

18 April 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature to
Commemorate International Mother Earth Day**

Under-Secretary-General Mr. Sha Zukang, and Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development,

Your Excellency Mr. Rafael Archondo, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Plurinational State of Bolivia to the United Nations,

Eminent Professors,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentleman,

On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, I am pleased to make the following remarks.

Let me welcome each of you to this Interactive Dialogue on Harmony with Nature, in commemoration of International Mother Earth Day.

The theme of this year's International Day is "Scientific findings on the impacts of human activities on the functioning of the Earth System".

This apt theme was selected by Member States in General Assembly resolution 66/204, and is an implicit recognition of the importance of ensuring harmony with nature through science and multilateral action.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bolivia for initiating this important resolution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Recent advances in Earth system science confirm that humanity is facing severe risks - risks that negatively impact human development and our existence on Earth.

During the past century, human activities on Earth have resulted in a significant increase of Green House Gas concentrations in the atmosphere, land degradation, the destruction of ecosystems and the depletion of Earth's biodiversity.

Climate change, desertification and loss of biodiversity pose an unequivocal challenge for human development.

Economic growth associated with unsustainable patterns of consumption and production is hindering our quest for harmony, both within and between societies, as well as between humankind and the natural environment.

I would submit that the world today is deeply engaged in two of the greatest existential questions:

First, how can we sustain life while protecting the planet?

And second, what does that Earth require in order to support seven - soon to be nine - billion people?

We are, for the first time, acknowledging worldwide that the sustainability of life on earth is a serious question that will drive fundamental decisions in our societies and the world at large.

In making such decisions, academic research plays an important role in clarifying these global issues.

The contribution of science and innovation in achieving sustainable development cannot be underestimated.

The effective implementation of the results of scientific research can support, among other things, efficient resource utilization, environmental protection and poverty eradication.

I firmly believe that scientists must guide this new paradigm, and that the UN System should work together towards supporting a stronger science based on sustainable development.

I would encourage Member States to continue to support the academic sector as it explores and explains these profound issues.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is clear that we have to do more to address the issue of unsustainability.

As a human race, we have the resources, the scientific knowledge and the know-how to save our planet.

I believe that future work on this new paradigm should be supported by a globally recognized and coherent science base, that is capable of creating a strong science-policy interface for sustainable development.

This model would provide practical tools for utilizing natural resources in a more sustainable way, and safeguarding ecosystems by promoting social and economic development at all levels.

Our efforts for achieving sustainable development should be viewed as an investment in the future of humankind.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) is an opportunity to assess our relationship with nature over the last 20 years; to affirm commitments made in Rio and Johannesburg; and to inject new impetus and genuine innovation towards fostering a sustainable way forward.

The commemoration of the International Day of Mother Earth is therefore both timely and relevant, as we aim to have a successful outcome in Rio next June.

Thank you.