

Bo Ekman

I have to get the flight immediately after this speech because I have a commitment to a village group on Tällberg tomorrow, and that commitment was agreed lock stock and barrel before Sten (Nilsson, Deputy Director of IIASA) called and invited me to come and speak to you today.

We are coming to the close now of two extremely rich days. There was a text that I had intended to give, and you can find that text on the website of Tallbergfoundation.org in the near future.

My first encounter with IIASA was actually of my own doing. I was inspired in the early 1960s by Greg Bates, Margaret Mead and Russ Ackoff to look into systems thinking or systems theory, and Russ Ackoff has been my mentor ever since. He is 88 today and, I can tell you, still going strong. He is a continuous source of honesty, piercing analysis, and creative designs. Then I had also the opportunity to work for the state committee for science and technology in the Soviet Union, and there I met with one Chairman Gvishiani and we cooperated over a number of years and he was one of the movers and shakers of the state committee, so that also brought me into contact with IIASA at Laxenburg. As did also Russ Ackoff who was one of the founding fathers of operations research. He always regretted organizing the burial of operations research at Laxenburg—and he invited me to the burial ceremony.

The Tällberg Forum that Sten alluded to [see <http://www.tallbergforum.org/>], I brought to a close this year with the following reflection – very short. “Do we know what to do? Probably yes. Will we do it? Probably not.” I participated in a number of meetings (at the Forum) that touched a lot and made me hope, more realistic than rosily optimistic, that a new wave of new technologies will solve the problems created by the old technologies that we so passionately believed in.

We do have a systems problem; we do have an awesomely super-complex systems problem. But the hang-up is that we are not organized to solve systems problems. We are organized to solve conflicts of interest. That’s how power is balanced on the grand scale, as we heard Mr. Gaidar just say, and Tom (Schelling) yesterday. And some might think that this type of security system is the apex of human wisdom. And some perhaps not. But we are organized to solve problems reductionistically, part by part. The world is divided into political constructs of nations and constitutions. The world is organized on the principle of stakes or interests: lobbies, we for us. And if anything, I am in the business of bringing the aesthetics of systems “thinking” into the messy affairs of systems “doing.”

The Stockholm Environment Institute gave me a very interesting bit of information a couple of weeks ago. They had reviewed and followed up on how we live up to the international agreements in the field of the environment that we have agreed upon—climate, ecosystems, the whole thing. There are about 500 of these (international agreements) and not one is respected to the letter. Not one. And that, I think, is very

important for me, and perhaps for you, to absorb, that this is a measure of the efficiency of governance today. And we are all watching it all, very, very carefully. We are not neglecting opportunities; we are not allowing maneuverability on the part of the adversary. And that was very clear when I had the opportunity to listen in on Ban Ki-moon's climate day in the General Assembly on 24 September. And I listened to, I think, about 50 heads of state and premiers' take on climate change. And I went away saying: Wow. You know, we have a problem here. The lines of demarcation of conflict of interest were made so clear. Many of the words were very moving.

The President of Micronesia said: "Where do we have to go? Where can we go? We are one with our nature. We can only settle in a reservation in the interior of Australia" (with reference to sea-level rise linked to climate change).

The acting President of Bangladesh said "We are on the very threshold of a climatic Armageddon." And I guess most of you know that, right now, a monster cyclone is approaching the shores of Bangladesh. And he told the story that I'm sure we all know, about how saltwater is seeping millimeter by millimeter into the rice paddies, ground waters and aquifers.

So I did an exercise together with my associate and friend Jim Wine to see if we could gather the numbers on how many people on Earth have had their livelihood smashed so far this year by landslides, floods, rainfall, hurricanes, typhoons and so forth. And the numbers are, my friends, staggering. They are over 100 million. We very cautiously say a hundred million. To get closer to the truth, we would say 140 million, but there might be as many as 150 million people. To them, what we are discussing is not the future, it is now. They can't wait. And these figures are strongly substantiated by the last Geo-4 report from UNEP, Achim Steiner's outfit in Nairobi, which says that in the early part of this century yearly about 3.5 billion people are in some way affected by the ecosystem crisis and the icing on the cake, which is the climate crisis. And in comparison they evaluate that those numbers were more like 6-7 million thirty years ago. It is an acute situation, and we are, in fact, tampering with evolution. We are tampering with the purpose and efficiency of the biological, physiological and biospheric systems. And perhaps still neglecting the fact that we are just one part of that.

Manfred (Max-Neef) mentioned that very important argument yesterday. Very important. About a month ago, we had a meeting—a Tällberg conversation. We had gathered some scientists, some people involved in the G8 negotiations, European negotiations, and successful business people, politicians, and people from administrations in Europe. But we also had invited Oren Lyons, the chief of the Onondaga nation of indigenous people, and a tower of a man, and really sensitive to many indigenous peoples. Yes, a great force. We spent 24 hours together going through the scientific "state of the Earth" and the "state of the art of the negotiations." And I brought with me from the UN the conclusion that these upcoming negotiations (United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali, 3-14 December 2007) will not be a piece of cake. The inbuilt conflicts are staggering, as we also have heard through these last two days. We didn't just sit in a ring (with the indigenous people) in the conference room, we also went

out into nature. And we were taught by both Chief Lyons and others to see and become more of an interactive part of the natural system. Now that deeply moved some people. Moved them to tears. It moved them to some deep soul searching, and the whole meeting ended on a very fruitful, constructive note of seriousness and responsibility. I think that today there is a weakness for having every speech end on a positive note and every conference end on an action note. Now we know what to do! Up with your sleeves and so forth. I think it is just as productive to end on a reflective note, almost an introspective note. So I would close the remark I made in the introduction by saying:

Do we know what to do? Probably yes.

Will we do it.....?

Thank you.