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## The Environmentalists Are Wrong

By BJORN LOMBORG

**C**OPENHAGEN With the opening today of the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, we will be hearing a great deal about both concepts: sustainability and development. Traditionally, the developed nations of the West have shown greater concern for environmental sustainability, while the third world countries have a stronger desire for economic development. At big environmental gatherings, it is usually the priorities of the first world that carry the day.

The challenge in Johannesburg will be whether we are ready to put development ahead of sustainability. If the United States leads the way, the world may finally find the courage to do so.

Why does the developed world worry so much about sustainability? Because we constantly hear a litany of how the environment is in poor shape. Natural resources are running out. Population is growing, leaving less and less to eat. Species are becoming extinct in vast numbers. Forests are disappearing. The planet's air and water are getting ever more polluted. Human activity is, in short, defiling the earth — and as it does so, humanity may end up killing itself.

There is, however, one problem: this litany is not supported by the evidence. Energy and other natural resources have become more abundant, not less so. More food is now produced per capita than at any time in the world's history. Fewer people are starving. Species are, it is true, becoming extinct. But only about 0.7 percent of them are expected to disappear in the next 50 years, not the 20 percent to 50 percent that some have predicted. Most forms of environmental pollution look as though they have either been exaggerated or are transient — associated with the early phases of industrialization. They are best cured not by restricting economic growth but by accelerating it.

That we in the West are so prone to believe the litany despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary results in an excessive focus on sustainability. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the discussion on global warming.

There is no doubt that pumping out carbon dioxide from fossil fuels has increased the global temperature. Yet too much of the debate is fixated on reducing emissions without regard to cost. With its agreement to the 1997 Kyoto climate treaty, Europe has set itself the goal of cutting its carbon emissions to 1990 levels by 2012. This is more than 30 percent below what they would have been in 2012.

Even with renewable sources of energy taking over, the United Nations Climate Panel still estimates a temperature increase of four degrees to five degrees fahrenheit by the year 2100. Such a rise is projected to have less impact in the industrialized world than in the developing world, which tends to be in warmer regions and has an infrastructure less able to withstand the inevitable problems.

Despite our intuition that we need to do something drastic about global warming, economic analyses show that it will be far more expensive to cut carbon dioxide emissions radically than to pay the costs of adapting to the increased temperatures. Moreover, all current models show that the Kyoto Protocol will have surprisingly little impact on the climate: temperature levels projected for 2100 will be postponed for all of six years.

Yet the cost of the Kyoto Protocol will be \$150 billion to \$350 billion annually (compared to \$50 billion in global annual development aid). With global warming disproportionately affecting third world countries, we have to ask if Kyoto is the best way to help them. The answer is no. For the cost of Kyoto for just one year we could solve the world's biggest problem: we could provide every person in the world with clean water. This alone would save two million lives each year and prevent 500 million from severe disease. In fact, for the same amount Kyoto would have cost just the United States every year, the United Nations estimates that we could provide every person in the world with access to basic health, education, family planning and water and sanitation services. Isn't this a better way of serving the world?

The focus should be on development, not sustainability. Development is not simply valuable in itself, but in the long run it will lead the third world to become more concerned about the environment. Only when people are rich enough to feed themselves do they begin to think about the effect of their actions on the world around them and on future generations. With its focus on sustainability, the developed world ends up prioritizing the future at the expense of the present. This is backward. In contrast, a focus on development helps people today while creating the foundation for an even better tomorrow.

The United States has a unique opportunity in Johannesburg to call attention to development. Many Europeans chastised the the Bush

administration for not caring enough about sustainability, especially in its rejection of the Kyoto Protocol. They are probably correct that the United States decision was made on the basis of economic self-interest rather than out of some principled belief in world development. But in Johannesburg the administration can recast its decision as an attempt to focus on the most important and fundamental issues on the global agenda: clean drinking water, better sanitation and health care and the fight against poverty.

Such move would regain for the United States the moral high ground. When United States rejected the Kyoto treaty last year, Europeans talked endlessly about how it was left to them to "save the world." But if the United States is willing to commit the resources to ensure development, it could emerge as the savior.

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