

Statement by

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**at the occasion of the  
United Nations Conference on Environment and Development**

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Dear Mr. Chairman,  
distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

My country, the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, starts, after the recent general elections, on it's second period of transition towards democracy. We are again at a crossroads, with plenty of opportunities, but also many threats and unknown challenges ahead of us. This situation unfortunately does not allow our President Václav Havel to join the World Summit in Rio. But he strongly supports the effort of this unique conference to solve the most pressing and mutually interdependent problems of our planet, the immense poverty in so many countries and the affluent life and overconsumption in some others, the unlimited growth of the human population, and the global deterioration of our environment with massive depletion of the very limited natural resources.

My country, in the heart of Europe, inherited after decades of totalitarian regimes, not only a highly energy consumptive and inefficient economy, but also a heavily deteriorated environment, although in some parts we can still find beautiful nature. Discharge of all kind of pollutants endanger not only the health of the population and nature of Czechoslovakia, but also the North, Baltic and Black Seas, and forests in all the neighboring countries. But also vice versa: about 50% of all atmospheric depositions destroying our landscape are coming from sources located on the territory of other European states. The severe ecological problems of Europe can not be solved by only the isolated effort of a single country or group of

countries. A close pan-european co-operation is inevitable for the restoration of our environment. But even more: in times of continued disintegration in Central and Eastern Europe, which is also threatening its Western part, environmental protection is probably the best framework for the future integration of our continent. I am afraid, that there are no alternatives: national, ethnic, economic, religious and political interests are often so different, that they could<sup>not</sup> form a starting base for the fight against the threat of chaos in our part of the world. We, environmentalists, are thus responsible not only for the solution of environmental problems, but also for the exploitation of this historical opportunity.

And there is also a third extremely important reason for close pan-european ecological cooperation: if we shall not be able to solve our cross-boundary environmental problems on the basis of rational negotiations, these "time-bombs" could explode and even increase growing tension in Europe.

For these three reasons Czechoslovakia together with the European Community and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe organized in Dobříš, June 1991 the first pan-european Conference of environmental ministers with the participation of ministers from the U.S.A., Canada and Japan, but also of the key representatives of many important international and financial institutions. We have established the framework of a future Environmental Programme for Europe orientated on cleaning up of the basins of the main European rivers, and of most of the polluted industrial areas, as well as the preservation or revitalizing of natural areas important for the ecological stability of our continent without

constraint on political borders. I am very glad that the next ministerial environmental conference will be held in Switzerland at the beginning of next year. We are facing some very important problems: the schism between the highly organized western part of Europe with many international or even supranational institutions on one side, and on the other side the almost complete "institutional vacuum" in the Central and Eastern part of Europe, after the inevitable and desirable fall of the former Soviet empire. We have to establish the European Environmental Protection and Restoration System headed by a Council of Environmental Ministers, with a small professional staff. Such an arrangement could considerably improve the coordination of European environmental efforts and thus increase its efficiency.

Czechoslovakia also accepts its share of the responsibility for the solution of global environmental and development problems. We are immediately prepared to sign the Rio Declaration and the Agenda 21, as well as, after completing necessary internal procedures, the Conventions on Biodiversity and Climate Change and the Principles for Forest Management.

Czechoslovakia is supporting developing countries in their effort to combat poverty, population explosion, and environmental deterioration, even if our financial means are limited in this difficult period of transition. We are organizing training courses for foreign experts, especially in the field of transfer of environmentally friendly technologies and products. And we do not like to "fight" with developing countries for the financial

resources of donor states. We should be partners, even if some short term assistance could help us to overcome our economic and environmental problems to make our contribution to the world community more efficient.

Mr. Chairman,

I can assure you that Czechoslovakia considers the United Nations a natural framework for the effective international cooperation in pursuit of sustainable development at the global scale. But the world has been changed very substantially since 1945. Many new, unpredictable problems have emerged, and some old ones have not been solved. It is time to reconstruct and revitalize the UN System, to adapt it in order to meet the new needs of sustainable development, whilst preserving all its proven advantages. It will probably be necessary to abolish some inefficient UN practices, and to develop principles and structures which would be better tailored for the problems we face at the end of the 20th century and which we can foresee for the beginning of the next century. One of the main tasks is to establish a much more powerful and efficient global environmental protection and restoration system.

We can distinguish two time horizons in carrying out the inevitable changes of the United Nations. In short time horizon we should focus on the increasing efficiency of the existing UN structure. The ongoing reorganization of the UN secretariat, as introduced by the new Secretary-General, represents a very important first step in this direction. But we should simultaneously start to think about the more distant time horizon.

We need a vision of the future, a vision of a more effective, more socially and environmentally oriented, and less expensive UN System. Without such a vision, without a blueprint of a future UN System, all the practical steps in the near future could be just an application of the trial and error method. And, I am afraid, it might be fatal to make substantial errors now.

There are several options on how to set up such a blueprint for the structure of a revitalized UN System. One of them may be based on a two-dimensional matrix structure, where 'columns' may represent four main institutional 'pillars' of the future UN System: a security system, an economic system, a social system and an environmental protection system. These systems have to work together at all levels - local, regional, national, as well as global ones, but preserving their specific points of view, necessary for distinguishing main facets of all really important problems. We should give up the illusion, that the integration of all these four main aspects of future development could be the responsibility of one institution. The long time and very bitter experience of Czechoslovakia as well as of other former "socialist" countries is quite clear: it simply does not work.

The second structure ('rows') of the future UN system could be based on the strengthening of UN regional offices in such a way that these offices would be able to handle all the important problems of the different continents or parts of them. Such a decentralization of UN activities can be extremely important not only for increasing of efficiency of UN operations, but also for the preserving and supporting of the cultural

diversity of Mankind. Such an effort will be equally important as the attempt to preserve the biodiversity of our planet since the increase of homogeneity of human society is accompanied also by the sharp increase of its vulnerability, dangerous not only to homo sapiens, but also to an immense number of other species.

Close cooperation of these proposed two structures could improve the flexibility and efficiency of the whole UN system reflecting specific conditions and cultural diversity of different parts of our planet. Further details of this proposal can be found in the UNCED Network'92, last January's issue.

Within the framework of the Commission on Sustainable Development it could be useful to establish a special working team analyzing the different alternative blueprints for a revitalized and sustainable development oriented UN System. This team will have to finish its work before 1995, the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Charter.

There is no possibility to introduce the idea of sustainable development into reality without thorough changes of existing human values, where egoism and selfishness, plundering of nature, and haughty overestimation of our knowledge too often predominates. We have to rediscover human values such as modesty, altruism, solidarity and A. Schweitzer's "respect for life". We have to remember, that people once knew the secrets of living with nature, and that this knowledge still exists

in some parts of the world. But at the same time we should analyze the enormous amount of scientific information which has been collected by mankind, and we should internalize some general rules of human behavior compatible with more sustainable and less selfish ways of life.

Mr. Chairman,

The UNCED is a unique opportunity to solve the pressing global problems or at least to start the process of their solution. We can not miss this opportunity. The following generations could not forgive us for any failure. Let me wish all the succes to our common effort.