

The fact that these measures were agreed at the highest possible political level surely gives them unique political authority.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told a story recently of his first meeting with Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao. During a discussion on revolutions, he asked Chairman Mao, "What do you think were the principal results of the French revolution?" He reports that Chairman Mao replied, with a benign smile, "It's still too early to tell, Mr. Kissinger."

Just six months after the Earth Summit, it is clearly too early to tell what its ultimate results will be. This will depend on what governments and others do now to give effect to the agreements reached at Rio. And given the current preoccupation with issues more immediate and pressing, this cannot be taken for granted. It will require the continued commitment and leadership of all those who contributed to the results achieved at Rio, as well as the active interest and support of people everywhere concerned with the fate of our planet.

But if it is too early to judge what the response to Rio will be, it is not too early to reflect on the lessons that we have learned from the conference, the prospects for the realization of the new hopes it engendered and the new directions it set for our common future.

The Earth Summit was neither the beginning nor the end of the process by which the world community is having to confront the threats to its own future arising from the same processes of technology-driven change that have produced our industrial civilization.

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 first put the environment issue on the world agenda. Twenty years later, the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro moved the environment issue into the centre of economic policy and decision making in virtually every sector of our economic life.

As a result, it is no longer possible to consider the environment as an issue separate from the economy or from issues of poverty and underdevelopment that prevent developing countries from dealing effectively with their growing environmental problems