

## Environmental Health Sustainability: Who Will Answer?

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**Abstract:** The paper will explore how we are informed by patterns disclosed in nature and are moved to be in full solidarity with one another in all the professions, trades and disciplines so as to promote and maintain sustainable environmental health governance practices globally. Emphasis will be placed on the important principles of solidarity, subsidiarity and the enculturation of environmental health monitoring programmes to satisfy local circumstances. Rigorous science will be emphasised as essential in reading the environment and the EPH Programme will be fully supported. Reference will be made to the memorandum of understanding agreed between IFEH and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD); and participants will be introduced to the Sustainability Indicator Initiative (SII) of IFEH.

<http://www.ifeh.org/indicators/index.html>

Fifty years ago was a turbulent time in global affairs, with the Vietnam War at its height and the in great disarray. The Cuban Missile Crisis brought us to the brink of a nuclear holocaust with consequent environmental destruction. Thankfully, war was averted. What have we learnt in the meantime and what can we do to promote environmental health sustainability regionally and globally? A practical paradigm will be presented, based on the wisdom of the ages and the importance of rigorous science.

Thucydides (C460 – 400 BCE), the Greek historian, was deeply stirred by the spirit of scientific inquiry flourishing in his lifetime. He was essentially a man of action who expected his inquiries to produce practical results. In his time the most conspicuous science which did this was medicine. Hippocrates of Cos (469 – 399BC) instituted new methods which influenced the historian more decisively than any other science. From these developments Thucydides learned to treat the body politic as analogous to the human body and to accept the corollary that it is impossible to understand the parts without understanding the whole.

Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, proposes an interlinked hierarchy of means and ends leading to human wellbeing; and again, in the beginning of his "On the Parts of Animals" deals with the nature of specialist and generalist knowledge, referring to the benefits of an overall perspective in judging well in any situation. For environmental health sustainability to be achieved it is necessary to have both good science and good behaviour.

### **Order prevailing in nature and disorders besetting human communities**

Ed Ames sang of nuclear war, attempted suicide, infidelity and other “eve of destruction” themes in his song of the late 1960’s. It hit the Top 40 and was titled: “Who Will Answer?” The lyrics were given to a group of us, undergraduate philosophy students, at our introduction to an ethics course at the University of St. Jerome’s College, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada in 1969. It had nine verses, including the following:

**Is our hope in walnut shells  
Worn ’round the neck with temple bells,  
Or deep within some cloistered walls  
Where hooded figures pray in halls?  
Or crumbled books on dusty shelves,  
Or in our stars, or in ourselves,  
Who will answer? [verse 8]**

The song provides a strong impetus for serious thought in the environmental health sustainability field. The 1960’s was a turbulent time in global affairs, with the Vietnam War at its height and the world in great disarray. It seemed that a ‘silent spring’ was looming. With the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 we came close to a nuclear holocaust. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had conceived and followed through on the idea of placing intermediate-range missiles in Cuba. This would have doubled the Soviet strategic arsenal and provided a real deterrent to a potential U.S. attack against the Soviet Union. Thanks to the bravery of two men, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, war was averted.

## **Environmental Health Sustainability and Peace on Earth**

On April 11, 1963, just a few months before he died, Pope John XXIII presented his encyclical letter, *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) to the world’s people. Addressed to all people of good will, it is a powerful document that explores the wonderful order prevailing in nature and the disorders besetting human communities in a global context. Paragraphs 11, 98 and 142 touch on environmental health rights, the principle of solidarity and developments in the United Nations, respectively.

I am pleased to supply some images, based on No. 163 and also informed by the world of nature. The text is also provided in several languages, together with an image and a maxim drawn from No. 1 for reference, in a link below.

The English version follows:

163. Hence among the very serious obligations incumbent upon men of high principles, we must include the task of establishing new relationships in human society, under the mastery and guidance of truth, justice, charity and freedom—relations between individual citizens, between citizens and their respective States, between States, and finally between individuals, families, intermediate associations and States on the one hand, and the world community on the other.

There is surely no one who will not consider this a most exalted task, for it is one which is able to bring about true peace in accordance with divinely established order.

## **Environmental Health Sustainability and the Principle of Solidarity**

“It is a small world. It is one world, and we are each other’s keepers and we are keepers of the whole fragile earth which keeps us all.” Niall O’Brien, Maryknoll, N.Y.1986.

Fast-forward to July 11, 2012, Ireland, where a little girl (6 pounds 14 ounces – 3.118 Kg)), Aisling, was born at the National Maternity Hospital. Within a few hours of birth she was being driven in emergency by ambulance to the Crumlin Childrens’ Hospital. She had been diagnosed with transposition of the great vessels. She promptly received emergency heart intervention and, within two days, had major open heart surgery involving an arterial switch procedure of close on seven hours duration. On July 24, 2012 Aisling was discharged home and is now well, thriving and full of smiles, and in true solidarity with all of her family, thanks be to God!

Aisling’s progress, and the general healing of all peoples and of the environment, relies on the truth that all human beings are distinguished by a special and complementary capacity for service which needs always to be exercised. When good science and good behaviour come together environmental health sustainability is brought forward.

At this Consultative & Annual Work meeting of the EPH Community in Krakow a powerful alliance of scientific research and policy innovation in environmental health has been vigorously pursued in the hearts and minds of a truly committed group of dedicated individuals working for the common good. The prospect of success has been well expressed by a native of Krakow and a champion of global solidarity in the following words:

The Triune God ... giving himself in the Holy Spirit as gift to man, transforms the human world from within, from inside hearts and minds. Along this path the world, made to share in the divine gift, becomes “as the Council teaches” “ever more human, ever more profoundly human” (Dominum et Vivificantem 59 John Paul II).

Trójjedyny Bóg, ... udzielaj?c si? w Duchu ?wi?tym jako Dar cz?owiekowi, przetwarza ?wiat ludzki od wewn?trz, od wn?trza serc i sumie?. Na tej drodze ca?y ów ?wiat — uczestnicz?c w tym Darze Bo?ym — staje si? zarazem, jak uczy Sobór, „coraz bardziej ludzki, coraz g??biej ludzki” (Dominum et Vivificantem 59 Jan Pawel II).