

CHAMPIONS OF THE EARTH AWARD CEREMONY
ADDRESS OF THE MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT OF BRAZIL
MARINA SILVA

Singapore, 19th April 2007.

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is an enormous pleasure to receive such an important award from the United Nations Environmental Programme. I thank God and all those who have inspired me, taught me, and encouraged me to have faith in life, in a plentiful life.

In January, I received a letter from the United Nations Environmental Programme informing that I was to be awarded. The letter stated that the award was for my efforts to protect the Amazon Rain Forest, while taking into consideration the perspectives of the people who use its resources in their daily lives. This relationship could not be different. In fact, my first contact with the notion of environmental protection was from this perspective: it is not possible to dissociate it from the lives of people, traditional communities, and indigenous populations, whose livelihood is so strongly connected to the conservation of natural resources.

When I was invited by President Lula to the position of Minister of the Environment of Brazil, I was confronted with a huge challenge. How to formulate an environmental policy capable of promoting the conservation and sustainable use of Brazil's vast natural resources, while, at the same time, responding to society's legitimate needs for economic development and social inclusion?

With my team, I sought for inspiration to outline the guidelines to face this

challenge, as regards ideas, reflections, and experiences produced in Brazil and worldwide. These experiences result from the visions and efforts of past administrations, people's leaderships, leading entrepreneurs, and the academic community. I also sought for inspiration in the lessons learnt along my own life.

We concluded that our main guideline should be the promotion of sustainable development. We should concentrate efforts towards finding ways to harmonize the generation of social and economic benefits with the balanced use of natural resources while preserving them for future generations, in compliance with sustainability standards.

We observed that a challenge of such magnitude could not be addressed by the government alone, but through direct engagement of society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of public policies. Our second guideline is, therefore, social control and social participation.

Finally, we realized that environmental issues could not be addressed only by the Ministry of Environment. It is necessary to engage other government sectors, especially those in charge of the economic development agenda, in the need to integrate socio-environmental sustainability into the planning of their sector policies. This goal is included in our last guideline: the integrated environmental policy.

The 50% decline in deforestation rates in the Amazon Region during the last two years is only part of an ongoing battle, initiated long ago, and whose results are not yet assured. In 2004, I suggested to the President of the Republic the elaboration of a Work Plan for Prevention and Control of Deforestation of the Amazon Region. Different from previous attempts to deter deforestation in the Amazon, this plan should not be a sector project of

the Ministry of Environment. Thus, a work group was created involving 13 Ministries, coordinated by the Chief of Staff of the Presidency, directly under the Presidency of the Republic.

The implementation of the Plan mobilized the participation of several sectors of the federal, state and municipal governments, several segments of the organized civil society, scientists, scholars, entrepreneurs. And, in practice, it was the implementation of the major guidelines undertaken when I took office as Minister. I am sure that the environmental area, in an isolated manner, would not have achieved the expressive results accomplished.

In these times of doubts and uncertainty as regards the future, it is increasingly necessary to believe in life as a succession of rebirths, as expressed in the statement by Joseph Campbell: “where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the people”.

It is with the thought of one day being able to be with all the people, substituting the predatory development models for sustainable ones, deforestation for conservation, competition for solidarity, that I join in, along this path, with the United Nations Environmental Programme and my awarded colleagues. We are all precisely in the beginning... As a famous Brazilian writer would say, “utopias are just the beginning”.

Thank you.