

*Speech by HSH the Prince
50th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty
Science-Policy Interactions in International Governance
Smithsonian Institution, Washington
30 November 2009*

Dear Paul [Berkman],

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

As all eyes all over the world are about to focus on Copenhagen, I am pleased that so many of us are gathered here for this meeting dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty.

The legitimate unrest and anxiety we can observe around the Summit in Copenhagen, which will be determinant for the future of the Planet and where I will be present, must not allow us to lose sight of the fact that not everything will be settled there.

Nor should they allow us to forget that considerable progress has already been achieved that should serve to inspire us. Of the determinant victories already won in their day, the Antarctic Treaty is a particularly enlightening example.

As is the case wherever the problem of environmental protection arises, the major issue in Copenhagen is that of the interface between scientific research and policymaking

It is also that of the transformation of scientific truth into collective choice. Such transformation is never easy or natural.

Regardless of their accuracy, scientific facts cannot conceal the complexity of a decision that must include other parameters and take into account other interests.

This is why it is so important today for us to be able to examine the case of the Antarctic Treaty, which is both exemplary and - alas! - unique.

Fifty years ago, when twelve countries decided to pool their efforts to preserve the Antarctic from all territorial claims, they probably had no idea of the meaning their action would take in the light of the current situation.

They could not imagine that saving our now endangered Planet would become our main concern.

They could not have known that the Poles, until now the embodiment of the power of the wilderness, would become the symbols of their new vulnerability.

True, the Madrid Protocol provided a useful addition to the Treaty in 1991, giving it an essential environmental dimension. In fact, all it did was to reassert its original spirit: that of an area dependent on the shared responsibility of humankind, a continent whose collective importance requires defining the boundaries of special interests.

It is the spirit of today's meeting to emphasize the primordial importance of these deserted expanses for humankind, expanses with - almost - no human beings, but also without which humankind could no longer exist as we have so far.

This is why I spoke of a case that is both exemplary and unique. With the Antarctic Treaty, political decision preceded scientific certainty; in a way it even preceded the threat.

But, beyond the realities of its time, it also set out a universal philosophy for the preservation of the higher interests of humankind. And it made it possible for nearly 10% of the Earth's surface to escape national interests and be dedicated to peaceful purposes.

Given today's very different realities, this is a success that should inspire us. It will be difficult, but not impossible since we have other assets, including the certainties acquired by scientists in the past fifty years. We now know the challenge confronting us. We know what is at stake: our prime interests, our very survival. Threat often triggers new momentum.

I was able to go to Antarctica this year, where I visited twenty-six bases with dozens of researchers of different nationalities. And I want to pay tribute to the selflessness of these men and women who devote years of their lives to trying to understand our world.

But we must recognize today that their work is often insufficiently heeded by those who should be its natural extension, political decision makers.

In recent decades, scientists have been warning us of our Planet's degradation. But, for decades, our economies' short-term interests have been privileged. The international agenda is brimming with more urgent tragedies and crises with more immediate effects.

Fortunately, things are changing, since scientists have succeeded in mobilizing increasingly vigilant public opinion. The world over, we can now see the emergence of global awareness, our most valuable asset.

We can simply remember all the preparation for the Kyoto Summit and observe the considerable changes over those twelve years! Thanks to this exceptional mobilization, we know that, even if Copenhagen does not achieve the goals we hoped for, the issue will not disappear from international concerns.

Regardless of the time it will take, we can now believe that progress will end up being the rule.

We cannot afford, however, to lose too much time. We have already too long postponed making the right decisions to preserve the Earth and likely to guarantee a viable environment for future generations.

In Antarctica more than anywhere else, we can observe the devastating effects of global warming year after year.

The problem is all the more acutely felt in the Arctic, which does not benefit from any true protection by any treaty.

Today, we can observe that the threats weighing on the Arctic no longer concern only degradation of the biotope. The strategic stakes are now very clear, and the ambitions are more and more openly voiced.

Economic appetites, of course, aroused by scientific estimations that one-fifth of the Planet is still undiscovered, but technically exploitable energy resources are located in the Arctic Zone.

In addition to such economic appetites, there are often strategic appetites.

In the face of these threats, we must take action. The importance of the resources at stake can only aggravate the situation in future years. This is why it is imperative for us to set up as soon as possible a lasting international solution, taking into account everyone's interests.

Everyone, meaning not only the five States directly present there, part of whose populations are seeing their traditional lifestyles profoundly disrupted, but also the international community as a whole since, I repeat, the future of the Arctic is crucial for all humankind.

Without any specific international treaty, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea serves as the basis for protection of the Arctic. And it is on this basis that the five coastal countries recently “*agreed to take measures (...) to ensure protection and conservation of the fragile marine environment of the Arctic Ocean.*”

Can this statement weigh against the inexorable, almost daily advance of the new conquerors of these icy expanses? Given the interests involved, their power and their complexity, it is highly unlikely that any binding agreement can help move ahead in the coming years.

Thus, international negotiations cannot solve all problems, as we can observe as we approach Copenhagen. Such is the major lesson of the current period.

Although an effective global Arctic Treaty must remain our long-term objective, we must also explore parallel courses, short-term measures for good governance, less ambitious but just as necessary.

In particular, we must envisage the creation of sanctuaries and zones for preserving biodiversity, including at sea, as has already been done for example by Monaco, France and Italy in the Mediterranean with the Pelagos Sanctuary.

This approach also applies to all phenomena linked to global warming, including acidification of the oceans and the threats against biodiversity: in the face of each of these challenges, we must be flexible and inventive in combining different levels of action that are daring and complementary.

This is why it is so important for scientists to intensify their pressure. They represent a respected independent moral force. Today their voice is capable of going beyond the specific interests and contingences of topicality.

While policymakers struggle to convert the conclusions of their work into appropriate choices, we must continue relying on them so we can make reason triumph tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen, Dear friends,

I would now like to say a few words about the images you will discover retracing the Antarctic expedition I just mentioned.

I hope you will view this film as a human story, beyond the expedition of a few individuals visiting a little known continent.

It retraces the everyday adventure of scientists from all horizons around the same hope to converge in this hostile land.

Most of all, I would like you to watch this film as the story of all of us, the story of the new century, the challenge of a generation about to meet its destiny.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Last spring, I was here in Washington, at the invitation of Hillary Clinton for the fiftieth anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty, with all the countries that signed it.

As the Secretary of State then said, the challenges of the Poles “offer nations the opportunity of meeting in the 21st century, as we did fifty years ago, in the 20th century (...), to reinforce peace and security, encourage sustainable development and protect the environment.”

These very strong words trace the course that is now our own. This is, at any rate, the way I envisage my fight for the Poles, as a determinant meeting for the future of the world.

Thank you