

A Perspective On The Earth Summit

By Wayne Visser

It was to be an historic event. The largest event of its kind ever to be held. An event which would change the very course of civilisation. An event which would ultimately be the saving catalyst in our troubled times.

Now the event is over. There is some disappointment and some disillusionment. The event has even been called a failure. Some wonder whether there is any hope left at all.

The event was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, more commonly known as the Earth Summit. More than 30,000 concerned individuals gathered during 12 days in June 1992 in Rio, Brazil, to discuss and codify ways in which a looming environmental crisis could be averted and reversed. As its primary goal, it set out to “lay the foundation for a global partnership . . . based on mutual need and common interests, to ensure the future of the planet”. This it attempted to do by seeking agreement or concrete measures to reconcile economic activities with the need to protect the planet and ensure a sustainable future for all people.

And now, in the wake of the conference, the inevitable questions are being posed: Did the Earth Summit fulfil its mandate? Was the mission a success?

The answer, according to the broad media, is: NO! In my view, it is YES! It’s really all a matter of perspective. If you viewed the Summit as a conclusive and isolated event, meant as a last and only chance to escape impending disaster on Earth, then it is true that the attempt did fail. But if you understand it rather as part of a process which must be ongoing, a milestone on a long journey, then believe that the Summit was a landmark success.

In addition to the agreements that were signed and the action plans that were set in motion, a major achievement of the Summit was that it managed to bring the world together to focus on critical issues. And that it elicited such broad participation by way of the parallel Global Forum event for non-governmental organisations – a timely reminder that the future lies in the hands of the ordinary people (you and me) and not solely the politicians. And just think of the networks which have been set up as a result of this conference of people. And the ideas and potential solutions which will only now, after a gestation period, begin to break through the surface of consciousness into the light.

The positive impact of the Earth Summit is yet to manifest itself. For in the overall scheme of things, it has made a difference. It has added, I believe, to an accumulating

force of good in the ether made up of the efforts of many people in many spheres who are working for a better world.

Source:

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