

Human Environment

TEXT OF STATEMENT IN PLENARY SESSION OF THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY BY THE REPRESENTATIVE

OF CANADA, MR. R. KAPLAN, M.P., ON DECEMBER 3, 1968.

MAN'S increasingly rapid thrust into a technological age has not taken place without serious consequences for our human environment. Alarming changes have occurred in the environment as a result of human activity, principally as a result of the growing forces of industrialization and urbanization. If we are to preserve our environment and ensure the survival of our living resources and, in some regions, human health and life itself, then we must react to these changes in a positive and determined way.

In analyzing these changes, we have made scientific discoveries about our environment which run counter to popular assumptions. As these discoveries gain acceptance, as they must, they are bound to affect all our values, cultural, social and economic, as we develop a new respect for the balance of nature.

Popular assumptions have been based on the view that we have learned to conquer our environment and have become its master. We can now establish comfortable human settlements in the cruelest climates, we can grow crops in sterile soil, we can make food from waste, we can travel vast distances in minutes, we have extended the span of man's life. With all this power, it is small wonder that we have assumed that our environment is a virtually limitless reserve of air, fresh water, and clean earth — there for us to exploit as we develop the capacity to do so. Research has discerned the limits of these elements, but we have believed such limits to be of only theoretical interest.

Fragile Balance

What has recently become clear, and has altered our assumptions of human power over nature, is our realization that our human environment rests in a fragile balance. It is subject to laws which, for all our technology, we must learn to respect and obey, if conditions are to be maintained in which man and his living resources can survive. Our environment is like a living organism, sturdy enough to absorb some stresses but, in some regions, pushed beyond its limits by our production of vast amounts of noxious materials of great complexity. Nature can break only some of these substances down into simple and even beneficial elements, and no matter, however harmful and menacing its form may be to the survival of life, is ever lost to the system. The dynamic forces within the natural system, on which we have relied in the past, cannot

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