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## PROLOGUE

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### THE WELL-BEING OF THE EARTH AND OUR OWN WELL-BEING ARE ONE AND THE SAME<sup>1</sup>

#### Princess Irene of the Netherlands

What is the use of running when we are on the wrong path?

*Mahatma Gandhi*

I am profoundly happy China has chosen to host this vibrant and important World Cultural Forum that will undoubtedly put ecology high on the world agenda. Why is the Forum important? Because behind the economic, financial and climate crises that affect a large part of the world lies a deep moral and ethical crisis that we need to consider and explore as we have done here these days, to be able to envision a future for all life on earth.

‘To see what is right and not to do is want of courage’, these are wise words of Confucius and the reason why we were called to assemble here these days.

We all know that for the first time in history we are witnessing a global disruption of the biological foundations of the Earth. We seem to have forgotten that we are part of nature. We need to understand what we are actually doing to ourselves, when disrupting the biological foundations of the Earth.

As a result of losing our deep inner sense of connection and ease with our natural environment, our priorities have begun to shift from a deep harmony with all of life to a disconnected way of life. We have lost the deeper understanding of our human relationship with nature and at the same time part of our self-nature or inner-nature.

It is of vital importance that we realize how the well-being of the earth and our own well-being are one and the same. And that treating the earth sustainably has everything to do with ourselves, our mental and physical health.

Active measures and political decision-making are actually always linked to an inner attitude towards life, *a worldview*. We have come to think and act from a view that prioritizes humans, instead of considering the well-being of *all* of life.

When we talk about sustainability, do we have a worldview in mind where humankind is disconnected from nature, or a worldview that understands and feels the interrelation with all life?

My worldview is that of a broad society, which extends beyond the human society. A global interrelated society of all life with its rivers, mountains, animals, plant life...

Therefore, my vision of sustainability is: a sustained well-being for *all* living creatures. We are part of nature.

The wise South African Zulu, professor Koka, once said: *I am because nature is, and because she is I am.*

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<sup>1</sup> The speech was delivered on 19 May, 2013 at the Second World Cultural Forum in Hangzhou (China).

Actually that says it all. On a personal note: living consciously in close harmony with nature makes life so much more beautiful and happier and realistic.

The diminished connection to our environment, has contributed to a deep separation, a split between humans and nature and a split within humans themselves.

And thus the concept of *economic growth* has overtaken old human values. Values of interconnectedness and interrelation with each other and with our environment. An interrelation China still seems to have deeply rooted in its society.

What we need, and many young people are fully aware of this, is to remember that when human culture merges with 'the fundamental nature of the universe' (which is also a Taoist view) then we are back on track. We need to understand this, deeply feel this, and then act accordingly. Then we will act and feel as part of the greater whole, with respect for the great Ecosystem Earth. Then we will work in harmony with nature. Then we will think and act from the worldview of 'we', as participants of the greater system Earth.

The root of ecology and economy is the same in Greek – *oikos* – it means a house, a home. How we manage the home. In practical terms, this means to be aware that we can actually combine economy with ecology. Then economy will no longer be narrowly defined as meaning a mere profit, but economy will be understood as being the fundament for the well-being of all life.

Globally we observe a significant shift in consciousness towards an ecological civilization.

We are indeed globally re-evaluating our role in the web of life. We are aware that we, the humankind, have become a force of nature, possibly more destructive than tsunamis or earthquakes together. The future of all life now lies for a very large part in our human hands: we can actually make or break life on Earth, our home.

The Chinese philosopher Mencius (who lived twenty-four centuries ago) mentions how the destruction of the forests originated, as the humankind lost its original self-nature. How the mountains used to be places of healing, to preserve health and to strengthen people's vitality. Protecting the health of natural places was considered as a priority, to protect the health of all.

This is what many old philosophies knew and taught. We need to protect nature and we need to protect areas of wilderness. And, we need to understand how the interdependence and interrelation of all life is what we desperately need to understand again, feel and act upon.

The vastness and intensity of human suffering on earth is overwhelming and should be enough for a wakeup call for each and every one. We need to work towards the necessary basic needs that need to be realized for all; the difference now is that we can consciously do this ecologically, in harmony with nature.

Green economy, circular economy, and social entrepreneurship are hopeful developments in this sense.

However, we need to tackle this all together.

*Global citizenship* is needed to realize these goals.

And at the same time it calls for personal leadership, from a perspective of our authentic self in all our own personal and professional dimensions. The individual input is often undervalued and seen as without power to make a difference. Yet, on the contrary, let us not underestimate how our personal choices make a difference as they have an effect on our personal life, on our neighbours, and on our community. Like concen-

tric circles. The more are there these individually originated circles, the more it will become mainstream to be thoughtful of how we live, how we act and what is important to us. Then the 'I' becomes the 'We'. *Life is to be in relationships.*

That does not mean it is easy to change from our anthropocentric or human-centric worldview, to a worldview of a harmonious togetherness with all life. It is a significant change of mentality and attitude towards life. Actually it is a shift from fear or greed, to love. We should allow ourselves to grow towards this together. Small individual decisions are a starting point.

What is *your* worldview and what is your starting point? What kind of example do we want to be for our children and grandchildren? Research has revealed that today's children can barely muster any interest for nature at all, purely because *they do not know it.*

We live at a fascinating moment of history, when we are challenged to invent and discover new technical and spiritual ways for a lifestyle in harmony with nature. A lifestyle we would truly be able to call an ecological civilization.

China has the courage to prioritize ecology and will undoubtedly be one of the leaders in vision and resilience in this matter. This will benefit the whole world and the whole Ecosystem Earth.

To summarize.

The foundation for sustainability lies within ourselves.

Reflecting on our common future, we need to steer towards the direction where it becomes natural for us to make our decisions proceeding from the idea of the well-being of all life; where it becomes natural that we are indeed part of the whole. Then we are in harmony with the primordial essence, or life itself.

We need to do this all together, as a single global human civilization, with all our cultural differences.

So, what is sustainable development directed to? To a conscious interrelationship with all life.

*My pledge here is that we as the global human society, consciously decide together that we are indeed interrelated with and part of the Great Ecosystem Earth, and act upon this.*

This decision would bring us back on the right path, a path towards an ecological civilization. Nations, communities and each and every one of us can be a leader and an example on this path, with an open heart and mind towards each other and towards all of life.

Our most precious natural resource, our consciousness, will guide us to make the right decisions.

Confucius, who knew it all, mentioned, 'Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout heaven and earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish'.