa and for many there is no treatment, cure or vaccine.

At the same time over the past 20 years income per capita has grown almost 10%, life expectancy has increased about seven years, secondary school enrollments have grown by 30%, and infant mortality has dropped by almost 40%. However, the ratio of the average income of the top 5% to the bottom 5% of the population has grown from 6:1 in 1980 to over 200:1 today. Some 20% of the world receives 80% of the income, and 250 billionaires have as much wealth as three billion of the world's poor people. Massive income and wealth disparities continue to increase both within states and among them.

Annual global annual military budgets have reached nearly 1 Trillion US dollars. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute cites 19 major armed conflicts in 2003 that each had 1,000 or more deaths. Ten of these conflicts were over the question of government and the remaining 9 over disputed territory. The vast majority of conflicts are intra-state, and civilian fatalities in these climbed from 5% in 1900 to more than 90% in the 1990s. Rising terrorism and conflicts in the Middle East and the unsettled conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to be major sources of global instability. The University of Maryland Minorities at Risk Project lists 285 minority groups that could be in future conflicts due to different forms of injustice. Over 53,000 UN peacekeepers from 96 countries are deployed in 15 missions on three continents. And, in addition to the accelerating proliferation of existing nuclear weapons technology, the world is today on the verge of militarizing space and developing new weapons systems with untold consequences.

Cultures, ethnic groups and religions are also in conflict, both externally and internally among themselves. The current resurgence of intolerance, racism and political conflict add to the growing threats of terrorism and war.

Nonetheless, the majority of the people of the world lives in peace, dialogues among differing worldviews are increasing, formal EU and informal East Asia regional groupings are contributing to international stability, and intra-state conflicts are increasingly settled by international mediation and, if necessary, intervention. Human rights standards are increasing in importance relative to national sovereignty, and the International Criminal Court has begun operations. The growth of democracy and international trade, the global visibility provided by news media, by the Internet and by satellite surveillance, the increased world travel and better living standards, are evidence that a more peaceful and sustainable evolutionary path is possible for humanity.

Probable Conditions if Current Trends Unfold Without Major Change

Probable future trends if continued along present trajectories include: increased conflict between nations and peoples over resources, increased poverty in the many parts of the developing world, nuclear and biological warfare, terrorism, disease pandemics, economic upheaval, global warming, ozone depletion, diminishing biodiversity, energy shortages, food and water shortages, and extensive rainforest depletion among other things. By 2050 more than 2 billion people could be living in water-scarce areas, forcing masses of people into inhumane conditions. Without sufficient nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation it is reasonable to expect increased migrations, conflicts and disease. Increasing global instability and conflict over diminishing resources is the likely future if current trends unfold without major change.

Underlying the catastrophic consequences of linearly unfolding trends is the inverse relationship between economic growth and the Earth's eco-systems. Increased economic growth and consumerism depletes natural wealth. This creates a non-sustainable situation. If the world economy as now structured continues to expand it will end up by destroying its natural support systems and global civilization will decline and ultimately collapse. Humanity is in a race between the increasing proliferation of threats and its increasing ability to improve its condition.

Actions Required to Positively Transform Current Trends

The broadest preferred future for humanity can be simply stated as: "A sustainable, just and peaceful world based on a human population living in harmony with nature." Humankind is presently far from reaching this goal and appears to be moving in the opposite direction. What actions can be undertaken to shift humanity towards it?

The most fundamental action strategy towards a positive future for humankind to undertake is the re-prioritization of its budgetary expenditures at all levels of society in every nation. One need only consider that annual global annual military budgets have reached nearly 1 Trillion US dollars, while the UN's estimate for states to meet their Millennium Development Goal commitments is only 50 Billion US dollars—just 5% of what the world spends on arms. In addition, even these modest development goals, endorsed by every member state of the UN, have not been met to date. Responsible leadership is urgently needed from governments worldwide in this regard. If governments will not make these essential changes it

falls upon the world's people to demand them in mass popular movements. Clearly, the long-standing national funding priorities for war over peace, conflict over cooperation and weapons over food, shelter and education must be quickly reversed if humanity is to reach the preferred future. The alternative is equally clear.

Another fundamental action strategy to address global challenges and opportunities towards a positive future is global education. Accordingly, it is crucial to identify the most effective educational materials, curricula, and distribution media for global education as well as institutional arrangements to accelerate individual and group and community learning. Educating children to become responsible global citizens will influence adults and thus the entire population. UNICEF estimates that it would cost $7 billion a year over 10 years to educate the world. World governance must evolve to address shared global challenges and opportunities. Coupled with this is the extraordinary growth of global standards and those who seek to meet them. It is clear that widespread cultural and consciousness change is necessary to address our global challenges. Reaching the preferred future and the specific goals of sustainable development, genuine world democracy and justice, ending religious and ethnic conflict, preventing AIDS and other diseases, ending violence against women, etc., requires such cultural and consciousness change. The tools of globalization, such as the Internet and global trade, need to be utilized to help cultures adapt in a way that preserves their unique contributions to humankind while improving the overall human condition.

2 SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Current Status

Humanity may have consumed more of the Earth's natural resources in the 50 years since World War II than in all of history prior to that time. Half the world's forests and 25% of the coral reefs are now gone. Some 9.4 million hectares of forest area are lost annually worldwide. The "consume and dispose" engine that drives today's industrial economies is a multi-pronged challenge. Subsidies for extraction and harvesting of metals, timber, and other virgin materials; advertising that equates self-worth with ownership of goods; and land use policies that promote materials-intensive urban sprawl are just a few of the engines that drive excessive consumption. Numerous international organizations have documented the massive and increasing environmental damage caused by the intensive consumption of fossil fuels, natural resources, agricultural products, forest products, fresh water supplies and countless other natural resources.

In its Living Planet Report 2004 the Worldwide Fund for Nature states that in 2001 humanity's Ecological Footprint was 2.5 times larger than in 1961, and exceeded the Earth's biological capacity by about 20 per cent. This overshoot depletes the Earth's natural capital, and is only possible for a limited time.

The 'global consumer' now totals some 1.7 billion people—nearly a quarter of the world population. Almost half of this population segment now lives in developing

countries, which also have the greatest potential to expand the ranks of global consumers.

Declarations on sustainable development have not yet been matched by concerted actions for global change. The lack of global implementation of the UN's Millennium Development Goals and the modest reductions of CO_2 under the Kyoto Treaty are recent cases in point.

Probable Conditions if Current Trends Unfold Without Major Change

In a scenario based on the current growth model, increasing human population and development over the coming years will intensify environmental damage and climate change to a 'point of no return.' Whether, and how long before, this point is reached is of crucial concern.

Unsustainable forms of development pose the greatest threat to the future of humanity. Yet without some form of development billions of people are condemned to poverty, and many population segments could collapse.

Actions Required to Positively Transform Current Trends

Sustainable socio-economic development requires sustainable consumption. The shift to sustainable consumption presupposes a massive, on-going information and education campaign: continuously informing and engaging the global public through educational efforts that stress the quality of human life when in harmony with nature, along with what individuals and groups can do to change consumer behavior; initiate environmental tax reforms; and move from a fossil fuel economy toward a sustainable 'knowledge/wisdom' based economy. Individual conservation of diminishing resources is critical as is improved efficiency and pollution reduction in industrial processes.

Governments can stimulate economic investments in sustainable solutions; environmentally inefficient subsidies can be abolished; environmental costs can be included in the pricing of natural resources and products; investments can be encouraged in socially responsible businesses; the environmental standards ISO 14000 & 14001 can be adopted by more countries and companies; an international public/private funding mechanism can be created for high-impact technologies such as carbon sequestration or space solar power and for acquiring the rights to innovate "green" technologies such as alternative energy sources; key habitats can be declared off-limits for human development; a World Environment Organization with powers like the WTO can be created; and clean air, water, and land can be declared a human right.

3 POPULATION GROWTH

Current Status

Human population has grown more in the last 50 years than in all of previous human history. World population in the year 1900 was about 1.5 billion people. In late 2004, the world population is approximately 6.4 billion people—over a

fourfold increase in just over 100 years—and is increasing at approximately 90 million people annually. Rapid population growth has strained many countries' capacities to address social issues, leaving many in poverty and driving a downward spiral of economic misery.

Probable Conditions if Current Trends Unfold Without Major Change

The United Nations Population Division forecasts a world population of approximately 7.85 billion by 2025 and 8.92 billion by 2050, using the medium range forecast. 98% of population growth is expected to occur in the developing countries.

If current trends continue by 2050 fertility rates will fall below replacement level for 75% of the developed world. The median age will increase from 26 to 37, life expectancy frfom 65 to 75, and there will be 2 billion people who are 60 or older—more than those are under the age of 15. Retirement and health care systems will have to change. Increasing stress on nations and the biosphere due to rapid population growth is likely lead to greater poverty, disease and conflicts over resources.

Actions Required to Positively Transform Current Trends

A stable world population needs to be achieved where fertility and mortality rates are balanced at a low level of population input and output. In the developing world, where 98% of population growth will occur, high fertility, the factor that creates unbalanced population dynamics, needs to be strongly reduced by governments, institutions and civil organizations. Positive action in this regard includes increased income, improved literacy, economic empowerment and education of women, urbanization, nutrition and health programs, and improved and inexpensive contraceptives and family planning.

4 TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Current Status

Over the past 25 years, revolutions in technology have altered the human condition in countless ways. Nearly 13% of humankind is on-line. Computer chips, the Internet, telecommunications, new materials, genomics and biotechnology, computational sciences, collaborative software have changed the way people work, live and think worldwide. Scientists are now able to contemplate proteins embedded in a cell's membrane merely tens of billionths of a meter across, organic transistors with a single-molecule channel length, gene variants for schizophrenia, depression, and other mental diseases, and robot surgery.

However, unprecedented technological advances have also had a negative impact on nature and a dehumanizing effect on people. With the current forms of economic growth and consumer behavior technology has transformed the wealth of the Earth into the wealth of humanity. As human wealth is based on the Earth’s capital, the more resources we convert the more wealth we appear to have, but this conversion finite since the Earth’s resources are finite. Ultimately the Earth’s capital will be largely expended and this could have catastrophic consequences. The more

efficient the technologies of conversion, the faster it occurs, And faster the Earth's resources are used up, the closer humanity comes to an irreversibly unsustainable condition.

Probable Conditions if Current Trends Unfold Without Major Change

Technology is likely to evolve rapidly for the next 25 years, fuelled by further revolutionary developments. Nanotechnology, biotechnology, genetic engineering, information technology and cognitive science will dramatically increase individual and group performance and the support systems of civilization. Such advances will range from biometrics to greatly enhanced computer modeling of the Earth's systems, from restoring brain functioning and eyesight to increased human longevity. New approaches based on the new developments will integrate sciences, engineering, medicine, and business and change the very nature of economic activity. Humankind will be able to accelerate efficiency, create better medicines and more nutritious foods using less land and water, and improve learning and mental health. Artificial intelligence with quantum computing will increase collective intelligence, and space sciences will open new technological and societal frontiers.

However, ongoing advances in technology will also continue to enhance humanity's ability to convert the Earth's capital resources to match expanding human needs. The continuation of the current unsustainable economic models and forms of technological applications will bring humanity progressively closer to the point of irreversible, or nearly irreversible, collapse.

In addition, with each advance in technology a new threat appears. For example, in the 20th Century nuclear power gave rise to the threat of nuclear war and accident. In this Century, biotechnology is giving rise to the threat of bioterrorism. The risks incurred by the new technologies and their applications are unprecedented, and at the present time not fully predictable.

Actions Required to Positively Transform Current Trends

The requirement is to progress toward the development and use of 'sustainable technologies' that harmonize human activity with nature, emulate natural systems and minimize human impact on the Earth and on other life-forms. Such technologies can help humanity conserve the Earths capital, its non-renewable and renewable resources, using alternative sources of energy. If humanity is to avoid a collapse over the next decades, governments, institutions and corporations need to utilize foresight and develop policies that will encourage societal investment in sustainable current and yet-to-be-developed technologies,

A further essential course of action is the creation of a global Science and Technology organization associated with the United Nations, to bring together the world's knowledge in a more effective fashion, creating and drawing on data banks from many countries and organizations. Such a system could elucidate the risks and opportunities on new technologies on a cumulative basis.

International scientific assessments of new technologies should be conducted and whatever is found feasible and desirable should be developed on the 'fast-track' in order to address the principal global challenges. Technologies that are determined to be too risky for humanity to develop at the present time should be put on hold, enforced by national governments. Global collaboration via the Internet should be fostered for new technologies, and research should focus on how to create a sustainable form of development implementable by all countries and populations,

5 GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Current Status

Today's world is composed of over 200 putatively sovereign nation-states, 191 of which are member states of the United Nations.

The nation-state is a form of governance that evolved in Europe beginning in the early 16th Century. The United Nations was created in 1945 in the aftermath of the worldwide destruction and major geopolitical shifts caused by World War II. Forms of governance in nation-states range from totalitarian dictatorships to vibrant democracies. Although the number of democracies is growing while dictatorships are decreasing, approximately 50 nation-states have failed in creating democratic regimes.

As global challenges and threats increase, so does the need for global cooperation and coordination to address them and to take advantage of the vast opportunities the challenges provide through appropriate solutions. However, the mechanisms and institutions currently in place to increase and enhance global cooperation and coordination by nation-states have either proved ineffective or do not yet exist. Humanity is using tools and approaches inherited from past Centuries to solve the problems that arise in the 21st Century. If the required global-scope mechanisms and institutions are not quickly established, humanity may be unable to respond appropriately and in time to many of the problems that cannot be solved by any one nation by itself.

According to the Commission on Global Governance's 1996 report, the foundation for effective global governance is the widespread readiness to accept a 'global civic ethic' based on "a set of core values that can unite people of all cultural, political, religious, or philosophical backgrounds." This ethic must be reinforced by the belief "that governance should be underpinned by democracy at all levels and ultimately by the rule of enforceable law."

In September of the year 2000 at the U.N. Millennium Summit the governments of the world committed themselves to a global agenda. The Millennium Declaration was adopted, and a host of treaties and declarations was signed. Nearly every government pledged to devote serious efforts to ending the scourge of war, reducing the dire poverty and hunger that afflict hundreds of millions, stabilizing the global environment, and ensuring the basic rights of all people.

Nevertheless in 2004 the world appears to be moving in the direction of a return to the system of government of previous centuries. The terrorist attack on the USA on September 11, 2001 appears to have caused a break in the evolution of a system of global cooperation and coordination based on shared ethics and goals. The resurgence of the sovereignty of the nation-state (at least of the powerful states), the 'unipolar world' perspective, the lack of faith by some powerful governments in international institutions, and the lack of acceptance and enforcement of international treaties, all point in a regressive direction.

Probable Conditions if Current Trends Unfold Without Major Change

Existing international institutions and levels of national governmental cooperation will be inadequate to address growing global challenges. A case in point is the above-mentioned Millennium Summit of the United Nations and its Millennium Declaration Goals.

In April 2004, the World Economic Forum's Global Governance Initiative released its comprehensive analysis of the world's progress towards realizing the UN's Millennium Declaration Goals, endorsed by the leaders of 189 countries. The Report's concluded: "The Millennium Development Goals are not mere pious aspirations. They are the fundamental building blocks of global stability in what has become a tightly interconnected world. But too often the governments are scarcely trying. And the "non-state" actors on the international scene—businesses and civil society groups—are neither able nor willing to compensate for the inadequacies of government efforts. Across the board the world is failing to put forward even half the effort needed to meet the world's basic goals."

Accordingly, without significant and timely change, nations of the world will be in on-going and expanding conflict over access to dwindling resources, and over wealth disparities and ideological differences. In a world armed with tens of thousands of nuclear weapons ready to be launched at a moment's notice, given the potential for bio-terrorism and new forms of warfare such as genetic and space warfare, and with annual national military budgets totaling upwards of 1 trillion US dollars, if present trends continue without major change the future of humanity appears dismal.

Actions Required to Positively Transform Current Trends

The alternative to a peaceful world where humanity learns to live in harmony with nature is the collapse of civilization and the likely near-extinction of the human species. If humankind is to survive the coming decades without unprecedented and irrevocable disasters, current institution of international governance must be greatly strengthened, while new institutions and forms of democratic world governance must be created. Enlightened leadership for the common good is required at all levels of society, ranging from ordinary citizens to Presidents, Prime Ministers and other leaders, including corporate leaders and opinion leaders in the media, in entertainment, and in the arts. The widest layers of the public must be engaged to address the growing global challenges as informed and motivated 'global citizens'.

6 VALUES AND ETHICS

Current Status

Traditional values and ethics are breaking down in response to rapid globalization, unprecedented technological change and growing cultural conflict. In times of upheaval many people look to the past and traditional values for answers. Others look for solace, comfort and guidance from their belief in a higher power. Still others try to maximize personal gain at the expense of others in order to 'ride out' the troubled times. A small but growing segment of people search for new ways of thinking and acting better adapted to our changing times. Greater unity would be required, based on a new consensus on shared values and ethics.

Despite current rhetoric about value-conflict at the cultural level, humanity can be seen to share a number of core values. Values such as compassion, cooperation, justice, democracy, human rights, peace, ecology, honesty, integrity, a safe world of opportunities for our children are shared by the majority of countries and populations.

However, some groups believe that it is in their interest to emphasize differences in cultural values to the point of encouraging intolerance, racism and hatred. Recent 20th century history has shown where such strategies can lead. Values inspired by a single religious or ideological perspective tend to give rise to "us vs. them" divisions, making it impossible to address global problems and challenges.

Consensus on values and ethics relating to economic growth and development are especially critical. The spectrum of alternative values includes traditional values of rapid economic growth vs. values focused on sustainable development; consumerism vs. conservation; and plundering the Earth vs. safeguarding the Earth.

Probable Conditions if Current Trends Unfold Without Major Change

A basis for global values and ethics may be emerging, as evidenced by the establishment of the system of the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, and the emergence of indices of corporate ethics, international inter-religious dialogues, think-tanks, various ISO standards, and a wide variety of non-governmental organizations and Internet-based groupings committed to improved ethical standards. The United Nations, the International Organization for Standardization, Transparency International, and the Olympic Games are all forces favorable to the evolution of a global ethics. There are attempts at developing a global ethics at various levels, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNESCO's Universal Ethics Project, the Earth Charter, the projects of the Institute for Global Ethics and the recommendations of the ISO's Advisory Group on Social Responsibility for corporate social responsibility.

The positive trends are countered by trends that endeavor a return to values perceived as more in line with particular cultural traditions. At the tip of this counter-movement are fundamentalists who consider that their own particular religion or sect is in possession of the best or the sole 'truth'.

Actions Required to Positively Transform Current Trends

Courses in global values and ethics may need to be instituted at all levels of education as an essential aspect of civic education. Concrete steps need to be taken to implement effective worldwide policies to counter corruption, to encourage the will to act in the shared interest of all people, of those yet to be born, to control lobbying by narrow interest-groups, reduce greed and self-centeredness, lower barriers to freedom of inquiry, and to create cost-effective strategies for implementing programs of global education.

A core set of values and ethics agreed upon by the vast majority of the human family seems required. The global consensus that produced the Earth Charter demonstrates the potential for creating such values and ethics. Making use of the power of the Internet and the increasing number of people going on-line worldwide, this potential can be significantly enhanced.

2 ECOLOGICAL TRENDS

Current Status

Plausible projections of consumer demand in the next few decades suggest a marked escalation of impacts on ecosystems. Consumption of the commodities produced by ecosystems directly—grains, meat, fish, and wood—have increased substantially in the last four decades and will continue to increase as the global economy expands and world population grows. Global wood consumption has increased 64 percent since 1961, world cereal consumption has more than doubled in the last 30 years, and meat consumption has tripled since 1961. The global fish catch has grown more than sixfold since 1950 to 122 million metric tons in 1997. The money spent on private consumption worldwide (all goods and services consumed by individuals except real estate) nearly tripled between 1980 and 1997. Human consumption of the Earth's resources continues to grow exponentially.

Statistics from the World Resources Institute 2002-2004 report indicate an overwhelming human dependence on rapidly deteriorating ecosystems. One out of every six humans depends on fish for protein supplies, yet 75 percent of the world's fisheries are over-fished or fished at their biological limit. Nearly forty-one out of every 100 people live in water-stressed river basins. Some 350 million people are directly dependent on forests for their survival, with global forest cover declining by 46 percent since pre-agricultural times. Water tables are falling on every continent, agricultural land is becoming brackish, and groundwater aquifers are being increasingly polluted.

In regard to bio-diversity, the 2004 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species released in November of 2004 reports that a total of 15,589 species now face extinction. One in three amphibians and almost half of all freshwater turtles are threatened, and one in eight species of birds and one in four species of mammals are in jeopardy.

Human activity triggers rapid climate change including global warming, changed weather patterns, ozone depletion, and widespread pollution. The report on Arctic

Climate Impact Assessment, produced by more than 250 scientists and six circumpolar indigenous peoples' organisations, provides incontrovertible proof that climate change is occurring in the Arctic and will get worse unless emissions of carbon dioxide are drastically reduced. The report warns that a warmer Arctic will have impacts around the world, contributing to global warming and the rise of sea levels. Sea levels could rise by nearly one meter by the end of the century, endangering 17 million people who live less than one meter above sea level in Bangladesh, and putting at risk populations in places as diverse as Florida and Louisiana, Bangkok, Calcutta, Dhaka, and Manila.

Probable Conditions if Current Trends Unfold Without Major Change

The State of the World Report 2004 states that rising consumption in the U.S., in other rich nations and in many developing ones exceeds the carrying capacity of the planet. Forests, wetlands, and other natural areas are shrinking to make way for people and their houses, farms, malls, and factories. Despite the existence of alternative sources, more than 90 percent of paper still comes from trees, consuming about one fifth of the total wood harvest worldwide. An estimated 75 percent of global fish stocks are now fished at or beyond their sustainable limit. And even though technology allows for greater fuel efficiency than ever before, cars and other forms of transportation account for nearly 30 percent of world energy use and 95 percent of global oil consumption.

On the positive side, growing dissatisfaction with current consumption trends has led consumer advocates, economists, policymakers, and environmentalists to develop creative options for meeting people's needs while dampening the environmental and social costs of mass consumption. Public pressure on politicians has led to the implementation of a number of eco-friendly policies in the last 30 years. But whether this trend will continue in the coming years is presently not clear. Due to regressive governmental policies and entrenched economic growth-values, efforts to reduce consumption, preserve ecosystems, and limit human impacts on the weather are faltering.

Actions Required to Positively Transform Current Trends

The best way to shift the environmental policies of governments is to empower citizens through improved public access to information and democratic participation in environmental decision-making. Democratization of environmental decision-making is one of the most direct routes to better environmental decisions and is a powerful lever for better governance in general.

Specific policy actions (as recommended by the Worldwatch Institute) include:

- *Ecological Tax Reform. By shifting taxes so that manufacturers have to pay for the harm they do to the environment, and by introducing production standards and other regulatory tools, governments can help minimize negative impacts on natural resources.*
- *Take-Back Laws. Now being adopted by a growing number of governments around the world, these laws require companies to "take back" products at*

the end of their useful lives, and ban the landfilling and incineration of products.

- *Durability. Industries can take shared responsibility for their ecological impacts by finding ways to reduce the amount of raw material needed to create products and by making goods more durable and easy to repair and upgrade.*
- *Personal Responsibility. Changes in consumption practices will require millions of individual decisions that start at the grassroots regarding everything from the use of energy and water to the consumption of food.*

Personal responsibility is the key element in any effective shift to a sustainable world. Major changes in individual consumption must occur and occur swiftly. There is at present no political will to enforce such change in the vast majority of the world's governments. Consequently the change must come from below: from hundreds of millions of concerned and informed people the world over.

ON-LINE INFORMATION RESOURCES

United Nations	http://www.un.org/
Club of Budapest	http://www.clubofbudapest.com/
World Commission on Global Consciousness & Spirituality	http://globalspirit.org/
Worldwatch Institute	http://www.worldwatch.org/
World Resources Institute	http://www.wri.org/
World Wide Fund for Nature	http://www.panda.org/
World Conservation Union	http://www.iucn.org/
Barcelona Forum 2004	http://www.barcelona2004.org/
World Social Forum	http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/
World Economic Forum	http://www.weforum.org/
World Future Society	http://www.wfs.org/
Earth Charter Initiative	http://www.earthcharter.org/
ACUNU / The Millennium Project	http://www.acunu.org/
Liu Institute for Global Issues	http://www.ligi.ubc.ca/
Forum 2000	http://www.forum2000.cz/
Futuribles	http://www.futuribles.com/home.html
Earth Policy Institute	http://www.earth-policy.org/
Foundation for the Future	http://www.futurefoundation.org/
Global Issues	http://www.globalissues.org/
Global Security Institute	www.globalsecurityinstitute.org
World Federalist Movement	http://www.wfm.org/
State of the World Forum	http://www.worldforum.org/
Millennium Institute	http://www.millenniuminstitute.net/
Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions	http://www.cpwr.org/
Earth Institute	http://www.earth.columbia.edu/
Population Reference Bureau	http://www.prb.org/
Spiral Dynamics	http://www.spiraldynamics.com/
Center for International Development and Conflict Management	http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/