

Netherlands – 1990

Ms. Van Der Zijl

UN Youth Delegate Programme

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15. **Ms. VAN DER ZIJL** (Netherlands) said that, since concern for the environment now was a guarantee of earth’s survival tomorrow, millions of young people were calling for immediate action in order to build a solid base for the future, and a clean environment was an essential part of the future.

16. At the current turning-point in history, after the Berlin Wall had been torn down and at a time when the new detente between East and West could lead to arms reductions and cut-backs in military expenditure, the funds thus released must be used to improve quality of life on earth, in accordance with the wishes of the public at large, whose attention had been drawn to the many recent manifestations of environmental degradation: ozone depletion, the hole in the ozone layer above the Antarctic, climate change and the destruction of tropical rain forests, as well as such disasters as the oil spill in Alaska, the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, and the dumping of hazardous waste in developing countries.

17. In an attempt to tackle the issue of environmental degradation, the Netherlands had published an environmental policy plan in 1989, whose aim – to ensure that today’s environmental problems were not passed on to future generations – could only be achieved if current patterns of production and consumption were changed) the Netherlands had allocated slightly more than \$4 billion to protection of the environment for the period 1990-1994. She also wished to mention the Bergen Conference, held in May 1990, which had resulted in the Plan of Action for a Common Future and in which non-governmental and youth organizations had participated, the latter having produced their own plan, entitled “Tomorrow Today”.

18. In an endeavour to give added impetus to policy-making in the area in question, young people in the Netherlands were to hold a national demonstration at The Hague on 22 April 1991, International Earth Day, They would present a document containing proposals for the various ministries. In the month preceding the demonstration, local action groups would engage in a campaign calling on people to try to live in an environmentally sound manner. Since environmental pollution was a matter of international concern, the demonstration would have much more impact if young people all over the world were to hold demonstrations on the same day.

19. In addition to the efforts to increase people's awareness of environmental problems, attention must be devoted to formulating and implementing international public policy and rules to prevent pollution. Young people in the Netherlands had great expectations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, [6*] to be held in Brazil in 1992, and were willing to play a constructive part both in the preparations for the Conference and in the Conference itself. Just as young people had in the past often been at the forefront of the fight for freedom and democracy, they were willing now to take up the fight for the survival of the planet. Young people felt responsible for the future environment and supported pressure groups such as Greenpeace, because the consequences of most environmental problems would manifest themselves in 20 to 30 years' time, when today's policy makers would no longer be in power.

20. It was important to bring about a change in the behaviour and lifestyles of not only the older but also the younger generation. All countries of the world should accordingly develop and implement environmental education and training programmes in schools and universities, and the United Nations could play a vital role in identifying the needs of each country through a comparative survey of existing environmental education programmes. The UNEP/UNESCO International Environmental Education Programme provided an appropriate framework for the promotion of environmental education. The Government of the Netherlands, for its part, was preparing a special educational programme on nature and the environment and had invited youth and environmental organisations to take part in the development of that plan because of their knowledge and experience in that field.

21. As early as 1972, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had said that channels of communication between the Organisation and young people were inadequate. Eighteen years later, only a few of the 159 Member States had included young people's representatives in their delegations. All other countries should follow that example, since young people had a right to participate in the shaping of their future.

22. In conclusion, she said that young people wished rhetorical proposals to be set aside and environmental issues to be approached pragmatically, with observance of existing environmental laws and guidelines, which in many cases were ignored.

