

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 21 May 2019

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 14:00]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader is Professor Arthur Lyon Dahl PhD, who is the president of the International Environment Forum.

Professor Arthur Lyon Dahl (International Environment Forum): Climate change today represents an existential crisis, with leading scientists calling for urgent action on all fronts, and our children on strike and marching in the streets for their endangered future. The rapid loss of the planet's biodiversity is equally frightening.

How can a growing, rapidly developing and not yet united global population, in a just manner, live in harmony with the planet and its finite resources? Our present economic system and consumer lifestyle are having devastating consequences for the environment. We cannot exceed the capacity of our planetary ecosystem without expecting dire consequences. The limited availability and inequitable distribution of resources profoundly impact social relations within and between nations in many ways, even to the point of precipitating upheaval and war.

Faced with such challenges, we must set aside self-interest and partisan disputation that diminish the will to act, and strive to achieve unity of thought and action that is informed by the best available scientific evidence and grounded in spiritual principles.

Baha'u'llah, prophet-founder of the Baha'i faith, warned more than 100 years ago that

"The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men."

In a globalised world, acceptance of the oneness of humankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for the reorganization and administration of the world as one country, our common home. Only strengthened global governance for peace, security and the environment can assure the national autonomy and diversity that is so important to all of us.

We are trustees, or stewards, of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity. We must learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability and equity into the distant

reaches of time. That attitude of stewardship requires that we give full consideration to the potential environmental consequences of all development activities. We must temper our actions with moderation and humility, realising that the true value of nature cannot be expressed in economic terms. We need a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in our collective development, material and spiritual. Therefore, we must see sustainable environmental management not as a discretionary commitment that we can weigh against other competing interests, but rather as a fundamental responsibility that we must shoulder—a prerequisite for our spiritual development as well as our physical survival.