

See Also:

- Ethics, Spiritual Values, and Promotion of Environmentally Sustainable Development, by Oren Lyons, 1995
- Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan, Onondaga Council of Chiefs of the Haudenosaunee, PBS Interview, 3 July 1991

Citizen's Summit: Agenda for the Earth
Oren Lyons Speaking at the Earth Summit
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
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Good morning early birds. I'm very pleased to be here. I'm hearing, really, for the first time, what the Earth effort is about here, the coordination and the spiritual gathering. That is what's taking place here. I sense, not only here but in the past two or three years, a real groundswell of people beginning to challenge the status quo and positions of nation states.

I'm concerned as everybody else is because of the seriousness of the situation that we face today and of a lack of responsibility in governments and government leadership. I'm very concerned about the fact that business is leading the economy of the world and actually making the decisions for nation states. One must understand that in the ethics of business there are no ethics; that business is simply profit and loss. And it's a very severe game with severe consequences. What we're seeing today is the world market, the global market dictating direction for states.

What we're seeing in this process, in particular, is the use of the media as a corrupting force on the children. Our very children are being corrupted at the ages of two, three, four and five by commercial television. They are a market target for the world. There can not be ethics in a process such as that.

But it is real and it functions. The more technologically experienced and active a nation state, the more directly are the children impacted. In the United States, obviously, on Saturday morning, if anyone cares to get up and see what the children are watching, you will see this effort to implant in the minds of the children wants for a very great variety of things from breakfast cereals to toys, a market. These marketeers, these advertizers who work out of the central areas of New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, are clearly, with advanced knowledge and process, corrupting these children, for profit. And for whose profit?

What I see is in this technological development across the world, this thing is being exported and experienced throughout the world now. What we have facing us is a process of development driven simply by forces seeking profit. The consequence of that, of course, is the degradation of not only the earth but also the human being. Pollution works two ways: there's pollution of the earth itself and pollution of the minds of the people. And so I think that you should be aware.

I've had the experience of working for ten years with advertizing in New York City so you can't tell me that I don't know what I'm talking about. I do know. I've worked on Madison Avenue. I've worked with most of the big corporations. So I have the experience of observing, and even being part of, that process. It's a very insidious process and it's a very effective process. It produces profits.

So when you use a commercial station, television station, the only thing that makes that station function is dollars. And those people who have the dollars to make that station function control what goes on in that station. It's as simple as that. It won't function for the welfare of people unless you put the dollars in there. If the people had the dollars to make it function for them it would work for them. But of course they don't.

So we have this very serious situation of control factor and of course lack of ethics on the part of business internationally. Actually in speaking with many of the CEOs of the largest of the corporations I find out that they're human beings, they have families, they're concerned. Sometimes some of them are Boy Scout leaders, I find, and different things like that. But at the same time during the day, at their work, they're destroying the world. And they don't have options.

I asked them, "Since you understand this problem why do you continue?" They say, "That's my work. As CEO I must produce profit. I am at the demand of my stockholders. My stockholders demand profit." I said, "Who are the stockholders?" They said, "They're the people." So it comes back again: the people, the consumer, the stockholder. I said, "Then perhaps there should be a tremendous education program for the stockholders." They said, "We would be better served if there was an education program for the people."

It's not as if they don't understand what the problem is. What it is is that in the competition, in what they call mega-competition of global market, there is no option for someone in that competition to back off. Because if they do, even if they slow down, even if they stop for a second, they lose the position that they're fighting to hold.

So I said, "For instance, then, it's like a horse race. Let's take shoes, the competition for shoes around the world. So we have these horses in a horse race -- one Reebok, one Adidas, so forth and so on -- and the jockey up is the CEO. And your job is to be out front because that means you're going to sell the most for the most profit."

And I said, "Is there a winner of the race?" They said, "The winner is who is in front." I said, "That changes." They said, "Very often." I said, "Is there an end to the race?" And they said, "It's a long race." And I said, "I don't think so. I think it's short race. I think you've made the far turn and you're coming down the stretch now and instead of a finish line you're going to run into a blank wall. As in any race, as you get closer to the finish line, the intensity of the race progresses and so they run faster."

I said, "You see at the end of this race a blank wall and yet you're not slowing up. You're not making any effort to change. You're going to carry the full force and impact right into this stone wall. The end." And they said, "We're hopeful that science and technology will help us." I said, "It brought us to pretty serious degradation at this point. In the intensity of this race I don't think that we should be depending on something like that when really the

problem is not science or technology, the problem is in the minds of human beings."

We have to make a change in our direction of how we live, a change in the direction of how we think, and a change in the direction of corporations and nation states and obviously a fundamental change in leadership. Certainly what is going on at UNCED today is a good indication of the irresponsibility of nation states or the inability of them to deal with the issue.

So it's going to come back to the people. It's going to come back to you. As I said before, if you're waiting for Jesus to come he's not going to be here right away. You better get out there and do it your self. That's why I'm putting my hope into the young people. Because they have the most at stake here. People like us will be gone in a short while; leadership will be gone. As it is, forever and ever, one generation comes behind the other, like waves of a sea and each generation is responsible for itself and responsible for the next one coming and of course responsible for the future.

If we can instill in this particular generation, inspire them to really try to change the direction and enjoy what even in my lifetime I've seen, where the water was clean, the air was clean. It's only since 1935 that electricity has become such a force that's really changed things. A very short time that all of these events have occurred.

As we go through the world and we observe life, the western civilization of looking at life as resources, and as long as they use that term for life as resources you're never going to gain anything. When you recognize life for what it is: a tree as a spirit, a tree as a living being, a tree as a grandfather that we call; when you recognize that there is a reason for all of these beings and that these beings are interlocked, that we depend on one another; if we can change the definitions, if we can have people speak about life for what it is -- as life with equal value, as life is necessary for survival and not as commerce and not as resources then we may have a chance. But as long as we look at forests as resources, as long as we look at these things as board-feet of lumber or we look at the fish runs as resources for people, we're going to continue to use them without restraint and without guidance.

That's why it is important for the small voice of indigenous people at this point to come forward. Because I must say in our own defense that we have never given up that position. And I must say that during all the time of this glorious development process that took us through the Victorian era, that came with the Monroe Doctrine, that came with the great wars of one, two, and now maybe three, that during all of that development of human as they say, you lost the mystery, you lost the elegance, you lost the spirituality of the reality of the earth and of life itself. And when you lost that you lost direction.

The only ones who have hung onto that over these periods of time have been the indigenous people wherever they were. They did hang on to that. I commend them for that. I would not be here if my grandfather and my grandmother did not say the same thing. If I wasn't told by them and I didn't believe them I would not be speaking to you here. It's to their credit that I stand here. And it's to my obligation and responsibility to see that when I'm gone somebody else is going to standing there speaking and saying the same thing. So we must inspire the young people and we must defend and protect them. We must not let them be homeless and in the streets and being so persecuted.

As I said before we were told that you can tell the quality of life and the position of the earth by how they treat the children. Let's look about us and see how are the societies of the world treating the children. Very dangerous and very damaging when even parents turn against their children.

All we can do, here, is speak about it. Yet another speech, yet another talk, yet another group of people. But the question goes back to you: what are you going to do about it? The answer is with you, it's not with us. As I said, if you're going to wait for a messiah, you're going to wait for a leader, they're not coming. The leader is among you. The leader is with you. Each generation raises their own heroes. Each generation raises their own leaders. You have to look to your selves. If you're going to stand and wait to be led, you will be led, but it won't be to your benefit.

I'm simply saying that this very extraordinary meeting of Rio, this global forum of 1992, in retrospect, after years have gone by, will be looked upon as one of the most important meetings of human beings ever. Because we still have options, we still have time. Gathered here are an amazing assortment of strong-willed, strong-minded people who are not giving up and sitting here figuring what can we do now?

In The Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders For Global Survival which I've been working with since 1988, I put my effort into that because I saw that they are moving away from states and governments. As an independent *ad hoc* group with very powerful individuals in there they announced on Saturday the Green Cross. They announced that President Gorbachev would be the leader of that Green Cross, an effort that will look after natural disasters and the environment as we look at it today. That's a very serious leader. But nothing is going to happen in this Green Cross if the people don't operate. Now that they have put this process out there, now that they have established it, it's going to be up to the grassroots people, to the young people to say, This is going to work.

They have asked me to be responsible for indigenous people and I want to extend that to the youth because I like working with young people. I like their fire, I like their hope, I like their unwillingness to accept what people say. Somehow or other now, we have a process by which we can begin, really at a grassroots level, with financial support (which makes it different). But all in all, it's much better if it's volunteer, it's much better if everybody gets behind it and organizes.

I want you to think about that. The process is there. Or the mechanism is there, the process is to be determined. And the process is determined by you because who has a clue of how to do it except the people who are involved in it wherever you are. I want to make that announcement that that is what I'm involved in. I don't know how the Council at Onondaga or the people at Onondaga are going to say, "Now what are you going to be doing? Besides everything else."

But it's common cause for all of us. We'll organize at Onondaga, we'll organize at our own grassroots levels. But I want to hear ideas from you. I want to hear thoughts. I want to hear what you think has to be done and I'm sure it's not going to match at all with what's going on at Rio Central. I'm sure of that. But then again, they're limited in their time and their control.

We have one thing on our side and that's the reality. No matter what they say over there, no matter what proclamations or no matter what treaties they fail to sign, no matter what they do there is one thing that you can depend on for sure: you can absolutely depend on that the environment is going to get worse and worse and worse. So if they're not going to listen this year, they'll listen next year or the year after or the year after.

But time is extremely important now. That's the only thing that we have to move on, is time. We have to broaden our thinking. We have to think as a large world community. We have to set aside some of our personal agendas on this. And we have to impact a country like the United States which says they will not sign the forest treaty because it is not in their national interests. Now if that isn't a short-sided way of looking at things, and absolutely suicidal, I don't know what it is. It won't operate no matter what they say.

The vision can come from anyone and the vision should come from everyone. You have that ability. Each one of you is a very powerful spiritual entity. Each human being is a great power. And when you choose to collectively put that power together in one mind you can take down the walls of Berlin, you can remove despotic dictatorships, you can change a whole structure if the people move in one mind. That's what we're told, the power of one mind.

With that, I'll close and say of the work that we're facing, I regard Rio '92 as the first real skirmish. This is a real skirmish. As you drive to the Rio you're seeing the military, you're seeing the seriousness with which they're looking at this. It is a very real skirmish. But it certainly isn't the war. It's a battle and it's a beginning. We're going to have another one and you better be ready at the next time. You organize yourself, you make your connections now. This is the greatest opportunity for connecting. You're not going to have this kind of gathering of people for a long time again.

This is an extraordinary time and we're very fortunate to be a part of it. And by being a part of it and by being here you have obligated yourself to act. You just can't go home and forget it because you were fortunate to be here. What that means is what do we do next? What do we do next is what you think we should do next. And the more hear from you and the more we hear from your thoughts the better things are going to be. We must have faith. We must have mystery. We don't have to know everything. We must believe. And maybe we can help our nations survive. Maybe we can. But that is entirely in the hands of the people.

Thank you.