

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL COLLAPSE AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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IN A SOUP

The fact that about fifty thousand people ranging from national leaders to grass roots activists from every corner of the world are now in Johannesburg to participate in this Summit, must mean that issues relating to Sustainable Development are now being taken seriously by people in all levels of society. Global Environment Outlook 3ⁱ (GEO 3), the report published by UNEP to coincide with the summit makes for some sober reading. The introductory paragraph to its Synthesis Reportⁱⁱ gives one an idea of the convoluted nature of the problem no matter how hard the writers try to be even handed; the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm was a watershed in modern environmentalism; great strides have been made since then in placing environment on the agenda at local, national and international levels; there have been a proliferation of policy documents, new legislative regimes and institutions and an *“unspoken acknowledgement that the environment is too complex for humanity to address adequately in every sense”* (writer’s italics).

Decisions made in Stockholm are now said to influence governance, business, economic activity, international environmental law, bilateral relations and also influence individual and society life style choices. But, there are problems. The environment is still at the periphery of socio economic development. Additionally, poverty and excessive consumption put enormous pressure on the environment and sustainable development remains largely theoretical for the majority of the world’s population of 600 million people. In a sentence, in spite of all the talking, report writing, the legislating and institution building very little progress has been made on the ground. “There has been immense change in both human and environmental conditions over the past thirty years”ⁱⁱⁱ, for the worse, epitomised by the widening gap between rich and poor nations and the deteriorating state of the environment. This leads one to the obvious conclusion that if we do not begin to act with the required alacrity now we will be leaving succeeding generations in dire straits.

Alarming, there does not appear to be ministerial consensus even in developed countries like the UK who could be counted on to give the idea of Sustainable Development a push in the right direction. This is reflected in embarrassing public disagreements^{iv} between ministers who form part of the British delegation to the Summit, one contending that this gathering is about development and the other conservation. A survey in the Economist^v observes that “Sustainable Development cuts to the heart of mankind’s relationship with nature” and warns of the contradiction inherent in pursuing economic growth, which is “the best way known to help the poor” and the havoc this could wreck on the planet if this is not handled with care. The survey further observes “ the sheer magnitude of economic growth that is hoped for in the coming decades makes it seem inevitable that clashes between mankind and nature will grow worse”. This is a soup with some unpalatable ingredients in it.

As people ask the big questions the solutions flood in thick and fast. What takes precedence, development or conservation? The answer depends on whether you are an economist or a conservationist. But Sustainable Development has managed to marry the two thanks to the magic word “sustainable” a la Brutland 1987^{vi}. But the debate continues. Has not the environmentalist hand been overplayed? Cannot market forces and technological fixes ease us out of this conundrum? Is nature so

sacrosanct that we preserve it at the cost of human welfare? Should progress be sacrificed at the altar of nature? Are not the answers apparent in the way rich countries have dealt with the problem? Pollute as you progress and clean up the debris sometime in the future.

In spite of all the evidence that the carrying capacity of the planet is being severely tested there is fierce resistance to the idea of sustainability from the big business lobby. This is reminiscent of the 1950s and 1960s when the tobacco industry lobbied and laboured to deny any links between smoking and lung cancer. Now they pay out millions in damages to those who have succumbed to the smoking habit and suffer its consequences. Big business is the force behind the US Government's decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change.

One of the arguments behind the market forces palliative are emissions trading where companies and even countries can buy and sell tradable pollution credits. Another idea is for the state to levy pollution taxes. But, who puts a price on the environment, on nature? Some have dared to try. In an article in the *Science*^{vii} journal a group of ecological economists "estimate that the overall cost benefit ratio of an effective programme for conservation of remaining wild nature is 100:1". Nature's services are valued at "around a rough average of \$38 trillion". So nature has now become a service industry. Those who wonder if technology could save the planet should also reflect on what technology has done to it in the past two hundreds years. We have become its addicts have we not? It has the quality of a drug where in spite of the systemic damage it has done to us and other living systems we crave for stiffer fixes of the same.

This Summit is essentially a manifestation of globalisation and it could be said in its mitigation that a global response is needed for a global problem essentially not of the making of the majority of the people represented in Johannesburg for this gathering. No mention is made in GEO 3 of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) who many consider the bete noir of Sustainable Development. It is an organisation based on the profit motive and in the main serves the interest of the Multi National Corporations (MNCs). Sustainable Development is not on its lists of priorities.^{viii} Five MNCs control 50 percent of the global markets in aerospace, electronics, automobiles, airlines and steel; five control 70 percent in consumer durables; five control 40 percent in oil, personal computers and media. 51 percent of the largest economies today are MNCs, not countries.^{ix} It is also interesting to note that the sales of 200 companies represent 28.3 percent of the world's GDP and these companies employ only 0.75 percent of the world's workforce.^x This should ring alarm bells for Sustainable Development as powerful forces are working against it. As the world is economics led it is as well to be aware that one of the leading maxims of this discipline is the utilisation of scarce resources in the most efficient (meaning profitable) manner possible. Sustainable Development does not figure in this equation. However, the United nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its latest report^{xi} calls for more open markets and reminds industrial countries that their subsidies to production and exports cost the poor countries more in loss exports than the \$56 billion they now receive in aid annually. Commitment to free trade by the rich countries is only superficial as domestic political concerns take precedence.

DEMOCRACY'S APPETITES

Democracy is not a new phenomenon and neither is it a particular invention of the West. It has thrived in human society in many forms and what is propagated today is

a political form that has adapted with modernity to serve the needs of modernity itself. Modernity destroys and devours traditional cultures and societies and has a voracious appetite for the finite resources of the natural world. Modernity with its indissoluble link to the state and the market leaves no individual free from the influence of the market.^{xii} The market today is not of the local community any longer where participants have a commonality of purpose and interests. The modern economy, which is now global in extent devalues and destroys a whole range of human activities, human networks, solidarity, cooperation and reciprocity.^{xiii} What emerges from this is a selfish form of consumer individualism, which is destroying communal cohesion and solidarity. This individualism is illusory as it denies true choice, individuals having been 'functionalised' and transformed into 'cogs and machines'.^{xiv} The global village is now a homogenised global culture defined largely in economic terms. It emerged through the progressive dilution and destruction of the old traditional cultures and the marginalization of the great religions by what has come to be known as the secular scientific order.^{xv} Another writer observes that the driving force of modernity is its obsession with success; its aspiration to create a grand society is illusory and is totalitarian in outlook in that it sees all other societies as irrational. He describes modernity as the rape of traditional ancestral values and sees a titanic struggle between it and tradition. The technological society it espouses has dehumanising tendencies.^{xvi} Much of this is encapsulated in the plight of traditional communities in Africa and other parts of the world today.

Modernity ushered in the age of the nation states, deployed nationalism in the service of state authority and promoted national interests as the criteria of state policy.^{xvii} Democracy functions in the interests of the nation state, that is, for its people and not for people of other states. Perceived national interest comes first and this is why the US withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol on Global Warming. From this perspective it would seem natural that politicians vie with each other to offer voters higher and higher standards of living. The party that sells the best package rules a pacified electorate until the next round. There is however one major problem with this superficially agreeable set up. High standards of living come at the expense of a finite planet. As the 1972 Landsat satellite image shows the blue marble in space has limits. But this is not all. Nations compete with each other to stay on top of the per capita incomes league, the GDP league, et cetera, all measures of economic well being that grow inexorably and unsustainably every year. The UNDP report^{xviii} gives Norway the number one spot on its Human Development Index. But, as we say "well done" Norway and mean it, we have to ask in the same breath if this was done sustainably and also wonder if this not an invitation for the rest to follow suit. It would be interesting to make a comparison of the ecological footprints left behind by the first ten nations ranked in the list of 173 and the rest.

We have two UN agencies here talking not quite the same language although, ostensibly, they have an understanding about sustainability. This is a cause for concern and it is also a puzzling paradox that global agencies can propagate local democracy with such vigour. Who now speaks for the Inuit of North America as his soul, his culture, his way of being, and his democracy is now destroyed? Who will speak for the now diminishing tribes of South America or the vanishing communities of Africa as globalisation sucks their souls into its vortex? It must have occurred to somebody that traditional communities did at one time live sustainably and in harmony with their surroundings before modernity intervened to change their lives.

In Chapter 5 of GEO 3^{xix} there are a few guarded passages that invite one to see through them. The affluent are asked to consider changes in consumption, meaning reducing consumption and changing life styles. Who in the developed democracies is going to listen to this? Cranks and conservationists may enthuse over this idea, but

this strikes at the root of the *raison d'être* of the modern nation state and democracy itself. Standards of living only go one way and that is up. This is why 90 percent of the world's resources is consumed by 20 percent^{xx} of the world's affluent, all but a tiny minority of whom live in the developed world.

Prosperity is closely linked to the ability to address environmental concerns but it is also one of the forces behind excessive consumption, which is the cause of the other problems with far reaching impacts.^{xxi} But, there is more to this than meets the eye. Higher levels of education and mass communication have benefited the prosperous countries and there is both a greater awareness and appreciation of environmental issues amongst them. But education is a double edged sword. People normally get educated to increase their standards of living, to prosper and thus become bigger and better consumers with its attendant environmental problems. This is how the system works. The direct correlation between education and environmental degradation is not an argument against education itself but a drastic change in its orientation from one that is fixated on individual careers to another that inculcates wider responsibilities. So how do we explain environmental improvements in rich countries? Much of the pollution is exported elsewhere. Developing countries are rapidly becoming the manufacturing bases of the multinational corporations, cheap and unorganised labour being one of the major factors. Also, Europe for example, having exhausted its easily exploitable material resources imports its requirements mostly from Africa. But in doing so Europe may be foreclosing on the development prospects of the African countries themselves. Additionally, Europe's own "unsustainable rates of production are using up the planets sinks for waste, which will no longer be available in the future".^{xxii} Africa and indeed much of the developing world are being sucked into unsustainable practices of the more affluent countries at a great cost to their future development. Multi national mining conglomerates acted with great alacrity in obtaining vast mining rights in the Congo with the Government that succeeded Mobuto's regime.

GEO 3 does suggest that reduction of excessive consumption by the more affluent countries should be one of the key areas for attention to ensure the success of Sustainable Development. But when this is linked with the alleviation of poverty in poor countries, as it nearly always is, it loses its impact altogether. These two things are not equal. Surely the one fifth who consume 90 percent of the world's resources have a proportionately greater responsibility to the four fifths who consume the remaining 10 percent. "Economic and political concerns have stalled attempts to change consumption patterns through new policies or instruments".^{xxiii} This is a carefully worded way of saying that the haves are not ready for change. But, who can blame them – that is democracy. Generous to a fault at times of crises in other parts of the world, but try the idea of a sustainable development tax on them.

AN ISLAMIC RECIPE

Are Muslims a part of the problem or a part of the solution? Sad to say much points to the former option.

As what we now understand by modernity advanced, as the secular ethic progressively seeped into the Muslim psyche and as industrial development, economic indicators and consumerism became the governing parameters of society, there has been a corresponding erosion of the Muslim perception of the holistic and a withering of its understanding of the sacred nexus between the human community and the rest of the natural order.^{xxiv}

The creation of the heavens and the earth is far greater than the creation of mankind. But most of mankind do not know it"

Al Qur'an 40:56^{xxv}

Silent Spring is a seminal work written by Rachel Carson in 1962. It has the reputation of giving the modern environmental movement a big push in the right direction. It was in a sense a wake up call "which many consider a turning point in our understanding of the inter-connections between the environment, economy and social well being". But where have the Muslims been all this time? The Qur'an encapsulates this idea succinctly thus –

*What is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah.
Allah encompasses everything.*

Al Qur'an 4:125

It could be said that we are now devouring the womb that nourishes us and gives us succour. But this was not how it was. There was a time, and not a very long time ago, when all the people on this earth lived in close affinity with the natural world. The earth was not seen then as an economic resource. "Development" with its destructive consequences and "progress" with its polluting consequences are buzzwords invented in the latter half of the last century. Those who invented these words have grown richer, as they wanted for others what they wanted for themselves, and stronger as they devour the finite resources that are the birth right of those others, with increasing ferocity.

Islam and the other traditions having been reduced to religion, superstition and black magic there is now only one prevailing world view and that is secularism. Sustainable Development is a secular idea, invented by secular institutions to deal with a problem of gigantic proportions created by a secular mindset. How we have been seduced into this is a matter for discussion in another place but what we have been seduced into would bear some cursory examination. At its very basic the difference between Islam and the secular ethic could be reduced to two factors. One of these is our attitude to existence and our relationship with the natural world. The other is about that element which makes the world go round in a dizzy spin today – money.

The traditional world-view, which includes that of the West, was challenged by what we have come to know as the Enlightenment, which has its origins in 16th century Europe. These events are usually seen as a time in which science began its ascendancy over religion. Richard Tarnas^{xxvi} observes that this movement achieved its maturity in the 19th century, finally resulting in a radical shift of psychological alliance from the divine to humankind. Descartes, the French philosopher and mathematician, finally breached the flood gates of the old order by splitting mind from body and proclaiming a dualistic world view in his well-known statement "I think, therefore I am" (*cogito ergo sum*). The fruit of the dualism between rational subject and the material world was science, including the scientific capacity for rendering intelligible certain aspects of the material world and for making man in Descartes' own words, "master and possessor of nature".

This view is on a collision course with how Islam teaches Muslims to view the world. There is only one master and possessor of nature and that is the one who created it, *Allah Subhanawu a Ta'ala*. This is unequivocally expressed in the first line of the first verse in Al Qur'an –

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the world
Al Qur'an 1:1

and the last verse -

*Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind,
the King of mankind,
the God of mankind ...
Al Qur'an 114:1-3*

Two philosophers of the Frankfurt School, Adorno and Horkheimer, wrote in the 1940s^{xxvii}: Since the Enlightenment (roughly 17th, 18th and 19th centuries) a way of thinking evolved that was seen as liberating men from fear (meaning religion) and establishing their sovereignty over everything they see, hear and touch. Men control men's lives by sets of rules determined by men. Mankind is apart from nature and nature becomes an object that is manipulated, controlled and exploited. This is done for the benefit of mankind. The result of this confrontation with nature is alienation of the human from his own nature. The struggle to control external nature results in the struggle turning inwards on the species itself. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr observes, "there is near total disequilibrium between modern man and nature as attested by nearly every expression of modern civilisation which seeks to offer a challenge to nature rather than to co-operate with it"^{xxviii}.

At its very basic the philosophical formulations of Descartes turned the human race into a predator. For what he was "proposing was a new religious revelation, a radical revision of nature that had not really occurred to any other social animal"^{xxix} or to any previous civilisation in human history. The *Qur'an* shows us where we belong –

*Allah's natural pattern on which He made mankind.
There is no changing Allah's creation
Al Qur'an 30:29*

Humankind was created within the natural patterning of nature and being of it, its role is defined by this very same patterning. This is at one and the same time both a simple and lucid ecological definition of our place in the natural order -

Allah created humankind as part of His original creation to function within His original scheme. We were then subjected to Allah's unchangeable laws as was the rest of creation, making us – at the biological level – equal partners with the rest of nature. The different elements of the universe working together keep nature in balance. We can modify the environment to suit our purposes up to a point but we cannot change its basic make up. The environmental problems we experience today could be described as adjusting mechanisms that keep the earth in order. Like the human body the earth is a self-healing entity and it will tend to close the wounds inflicted upon it. Also like the human body the earth will react drastically to the deeper levels of injury we keep subjecting it to. But we have yet to understand these processes.^{xxx}

There would be no life on this earth without air and water. These are basic elemental gifts to us by the One who brought us into being. But, there is another 'element', which is entirely of our own making, which we have made nearly as indispensable as air and water. That is money, or rather the kind of money that we have conspired to bring into existence in the modern world. One increasingly comes across interesting appraisals of it like the following for example –

In spite of all its fervid activity, money remains a naked symbol with no intrinsic value of its own and no direct linkage to anything specific.^{xxxi}

Money has come to be recognised as mere tokens and

there is something quite magical about the way money is created. No other commodity works quite the same way. The money supply grows through use; it expands through debt. The more we lend, the more we have. The more debt there is, the more there is.^{xxxii}

These tokens of value that we create from nothing and use every day grow exponentially ad infinitum. But we know that the natural world, which is subject to drastic resource depletion, has limits and is finite. This equation is lopsided and the question is for how long can we continue to create this infinite amount of token finance to exploit the real and tangible resources of a finite world. Looked at from this perspective, money, as the modern world has conceived it, assumes the characteristics of a virus that eats into the fabric of the planet. The consequences of this become visible as global environmental degradation.

This magical system underwent a metamorphosis in 1971 when President Nixon unilaterally abandoned the gold standard. The background to this event is discussed below. It suffices to say now that, by abandoning the gold standard he also moved the world into a new standard: the interest standard.^{xxxiii}

It is generally known that Islam prohibits usury or the taking of interest and the term used in the Qur'an for this is *riba*.^{xxxiv} This term has wide connotations. Simply put, it means one cannot have something out of nothing. Thus, *riba* is also seen as prohibiting the free creation of credit. The Qur'an denounces these practices vehemently and we can see why from the foregoing discussion.

Those who practise riba will not rise from the grave except as someone driven mad by shaytan's (satan's) touch

Al Qur'an 2:274

Also,

You who have iman (faith)! have taqwa (awe) of Allah and forgo any remaining riba if you are mumimun (believers). If you do not, know that it means war from Allah and his Messenger

Al Qur'an 2:277,278

No other proclamation in the Qur'an matches this degree of trenchancy.^{xxxv}

The Bretton Woods Agreements concluded in 1944 as part of the process of post-war reconstruction put the US dollar centre-stage where all other trading currencies were linked to it in a system of fixed exchange rates. The US dollar itself had its value firmly linked to gold. One of the effects of this system was that it kept prices stable as money supply was in equilibrium with the real economy. In August 1971, President Nixon reneged on this agreement and decoupled the US dollar from gold for mainly domestic reasons. Kurtzman says of this -

...closing the gold window, although buried in a long laundry list of essentially useless economic policy changes, represent the biggest challenge to the world economy since the great depression... It was a change of monumental proportions that not only redefined money but created the opportunity to dramatically speed up the rate at which transactions between companies and countries took place. ...It also initiated the process of decoupling the "money" economy from the "real" economy. As a result, two plus decades later, the money economy, where transactions take

place purely for financial or speculative gain, and the real economy, where the world's raw materials, goods and services are produced and traded are badly out of balance. That was Nixon's economic legacy.^{xxxvi}

For Nixon read Bush and for Bretton Woods read Kyoto. The point is national interest rules supreme and it takes priority over the rest of the world even at the expense of the rest of the world, be it trade or the environment. Even more importantly the entire planet has now been sucked into the vortex of the dollar in a manoeuvre that represents the antithesis of democracy. No state regardless of its political complexion is now free from the machinations of the dollar driven international financial system. As trillions of dollars float ephemerally in cyber space everyday, 1.2 million people (an UNEP estimate) live on less than US\$1 per day.

Six trillion dollars American per day moves around in the international money market. Every serious banker I know tells me off the record that 95 percent of that is just paper (more like blips on a computer), it's just inflation, it's just moving stuff around in the South Sea bubble tradition. And in fact the growth of the international money market is one of the principle objects blocking our economies, blocking our societies, and impoverishing our societies.^{xxxvii}

Money now is a mere abstraction. It is a disconcerting thought that our entire lives are built on this fiction and it is this fiction that makes globalisation possible and Sustainable Development, as its promoters have come to define it, almost impossible to achieve. Kurtzman observes -

"High-tech financial economy with its boom-and bust cyclical and its daily volatility, has taken nearly complete charge of the real economy. For humanity as a whole, that is a new and highly uncertain condition".^{xxxviii}

Analysts have come to the conclusion that the global economy is growing exponentially - that is doubling periodically as a direct reflection of how money is created (discussed above). Is it any wonder that there is an environmental crisis? Exponential growth of unreal wealth has caused the exponential growth of all human activity, including scientific inquiry, technological innovation and industrial production. It would not be far fetched to conclude that magicians are juggling with our lives on a vast scale. We are now ruled by routine fraud committed by the banks and financiers aided and abetted by the political establishment. This does not offer Muslims any mitigation from our own collusion in the process. Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir as-Sufi, one of the leading Muslim thinkers of our times observed that the democratic state is the service industry of the banks.

UNEP's Millennium Report sees the future with some alarm -

... the global human ecosystem is threatened by grave imbalances in productivity and in the distribution of goods and services...sustainable progression of extremes of wealth and poverty threatens the stability of the whole human system...the world is undergoing *accelerating* (writer's italics) change, with internationally co-ordinated environmental stewardship lagging behind economic and social development. Environmental gains from new technology and policies are being overtaken by the pace and scale of population growth and economic development. The processes of globalisation that are so strongly influencing social evolution need to be directed towards resolving rather than aggravating the serious imbalances that divide the world today.^{xxxix}

Sustainable Development is an attempt to stop the flood and represents one of the major currents of modernity. In seeking an accommodation with globalisation those who speak on behalf of sustainability recognise its malign impact and call for a redirection of the influences it wields on the world today. It is as well to understand that in modernity we are dealing with an entity that makes it impossible for Muslims, individuals or nation states, to give expression to a normative Islam. This model, which we are not inevitably a part of, is as we have seen, in direct conflict with two fundamentals that constitute the Islamic world-view. This condition may be described as a psychosis in Muslim society. It strives to maintain its deep attachment to Islam on the one hand, while on the other it persists in tasting the fruits of a globalised order run on principles which are an anathema to it and moreover not of its own making.^{xi}

We are now living in an illusory world and one does not have to be a Muslim to understand this. In fact much of the cutting edge analysis for the current state of the planet comes, with rare exceptions, mainly from those who are not Muslims, although Islam gives the clearest understanding of this condition. All the evidence shows that we are hitching our futures even more firmly to a collapsing civilisation. There is clearly an issue of conflicting paradigms; one based on man's domination over the natural world and the manipulation of greed through ephemeral money, and the other on submission to the will of the Creator and the conduct of transactions with what is real.

How then can Muslims accommodate the former? Muslims have been doing so for the past 200 years or so to the extent that the *shariah* is now a moribund, if not a dead, force. For example, even in countries that claim to be Islamic, the system of *awkafs* that served Muslims so well over the centuries by providing schools, hospitals and relief to the poor is now replaced by *riba*-based real estate ventures. At another level, it is interesting to note that efforts to meet the challenge of environmental degradation in Muslim countries are made by secular agencies. It is all but forgotten that deep in the matrix of the *shariah* there exists institutions that can effectively deal with these problems.

This is the critique, but what can Muslims offer as viable solutions. The current international political climate is perhaps a good opportunity to re-evaluate our position in the fold of humanity and assert our authority once again. The issues we have discussed in this paper go to the heart of the matter – the glitter and dazzle of modernity is unsustainable. Our responses and our priorities should be based on the moral authority of being of service to humanity –

*Let there be a community among you who call to the good,
and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong,
they are the ones who have success.*

Al Qur'an 3:104

There are between 1.3 and 1.6 billion Muslims in the world today depending on who makes the calculations and this can be a massive force for good.

The idea of Sustainable Development as it has evolved today is said to contain three pillars, namely social, economic and environment. Whilst people wrestle with this idea and attempt to bring it into fruition we need to consider alternatives. Sustainable living sounds a more realistic proposition and this would seem to be the way people always conducted their daily lives before nature was subjected to a massive assault in the name of development and became an exploitable resource. For Muslims sustainable living is based on the *Fitra* – the natural paradigm of Allah Ta'ala's creation and adding the spiritual and political to the three pillars of sustainable development would make this a very Islamic concept. These five pillars in fact define

the externalities of the Islamic system and balance out the classical five pillars of individual practise.

There is an urgent need for change and one gets a sense of this from reading UNEP's own reports. Muslims can act as catalysts and give leadership in bringing about this change, working from Islamic principles and offering it to the world at large. Our major thrust should be on the establishment of *sharia* based financial and trading systems because this is where the problems lie today. There is a tried and tested Islamic monetary system based on the Gold Dinar and the Silver Dirham and the leading proponents of this today is the worldwide Murabitun movement. It is small and in its infancy, but it is growing. Islamic currency however is not a monopoly. It is both global and local and it is about people and not about profit. It is available to all and can be developed by any Muslim group anywhere bearing in mind that the example has already been set. It should not be forgotten that the Kruger Rand could be a force to be reckoned with in international transactions. It is a paradox of our times that people willingly exchange gold for worthless paper tokens and we should learn from the examples of Argentina and Uruguay whose people are today estranged from their real wealth.

There is a need for two strategies, one that could be adopted by Muslim minorities living in countries like South Africa and another for Muslim countries themselves, where scope for positive action and experimentation within the *sharia* is considerable. The establishment of the National Awqaf Foundation of South Africa is an excellent example of what can be done by minorities working within the laws of the countries they live in. It is also possible to adapt *sharia* institutions within secular administrative systems. We are conducting an experiment in another part of Africa where a marine conservation zone is being set up as a *hima*. This is a type of nature protection zone, which is now almost extinct in the Islamic world. The scope is considerable.

Muslim countries need now to breathe fresh life into those parts of the *sharia* that deal with trade and environmental protection. The Organisation of Islamic Countries should urgently consider the re-establishment of the Islamic trading system, which served Muslims well for centuries. It should be open to all who want to participate, be anything but hegemonistic and decouple trading from the hypnotic effects of the illusory world of global finance. This may set in motion the very moves for a change in direction the world is waiting for. Islamic trade is sustainable trade for sustainable living.

Our task is nothing short of giving the quality of leadership that would give fresh hope to the world.

Allah Ta'ala says in Qur'an Al Kareem –

*There are certainly signs in the earth
For people with certainty;
and in your selves as well.
Do you not then see?*

Al Qur'an 51: 20,21

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ⁱ UNEP, Global Environment 3, UNEP, 2002

ⁱⁱ UNEP, Synthesis GEO 3, UNEP, 2002.

ⁱⁱⁱ Op.cit

^{iv} The Independent (UK), 12 August 2002, "Ministerial odds over agenda for green talks"

^v Economist, 4 July 2002, "The Great Race"

^{vi} Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development – Our Common Future (popularly know as the Brutland Report), Oxford University Press, 1987.

^{vii} Balmford et al, Conserving Wild Nature in Science, 9 August 2002

^{viii} See [http://www. Globalexchange.org/economy/rulemakers/toptenreasons/html](http://www.Globalexchange.org/economy/rulemakers/toptenreasons/html)

^{ix} Ralston Saul, Democracy and Globalisation, transcript of a lecture delivered at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, Jan. 1998.

^x Op.cit

^{xi} UNDP, Human Development Report, 2002.

^{xii} Wolfgang Sachs (ed), The Development Dictionary, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg and Zed Books and London. See Market by Gerald Berthoud.

^{xiii} Op. cit. note 12; See Poverty by Majid Rahnema.

^{xiv} Joel Krieger (ed), The Oxford Companion to the Politics of the World, Oxford University Press, 1993. See Modernity by Zygmunt Bauman.

^{xv} Fazlun Khalid, An Islamic Critique of the Root Causes of Environmental Degradation, paper submitted to the Conference on Islam and Ecology, Harvard University, 1998, to be published.

^{xvi} Serge Latouche; In the Wake of the Affluent Society; Paris 1991; Zed Books, London, 1993.

^{xvii} Op. cit. note 14

^{xviii} Op. cit. note 11

^{xix} Op. cit. note 1

^{xx} Op. cit. note 1

^{xxi} Op. cit. note 1

^{xxii} Michael Carley and Phillippe Spapens, Sharing the World – Sustainability and Global Equity in the Twenty first Century, Earthscan, UK, 1998.

^{xxiii} Op. cit. 1

^{xxiv} Fazlun Khalid, Islam and the Environment, Vol. 5 Encyclopaedia of Global Environmental Change, John Wiley and Sons, Chichester, UK, 2002.

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