Planet Earth is suffering. Probably you are not aware of it, but your children and grandchildren will witness its dramatic wounds in person. If the Earth is sick, we shall also be sick, because our life is inextricably bound up with it , just like a child with its mother. Earlier generations called it Gaia, Mother Earth.

Gaia has given us everything she possessed - land, water, fruits, wildlife, energy, oxygen, the beauty of her landscapes. What would we be without all this? We owe her what we are because without her, you, he, they, we…. would not be here. In exchange for this gift, Gaia asks us one thing: to respect her! We have failed in this obligation. We have forgotten our Mother.

For the sake of our descendants, for the sake of mankind, we must renew this respect. It is our duty to heal the wounds we have inflicted. Gaia, our Mother Earth, gives us one more possibility, but, like the inescapable nature of former destinies, we must realise that this is our last chance.

SAFEGUARDING OUR PLANET ?

A first step we can all take:

SUPPORT THE THREE MAJOR UNITED NATIONS CONVENTIONS ON THE ENVIRONMENT

On what kind of Earth will future generations live? We as parents and grandparents, in what

state are we leaving the planet for our children? There is nothing to be proud of. The climate is changing, it is hotter, there are more extremes in temperature. Water will become scarce and not only in arid regions. With deforestation and constant felling of tropical forests, we are destroying Earth's lungs. We have also lost many irreplaceable components of the diversity of life. We shall be leaving soil impoverished by the form of agriculture practised by the poorest populations, and we shall have allowed desertification to advance a little further all over the planet.

Scientists, ecological movements and quite simply all people with common sense, lovers of progress, have been denouncing for years the threats that these almost irreversible tendencies represent for the biosphere. Ten years ago, for the first time these anxieties echoed round the world during the famous Earth Summit in Rio. It was believed that finally threats to the environment were to be considered seriously, and consequently a new method of managing Earth's resources would be adopted. At that point, three important international conventions were drawn up to combat the most serious threats: i.e. climate change, loss of biodiversity and consequences of soil degradation and desertification.

These three Conventions, which were meant to define the commitments made by States in applying new rules for managing the biosphere, exist and have been ratified by the majority of the members of the United Nations. They are the result of laborious compromises and, today, can only offer the beginnings of an answer, highlighting only a possible course of action. If we are to give the Earth another chance, we need much more, for instance a new method of natural resource management, a different economic attitude, a different type of consumerism, new benefits from science and technology, and above all a new perception of our obligations to defend the common good which is our EARTH. All this is difficult, and the three Conventions on the environment can only be "a sketch". They point out that the way will be long and arduous. It would however be easier to start along the way if the Conventions were taken seriously and applied effectively.

You readers who ask yourselves about the state of the world we are leaving for our children and grandchildren, do you know that these Conventions exist and that they can contribute to safeguarding our planet? For many of you they are probably just names. Probably you are even less well informed about what your Governments are doing to implement the commitments undertaken in your name when signing these Conventions. You not only have the right to know, but also the right to be informed of what is being done and the results obtained. You are not pursuing the question because you have not been informed, because you do not know what you could do. You believe it is all beyond you.

And if we said that you could do something, that you could intervene in debates, that you could question your Governments and international organizations about what they have done? That you could push them to act. And if it could be demonstrated that what could be done, thanks to your personal intervention, would lead to an outstanding result visible to all, would you not have the feeling that you personally had contributed to an improvement in the world for your children? This is what we are proposing , by inviting you to support the implementation of the three United Nations Conventions on the environment. Let us continue together to pick up this message in a more concrete way.

Interest in long-term environmental problems only appears sporadically in political debates and election campaigns. Unless there is a meeting on the environment of worldwide importance, with detailed reports in the media, or a natural catastrophe, threats to the environment are never mentioned: they are not considered an important subject for politicians, and this is why their statements are usually pessimistic. In fact, experience has shown that every struggle for the environment has lead to a result only when politicians have correctly interpreted the expectations and pressure of public opinion which has been mobilized by environmental movements.

But what has happened to the themes of the 3 Conventions? It is undeniable that, as far as information is concerned, the actions of numerous associations fighting for safeguarding the environment have borne fruit. Nowadays, public opinion is aware of the gravity of gas emissions and their effect on the climate, it is beginning to consider the risks of water shortage, and it is rallying in defence of tropical forests, etc. But not enough is done for the Conventions themselves, for the conditions of their application, for any results. Public opinion has little influence on those responsible for political decisions on application. In spite of efforts to inform and mobilize public opinion on the part of numerous environmental organizations, some of which operate worldwide,
there is no effect on governments or on bodies who implement the Conventions. There is no pressure on politicians to show results in view of the devastating balance sheets presented periodically during meetings of the signatories of the Conventions.

If we take into consideration all the organizations fighting for the same environmental causes, and all the individuals and people in every civil society who feel involved in the ecological future of the earth, we can easily imagine the enormous "pressure" that our unified efforts could have on governments. Such a unified action is realistic because, over and above the interests and objectives of each of us, the joint effort would have a simple undeniable message: "we ask you, governments and international institutions, to implement the Conventions which YOU YOURSELVES signed in our name and to inform us of the results of your actions" . This would be our basic message. So, the support given to the 3 Conventions would only be the simple exercise of every citizen's right. Nothing more. But if we succeed it

would be so effective!

Today's communications technology allows us to implement such a unified action to mobilize our wish to support the 3 Conventions and to lay a stone in the rebuilding of our planet. For example, the means could be an internet Forum, conceived as a WORLD instrument of support for the 3 Conventions. The basic concept would be the interaction of the expression of collective public opinion by means of "electronic postcards" which would be sent in their thousands to national and international leaders whenever an event assumes significance for environmental politicians. Such a Web site would thus become an effective instrument of "transversal democracy" for anything concerning the 3 major environmental Conventions.

Such a Forum would be conceived essentially as a meeting place and point of adherence for our wishes. Its aims would be those explained simply in this manifesto. All participants would be free to invite each other to visit their respective sites, accessible via the common site. So each participant would have the possibility of making known his or her specific actions in the environmental field. The internet Forum should also be able to reply to questions for information from participants. This would function by giving direct access, from the common site, to other sites dealing with the 3 Conventions.

Today we present you with such a site. You can participate as individuals and enter the interactive system, or you can participate as an organization. The latter would allow you to add your web site to all the others in the coalition. All we ask in exchange is that you show on your own site that you adhere to the coalition of support for the 3 Conventions.

This site has been created thanks to the initiative of an Italian NGO with the aim of supporting the 3 United Nations Conventions. We are called CA3C (Comitato d'Appoggio alle 3 Convenzioni - Action Committee for the 3 Conventions). This committee has undertaken various support activities at the national level and, from the start, was considering action to mobilize public opinion thanks to a web site. However, it soon became clear that such an undertaking would only make sense if it grew into a worldwide concept. During the 4th Conference of the Parties for the Convention for the Struggle against Desertification (Bonn, December 2000), several NGOs representing other parts of the world showed their interest in and their support for such a project and asked CA3C informally to lay the foundations for such a site. Various circumstances have postponed the elaboration of the site, and it is only today that we are able to launch it. The site opens with the formal adherence of several Italian NGOs and other participants, the list of whom can be consulted as we proceed with the site. During the launching phase, CA3C will oversee the running of the site. An informal common management formula of the site, already discussed with some voluntary NGOs, will then take over.

The first message, which we hope you will support with all your signatures, is proposed on the occasion of the World Food Summit to be held in Rome in June 2002. This message reminds all Heads of State and governments of the importance of good management of the environment for sustainable agriculture. To this end, it is essential that they considerably intensify their efforts to implement the 3 Conventions on the environment which have been ratified by their respective countries. The next step will probably be another message on the occasion of the World Conference on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg in August 2002.