

A MANIFESTO FOR LIFE

In Favour of an Ethic for Sustainability*

Introduction

1. The environmental crisis is a crisis in civilization, a crisis in the economic, technological and cultural model that has plundered nature and subjugated alternative cultures. The prevailing civilization model degrades the environment, looks down on cultural diversity and discriminates against “others” (indigenous people, the poor, women, black people and the South), while it gives priority to an exploitative form of production and a consumerist lifestyle that have become dominant in the globalisation process.
2. The environmental crisis is the crisis of our times. It is not an ecological crisis, but a social crisis, the result of a mechanistic worldview which, while ignoring the biophysical limits of nature and the lifestyles of different cultures, is accelerating global warming on our planet. The cause of the environmental crisis is anthropogenic rather than natural. It is a moral crisis in political institutions, legal apparatuses of domination, unjust social relations and an instrumental rationality at odds with the fabric of life.
3. Sustainable development discourse is based on an erroneous idea. Sustainable development policies seek to harmonise the economic process and the conservation of nature by encouraging a balance in meeting present needs and the needs of future generations, but they attempt to attain these objectives by revitalising the old developmentalist myth and promoting the fallacy of sustainable economic growth based on our planet’s finite nature. Criticism of this notion of sustainable development does not, however, invalidate the truth and the meaning of the sustainability concept as a guide for building a new social and production rationality.
4. The sustainability concept is based on recognition of nature’s limits and potential, as well as the environment’s complexity, and it inspires a new understanding of the world, in order

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to address the challenges facing humanity in the third millennium. The sustainability concept promotes a new nature-culture partnership by establishing a new economy, redirecting the potentials of science and technology, and building a new political culture founded on an ethic of sustainability in values, beliefs, feelings and knowledge, thereby renewing existential meanings, worlds of life and ways of inhabiting the planet Earth.

5. Environmental and sustainable development policies have been based on a set of principles and ecological awareness that have served as criteria for guiding the activities of governments, international institutions and citizens. From the first Earth Day in 1970 and the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972) up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio, 1992); and from *The Silent Spring*, *The Population Bomb* and *The Limits of Growth* up to *Our Common Future*, the *Rio Principles* and the *Earth Charter*, a body of precepts has accompanied ecodevelopment strategies and sustainable development policies. Sustainable development principles are based on a perception of the world as “only one earth” with a “common future” for humanity, and these principles point towards new geopolitics founded on “thinking globally and acting locally”. They establish the “precautionary principle” to conserve life in the face of uncertainty in scientific knowledge and excesses in technological and economic imperatives. And they promote collective responsibility, social equity, environmental justice and a better quality of life for present and future generations. However, these sustainable development precepts have not been translated into an ethic as a code of conduct to redirect economic and political processes towards a new social rationality and sustainable forms of production and lifestyles.

6. In the decade from the Rio Summit (1992) to the Johannesburg Summit (2002), economics has become ecological economics, ecology has become political ecology and cultural diversity has led to a policy of accepting differences. Ethics is transmuting into political ethics. From the dichotomy between pure reason and practical reason, and the dilemma between interest and values, society is moving towards moral economics and an ethical rationality that inspires solidarity between human beings and nature. The sustainability ethic promotes the participatory management of environmental goods and services of humanity for the common good; the coexistence of collective and individual rights; and satisfaction of the basic needs, personal goals and cultural aspirations of different social groups. The environmental ethic directs social processes and behaviour towards a just and sustainable future for all people.

7. The sustainability ethic poses the need to reconcile reason and morality, so that human beings can reach a new state of awareness, autonomy and control over their worlds of life, becoming responsible to themselves, to others and to nature for their acts in the deliberation of what is just and what is good. The environmental ethic is therefore becoming an existential support for human conduct towards nature and the sustainability of life.

8. The ethic for sustainability is an ethic of diversity in which there is interplay among the *ethos* of diverse cultures. This ethic encourages a policy of accepting differences. It is a radical ethic because it goes to the root of the environmental crisis to remove all the philosophical, cultural, political and social foundations of this hegemonic, homogenizing, hierarchic, wasteful, subjugating and exclusive civilization. The ethic of sustainability is an

ethic of living and an ethic in favour of life. It is an ethic to renew the enchantment and eroticism of a world in which the desire for life reaffirms the power of the imagination, creativity and the capacity of human beings to go beyond repressive irrationalities in order to delve into the unknown, to think the unthinkable, to build for the future of a sustainable society of peaceful coexistence and to advance towards lifestyles inspired by frugality, pluralism and harmony in diversity.

9. The sustainability ethic involves new knowledge needed to understand the complex interaction between society and nature. Environmental knowledge re-establishes the indissoluble links in an interconnected world of ecological, cultural, technological, economic and social processes. Environmental knowledge replaces the worldview based on a single and one-dimensional idea that lies at the roots of the environmental crisis with a view based on the idea of complexity. This ethic promotes the construction of an environmental rationality founded on a new moral, ecological and cultural economy as a prerequisite for establishing a new form of production that will make ecologically sustainable and socially just lifestyles viable.

10. The sustainability ethic is nourished by a set of precepts, principles and proposals to redirect individual and collective behaviour, as well as public and private activities, towards sustainability, and they include the following concepts:

A production ethic in favour of life

11. Poverty and social injustice, the most eloquent signs of failure in our culture, are directly or indirectly associated with world-wide ecological deterioration and are the result of historical processes of economic, political, social and cultural exclusion. The expanding gap between rich and poor countries, between power groups and the vast numbers of the dispossessed, continues to be the greatest environmental risk and the greatest challenge to sustainability. The sustainability ethic is facing a growing contradiction in the world between opulence and poverty, high technology and famine, ever-increasing exploitation of resources and the impoverishment and desperation of billions of human beings, the globalisation of markets and social exclusion. Social justice is a *sine qua non* condition for sustainability. Without equity in the distribution of environmental goods and services, it will be impossible to build ecologically sustainable and socially just societies.

12. The construction of sustainable societies forms part of the change towards a civilization based on tapping renewable, economically efficient and environmentally friendly energy sources, such as solar energy. The shift from the mechanist paradigm to the ecological paradigm is taking place in science, in individual and group values and attitudes and in the patterns of social organization and new production strategies, such as agroecology and agroforestry. Both current scientific knowledge and the emerging social movements that are fighting for new sustainable forms of production are opening up possibilities for the construction of a new production rationality founded on the ecotechnological productivity of each region and ecosystem, as indicated by the culture's natural potential and values. This new production rationality opens up perspectives for an economic process that will break with the unifying, hegemonic and homogenizing market model as the supreme law of the economy.

13. The sustainability ethic goes beyond the goal of granting nature an intrinsic universal, economic or instrumental value. The valuation of environmental goods is determined by cultures through cosmovisions, feelings and beliefs that are the result of practices that date back thousands of years in their transformation and co-evolution with nature. Recognition of limits in the intervention of culture in nature also implies accepting the limits of technology that have replaced human values with efficiency for utilitarian purposes. Bioethics should moderate technological intervention in biological matters. Technical matters should be governed by an ethical sense of their potential to transform life.

An ethic of knowledge and dialogue among fields of knowledge

14. Science has been the most powerful instrument of knowledge and transformation of nature, with the capacity to solve critical problems such as the shortage of resources, world hunger and the attainment of better conditions of well-being for humanity. The search for knowledge through scientific rationality has been one of the outstanding values of the human spirit. However, we have reached a dilemma: while scientific thought has opened up possibilities for “collective intelligence” based on advances in cybernetics and information technologies, the submission of science and technology to economic interests and political power seriously compromises the survival of human beings. At the same time, social inequity associated with the privatization of and unequal access to knowledge and information are morally unjust. Often, the human capacity to venture beyond its immediate environment and intervene in natural systems irreversibly modifies natural processes whose evolution has taken millions of years, thereby triggering ecological risks beyond any scientific control.

15. Scientific progress has accompanied an ideology of economic progress and the domination of nature, giving priority to mechanistic and quantitative models of reality which ignore qualitative, subjective and systemic aspects that nourish other forms of knowledge. The breaking up of scientific thought has made it unable to understand and address complex socio-environmental problems. Although the sciences and economics have been effective in intervening in natural systems and expanding the borders of information, paradoxically they have not resulted in any improvement in the quality of life among most of the world’s people. Many of the most devastating effects of economics and the sciences are deeply rooted in their assumptions, axioms, categories and procedures.

16. Two alternatives are now being debated for the future of science. On the one hand, it can continue being the main tool of the world’s market economy, aimed at seeking individual earnings and sustainable growth. On the other hand, it is called on to produce knowledge and technologies that will promote environmental quality, sustainable management of natural resources and the well-being of peoples. For that purpose, it will be necessary to combine the rational contributions of scientific knowledge with the moral reflections of humanistic tradition, opening up the possibility of a new knowledge in which reason and passion, the objective and the subjective, what is true and what is good coexist side by side.

17. The effectiveness of science has made it legitimate as an ideal paradigm of knowledge in hegemonic Western culture, negating and ruling out non-scientific knowledge, folk wisdom and indigenous knowledge, both in the design of ecological conservation strategies and in sustainable development projects, as well as in the settlement of environmental disputes. Today, the crucial matters of sustainability cannot be understood or solved through scientific knowledge alone, even with the participation of an interdisciplinary scientific body, in part because decisions on ecological sustainability and environmental justice involve diverse fields of knowledge and social actors. Judging what is true involves the intervention of visions, interests and values that fall completely outside the “objective” judgement of the sciences.

18. Adopting decisions on environmental matters requires the contribution of science to gain more precise information on natural phenomena. That is the case with global warming, where, in spite of the inevitable degree of uncertainty, the scientific predictions of ecological vulnerability and socio-environmental risks should prevail over decisions based on economic interests and unfounded beliefs in the virtues of the market to solve environmental problems.

19. The sustainability ethic refers us to an ethic of knowledge aimed at a new vision of the economy, society and human beings. This implies promoting strategies of knowledge open to the hybridization of modern sciences and technology with folk and local wisdom in an intercultural policy and dialogue among different fields of knowledge. The ethic implicit in environmental knowledge recovers “valuation knowledge” and places it among the relations of power in knowledge. Valuation knowledge implies recovering the value of life and the reencounter of ourselves, as social and human beings in a world where greed, earnings, power, indifference and aggression prevail over feelings of solidarity, compassion and understanding.

20. The sustainability ethic encourages a change in the concept of knowledge regarding a reality consisting of objects to a concept of knowledge aimed at the world of being. Understanding environmental complexity requires breaking out of the constraints of logic and opening up the circle of science that has generated a one-dimensional and fragmented worldview. Recognizing the value and the potential of science for attaining states of greater well-being for humanity, the sustainability ethic also includes a process for the social re-appropriation of knowledge and the directing of scientific efforts towards solving humanity’s most urgent problems and towards the principles of sustainability: an ecological economy, renewable sources of energy, health and an improved quality of life for all, poverty eradication and food security. The circle of sciences should open up towards an epistemological field that includes and benefits the flourishing of different cultural forms of knowledge. Environmental knowledge is the opening up of interdisciplinary and systemic science to a dialogue among different fields of knowledge.

21. The ethic of sustainability implies reversing the principle of “think globally and act locally”. This precept leads to a colonization of knowledge through geopolitics of know-how that would legitimize the thought and strategies formulated in the centres of power in the developed countries within the rationality of the prevailing economic globalisation process to be reproduced and implemented in the developing countries or countries in

transition in each locality and in all the pores of human sensitivity. Without ignoring the contributions of science to the transition towards sustainability, the concept of globality needs to be rethought from the locality of knowledge rooted in a territory and culture, from the wealth of its heterogeneity, diversity and uniqueness; and on that basis, to build the world through intercultural dialogue among different fields of knowledge and the hybridization of scientific knowledge with local wisdom.

22. Education for sustainability should be understood in this context as teaching based on dialogue among fields of knowledge and aimed at the construction of an environmental rationality. This pedagogy includes a holistic vision of the world and the idea of complexity. But it goes even further by establishing an ethic and an ontology of otherness in which the closed world of systemic interrelationships in the objective world of what already exists opens up to the infinite world of possibilities and the creation of what does not yet exist. This is education to construct a sustainable, equitable, just and diverse future. It is an education for participation, self-determination and transformation; an education that will recover the value of what is simple in complexity; of what is local in global matters; of what is diverse in relation to uniqueness; and of what is singular in relation to the universal.

An ethic for global citizenship, public space and social movements

23. Economic globalisation is leading to the privatization of public spaces. The fate of nations and people is being increasingly directed by economic and political processes that are decided on outside their spheres of autonomy and responsibility. The environmental movement has generated the emergence of a global citizenship that expresses the rights of all people and all persons to participate individually and collectively in adopting decisions that will affect their existence, freeing them from the power of the State and the market as organizers of their worlds of life.

24. The parliamentary system of modern democracies is in crisis because the public sphere, understood as the space for interrelated dialogue on aspirations, desires and interests, has been replaced by negotiation and the calculation of interests by political parties which, converted into pressure groups, negotiate their possibilities of holding office. A policy of tolerance and participation for dissidents and differences is needed in order to solve the paradoxes of the *majority effect*. Democratic values should also be encouraged in order to put direct democracy in practice.

25. Direct democracy is founded on the principle of collective participation in decision-making processes regarding matters of common interest. In response to the liberal democracy project that legitimizes dominance of the market rationality, environmental democracy recognizes the rights of self-managing communities founded on respect for the sovereignty and dignity of human beings, environmental responsibility and the exercise of decision-adopting processes, stemming from the ideal of an organization based on personal ties, creative work relationships, affinity groups and community and neighbourhood councils.

26. Environmentalism is a social movement which, born in this era of civilization crisis marked by environmental degradation, individualism, fragmentation of the world and social

exclusion, urges us to think about the future of life and to question the prevailing development model and the very concept of development, in order to face the limits in human beings' relationship with the planet. The ethic of sustainability confronts us with the linkage between society and nature, with the human condition and the meaning of life.

27. The ethic for building a sustainable society leads to an emancipation process which, as Paulo Friere taught, recognizes that no one frees anyone else and no one frees himself alone; human beings are only freed in communion. This allows society to overcome the "progressive" approach that attempts to save others (indigenous people, those who are socially excluded, the impoverished), changing them from who they themselves are by integrating them into a universal ideal, into the global market or into the national State; forcing them to abandon their being, their traditions and their lifestyles to become "modern" and "developed" beings.

An ethic of global governance and participatory democracy

28. The ethic for sustainability makes an appeal to the moral responsibility of subjects, social groups and the State to guarantee the continuation and improved quality of life. This responsibility is founded on principles of solidarity among political and social spheres, so that social actors are those who define and legitimize the social order, forms of life and sustainability practices through the establishment of a new citizen pact and democratic debate based on mutual respect, political pluralism and cultural diversity with primacy given to critical public opinion that acts autonomously in relation to the State's powers.

29. The sustainability ethic questions the current forms of domination established by differences in gender, ethnic group, social class and sexual preference and establishes the diversity and plurality of rights of citizens and the community. This implies recognizing the impossibility of consolidating a democratic society within the major economic and social inequities in the world and in a political scenario where the social actors play a role in democracy under conditions of inequality and the masses have very limited or no possibility of participating.

30. The sustainability ethic demands a new social pact. This must be founded within a framework of basic agreements for the construction of sustainable societies that will include new social relationships, forms of production and consumption patterns. These agreements should incorporate diversity in cultural styles of production and life; recognize dissension, come to terms with conflicts, identify those not participating in the dialogue and include those excluded from participation in democracy. These ethical principles lead to the construction of an alternative rationality that will produce sustainable societies for millions of poor people and those excluded from this globalised world, reducing the gap between growth and distribution, between participation and social exclusion, between what is desirable and what is possible.

31. A sustainability ethic should inspire new legal-institutional frameworks that will reflect, respond to and adapt to the global, regional, national and local nature of ecological dynamics, as well as revitalize cultures and their associated knowledge. This new institutionality should have the mandate and means to address inequities in the economic

and ecological distribution, the concentration of power in transnational corporations, and the corruption and ineffectiveness of different government and management bodies, in order to advance towards forms of governance that are more democratic and participatory for society as a whole.

An ethic of rights, justice and democracy

32. Law is not justice. Legal rationality has led to greater priority being given to legal processes than to substantive regulations, thereby neglecting the establishment of a social link founded on ethical principles, as well as the application of principles essential to guaranteeing the exercise of basic environmental and collective human rights. Based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we all have the right to the same opportunities and to enjoy common and differentiated rights. The project to advance towards a new solidary alliance with a civilization of diversity and a culture of low entropy presupposes the primacy of an ethic implicit in a new worldview that will prepare us for a transmutation of the values that will establish a new social contract. In the current circumstances of moral, ecological and political bankruptcy, this change in values is an imperative for survival.

33. The moral concept of modernity has tended to favour action governed by instrumental rationality and economic interest and, at the same time, it has diluted the sensitivity that enables us to distinguish utilitarian behaviour from other behaviour founded on substantive and intrinsic values. The growing complexity of the modern world has eradicated a universal vision of what is good or a transcendental principle of what is just, which could serve as a basis for solidary social linkage. The sustainability ethic should be an applied ethic that will ensure peaceful coexistence among rival visions in a world formed by a diversity of cultures and matrices of rationality focused on different concepts of what is good.

34. If what characterizes modern societies is scientific power over nature and political power over human beings, the sustainability ethic should formulate principles to prevent any social goods from serving as a means of domination. There are different social goods, whose distribution shapes different spheres of justice, each of which should be autonomous and provided with its own rules. This complexity of social goods gives rise to the idea of complex equity resulting from the intersection of the project to combat domination and the program to differentiate spheres of justice.

35. If domination is one of the essential forms of evil, abolishing it is a supreme good. It means untying knots of thought and power strategies in the knowledge that they subject us to different provisions of subjugation activated in social ideologies and institutions. The fight against domination is a moral project whose nucleus consists of cultivating an ethic of virtues that will enable us to renounce moral values, political organization systems and technological artefacts that have served as means of domination. At the same time, it is a cultural project to advance towards the ethical and aesthetic reinvention of the mind, socio-economic models and the nature-culture relationships that shape the prevailing lifestyle in this civilization. It is an ethic of personal and civic virtues that will guarantee respect for a minimum base of positive and negative duties to safeguard the basic regulations of peaceful coexistence for sustainability.

36. The sustainability ethic is an ethic of predictable basic rights that promote human dignity as the highest value and basic condition for reconstructing the relationships of human beings with nature. It is an ethic of solidarity that goes beyond individualism to base itself on the recognition of otherness and of differences; a participatory democratic ethic that promotes pluralism, recognizes the rights of minorities and protects them from abuses that could be inflicted on them by different power groups. The common good is to ensure the production and administration of justice for all, respecting the unique features of each individual and conceding what is due to each person.

An ethic of common goods and commons

37. The current processes of technological intervention, economic revaluation and social reappropriation of nature are posing the need to establish principles of bio-ethics, together with an ethic for environmental goods and services. Commons are not free goods, but rather goods that have been designated and transformed by common values of different cultures. Public goods are not goods to which there is free access, since they should be used for the common good. Today “common goods” are subject to forms of ownership and use where the interests of the State, of transnational companies and of peoples come into conflict in redefining what belongs to one and what belongs to others; what is public and what is private; and the heritage of peoples, of the State and of humanity. Environmental goods are an intricate network of communal goods and public goods that confront the principles of market freedom, the sovereignty of States and the autonomy of peoples.

38. The ethic of the common good is set forth as an ethic for settling the conflict of interests between what is common and what is universal, what is public and what is private. The ethic of public order and collective rights confronts the ethic of private rights as the greatest bastion of modern civilization, questioning the market and privatization of knowledge – the commercialization of nature, privatization and intellectual property rights – as principles for defining and legitimizing forms of possession, valuation and use of nature, and as a priority means of achieving the common good. In relation to private property rights and the idea of a neutral market in which individual preferences are expressed as a basis for regulating the supply of public goods, the collective rights of peoples, the cultural values of nature and collective forms of ownership and management of common goods are now emerging and defining an ethic of commons and confronting the biodiversity appropriation strategies of the corporations in the biotechnology industry.

39. The sustainability ethic involves replacing the principle of individual egoism as the generator of the common good with altruism founded on relationships of reciprocity and cooperation. This ethic is taking root in expanding social movements and cultural groups which are now beginning to join each other through citizen networks and world social forums in the new culture of solidarity.

An ethic of cultural diversity and a policy of differences

40. Sustainable development discourse advocates a common future for humanity, but does not adequately include a differentiated view of the different social groups involved and, in

particular, the indigenous peoples who, throughout history, have materially and spiritually lived in harmony with nature. Sustainability should be based on a principle that recognizes the integrity of human values and cultural identities, with conditions for the productivity and regeneration of nature, principles that emanate from the material and symbolic relationship that people have with their territories, natural resources and environment. The cosmovisions of ancestral peoples are embodied in and inspired by cultural practices that make sustainable use of nature.

41. The sustainability ethic welcomes this diversity in visions and knowledge, and challenges all forms of domination, discrimination and exclusion of cultural identities. An ethic of cultural diversity implies teaching otherness, so people will learn to listen to other reasoning and other feelings. This otherness includes the spirituality of indigenous peoples, their ancestral wisdom and their traditional practices, as a basic contribution of cultural diversity to global human sustainability.

42. For indigenous peoples and those of African descent, as well as for many peasant-farmer societies and grass-roots organizations, the sustainability ethic translates into an ethic of respect for their lifestyles and their territorial spaces, their habits and their habitat, both in rural and urban areas. This ethic translates into social practices for the protection of nature, the safeguarding of life and human sustainability. Ancestral knowledge, owing to its collective nature, is defined through its own cosmovisions and cultural rationality, and it contributes to the common good of the people to whom it belongs. That is why their knowledge, their nature and their culture should not be subjected to private use and ownership.

43. In the cosmovisions of indigenous peoples and those of African descent, as well as many peasant-farmer communities, nature and society are integrated in a *biocultural system*, where the social organization, production practices, religion, spirituality and language form an *ethos* that defines their own lifestyles. The ethic refers us to a concept of well-being that includes the “greater family” and not only persons. This idea of the community *living well* refers to achieving their well-being on the basis of their own cultural values and identities. The dynamics of demography, mobility and land-use, as well as biodiversity use and management practices, are defined within a three-pronged concept of territory, culture and biodiversity as an integral and indivisible whole. Territory is defined as the space for being, and biodiversity as a cultural heritage that enables a being to continue existing. Consequently, cultural existence is a prerequisite for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. These concepts of the world are generating new life alternatives for many rural and urban communities.

44. The inalienable right of people to their cultural being should lead to a new ethic of the rights of peoples in relation to the State. The sustainability ethic opens up channels for recovering identities, for once again asking ourselves who we are and who we want to be. This is an ethic for viewing and returning to our roots; an ethic for recognizing ourselves, regenerating ties of communication and solidarity in our differences and for not continuing to ride roughshod over others. It is an ethic to reestablish trust among human beings and among subjugated peoples, making a reality of the precepts in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

An ethic of peace and dialogue for settling disputes

45. The worst evil afflicting humanity is war that annihilates life and devastates nature, as well as the physical and symbolic violence that ignores human dignity and others' rights. The sustainability ethic is an ethic of a culture of peace and non-violence; of a society that settles its disputes through dialogue. This culture of dialogue and peace can only emerge in a society of free people where accords and consensus are built in processes where there is also a place for dissension.

46. The capacity to argue has enabled human beings to use rational judgement and rhetoric to maintain and defend individual and group positions and interests in opposition to the common good and the good of the majority. Only moral judgement can settle and overcome controversies between equally legitimate rational judgements. The function of intelligence is not only to reason logically and to know and create productively, but also wisely to guide behaviour and give meaning to existence. These are ethical functions of living well. In this sense, the ethic ennobles reason. The dignity, identity and autonomy of persons emerge as fundamental rights of beings to exist and be respected.

47. If every social order – including democracy – presupposes forms of exclusion, each negotiating scenario should include all affected and interested groups. This process is essential in the processes to settle environmental disputes through dialogue and negotiation, particularly if we take into account that the communities and individuals most affected by the environmental crisis in all its forms are precisely the poorest and those who are subordinated by and excluded from the structure of liberal democracy.

48. For the ethic to become an operative criterion that will allow the settlement of disputes between actors at different levels and differing degrees of power, there is a need for an agreement on principles of equality, accepted and put into practice by all the sustainability actors. It implies recognizing the specificity of the different actors and social sectors with their ecological impacts, responsibilities, interests and demands, and with different scales of intervention: local, national and international. That will require overcoming the dichotomies between rich countries and poor countries, as well as the conventional oppositions between the North and the South, the State and civil society, and the public sphere and the private sphere, so as to identify the values, interests and responsibilities of specific actors in the controversies brought into play by specific social groups, corporations, companies and States. This exercise is essential if the policies, decisions and commitments adopted are to be consistent with the differentiated responsibilities and specific conditions of the actors involved.

An ethic of being and the time of sustainability

49. The sustainability ethic is an ethic of being and time. It is recognition of differentiated times in natural, economic, political, social and cultural processes: of the time of life and of ecological cycles; of the time that is incorporated into the being of things and the time that is embodied in the life of human beings; of the time that marks the rhythms of natural history and social history; of the time that forges processes, imprints identities and triggers

tendencies; and of the encounter of differentiated cultural times for diverse social actors to generate consultations, consensus and decisions in their own codes of ethics, habits and customs.

50. The life of a species, of humanity and of cultures does not conclude in one generation. Individual life is transitory, but the adventure of the living system and of the collective identities transcends time. The fundamental value of all living beings is the perpetuation of life. The greatest value of culture is its opening towards cultural diversity. The construction of sustainability is suspended in time in a transgenerational ethic. A sustainable future will only be possible in a world where nature and culture continue co-evolving.

51. The sustainability ethic places life above economic-political or practical-instrumental interests. Sustainability will only be possible if we regenerate the desire for life that sustains the meanings of human existence. The ethic of sustainability is an ethic for the continuous renovation of life, where all is born, grows, becomes ill, dies and is reborn. Preservation of the continuous life cycle implies knowing how to manage time, so that the earth renews itself and life flourishes in all its forms, existing in harmony in the worlds of people's lives and cultures.

52. The sustainability ethic is nourished by the cultural being of peoples, by their forms of knowledge, by the deeply-rooted wisdom in their identities and by the circulation of knowledge in time. These cultural legacies are now opening up history and enabling the emergence of what is new through intercultural dialogue and transgenerational wisdom, enriching the paths leading to a sustainable future.

Epilogue

53. The sustainability ethic is an ethic of the common good. This Manifesto has been produced in common to become a common good; in this sense, it seeks to inspire principles and values, to promote reasons and feelings, and to guide procedures, action and conduct towards the construction of sustainable societies.

54. This Manifesto is not a final and conclusive text. The United Nations, the governments, citizen organizations, education centres and mass media throughout the world should contribute to distributing this Manifesto to encourage widespread dialogue and discussion that will lead to the establishment and practice of an ethic for sustainability.

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