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Caring for the Earth will help advance economic growth, not hinder it, says Migiro



20 April 2011 – Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro today called on countries to embrace a low-carbon, resource-efficient, pro-poor economic model, which will ensure progress while also promoting harmony with nature.

Ms. Migiro said in her [remarks](#) to a General Assembly event to mark International Mother Earth Day that the world is undergoing tremendous change, with considerable growth in the past two decades, particularly in emerging economies.

Hundreds of millions of people – in Asia, Latin America and, increasingly, in Africa – have risen from poverty, she noted. “We need to bring these benefits to hundreds of millions more: decent jobs, clean, affordable energy, and all the social and economic benefits that such advances can bring.

A holistic view of environmental, social and economic well-being is indeed the only route to truly sustainable development

“But we will not achieve this goal unless we respect the human and natural capital that is the foundation for our prosperity and well-being,” she cautioned.

In 2009, the Assembly proclaimed 22 April as International Mother Earth Day, expressing its conviction that, to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, “it is necessary to promote harmony with nature and the Earth.”

Ms. Migiro told participants at today's dialogue on harmony with nature that the decline in natural capital is rarely reflected when calculating the sum of a country's total annual production of goods and services.

"We neither factor in the benefits of ecosystems, nor the costs of their destruction," she stated. "A country can cut its forests and deplete its fisheries, and yet it shows only as a positive gain in GDP [gross domestic product], ignoring the corresponding decline in assets.

"We count arms sales on the plus side of the ledger, and spend many billions of dollars a year to subsidize coal, gas and oil – with little impact on the lives of the poor. We need to revise our accounting and embrace a low-carbon, resource-efficient, pro-poor economic model.

Decoupling growth from pollution and natural resource depletion will not put a brake on development, as those wedded to the status quo still argue. On the contrary, it will make growth sustainable," she stated.

She added that next year's UN Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as "Rio +20," is an opportunity to assess the world's relationship with nature over the last 20 years, to reaffirm commitments made at previous sustainable development summits in Rio and Johannesburg, to inject new impetus and to chart a sustainable way forward.

"A holistic view of environmental, social and economic well-being is indeed the only route to truly sustainable development," Ms. Migiro said.

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