

SPEECH DELIVERED IN RIO DE JANEIRO BY THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF AT THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, JUNE 12, 1992.

"Mr. President of Brazil, Fernando Collor de Mello;

Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations, Butros Ghali;

Excellencies:

An important biological species is at risk of disappearing due to the rapid and progressive liquidation of its natural living conditions: man.

Now we are aware of this problem when it is almost too late to prevent it.

It is necessary to point out that consumer societies are fundamentally responsible for the atrocious destruction of the environment. They were born from the old colonial metropolises and imperial policies that, in turn, generated backwardness and poverty that today plague the vast majority of humanity. With only 20 percent of the world's population, they consume two-thirds of the metals and three-quarters of the energy produced in the world. They have poisoned the seas and rivers, they have polluted the air, they have weakened and perforated the ozone layer, they have saturated the atmosphere with gases that alter climatic conditions with catastrophic effects that we are already beginning to suffer.

Forests disappear, deserts spread, billions of tons of fertile land end up in the sea every year. Many species become extinct. Population pressure and poverty lead to desperate efforts to survive even at the expense of nature. It is not possible to blame this on Third World countries, colonies yesterday, nations exploited and looted today by an unjust world economic order.

The solution cannot be to prevent the development of those who need it most. The reality is that everything that today contributes to underdevelopment and poverty constitutes a flagrant violation of ecology. Tens of millions of men, women and children die each year in the Third World as a result of this, more than in each of the two world wars. Unequal exchange, protectionism and external debt attack the ecology and promote the destruction of the environment.

If you want to save humanity from this self-destruction, you have to better distribute the wealth and technology available on the planet. Less luxury and less waste in a few countries so that there is less poverty and less hunger in much of the Earth. No more transfers to the Third World of lifestyles and consumption habits that ruin the environment. Make human life more rational. Apply a fair international economic order. Use all the science necessary for sustained development without pollution. Pay the ecological debt and not the foreign debt. Hunger disappears and not man.

When the supposed threats of communism have disappeared and there are no longer any pretexts for cold wars, arms races and military spending, what is it that prevents immediately devoting those resources to promoting the development of the Third World and combating the threat of ecological destruction of the planet? ?

Cease selfishness, cease hegemonism, cease insensitivity, irresponsibility and deception. Tomorrow it will be too late to do what we should have done long ago.

Thank you."