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Held at Headquarters, New York,
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President:

Mr. GARBA

(Nigeria)

- Address by Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs [16]
 - (b) Election of twelve members of the World Food Council: note by the Secretary-General
 - (c) Election of seven members of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination: note by the Secretary-General

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

ADDRESS BY MRS. MARGARET THATCHER, PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The PRESIDENT: The Assembly will first hear a statement by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was escorted to the rostrum.

The PRESIDENT: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher, and inviting her to address the General Assembly.

Mrs. THATCHER (United Kingdom): It gives me great pleasure to return to the rostrum of this Assembly. When I last spoke here - four years ago, on the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations - the message that I and others like me gave was one of encouragement to the Organization to play the great role allotted to it.

Of all the challenges faced by the world community in those four years, one has grown clearer than any other in both urgency and importance. I refer to the threat to our global environment. I shall take the opportunity of addressing the General Assembly to speak on that subject alone.

During his historic voyage through the South Seas on the Beagle, Charles Darwin landed, one November morning in 1835, on the shore of Western Tahiti. After breakfast he climbed a nearby hill to find a vantage point from which to survey the surrounding Pacific. The sight seemed to him like "a framed engraving", with blue sky, blue lagoon and white breakers crashing against the encircling coral reef. As he looked out from that hillside he began to form his theory of the evolution of coral. One hundred and fifty-four years after Darwin's visit to Tahiti we have added little to what he discovered then.

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What if Charles Darwin had been able not just to climb a foothill but to soar through the heavens in one of the orbiting space shuttles? What would he have learned, as he surveyed our planet from that altitude, from a moon's-eye view of that strange and beautiful anomaly in our solar system that is the Earth?

Of course, we have learned much detail about our environment as we have looked back at it from space, but nothing has made a more profound impact on us than these two facts.

First, as the British scientist Fred Hoyle wrote long before space travel was a reality,

"Once a photograph of the earth, taken from the outside, is available ... a new idea as powerful as any other in history will be let loose."

That powerful idea is the recognition of our shared inheritance on this planet. We know more clearly than ever before that we carry common burdens, face common problems, and must respond with common action.

Secondly, as we travel through space, as we pass one dead planet after another, we look back on our Earth - a speck of life in an infinite void. It is life itself, incomparably precious, that distinguishes us from the other planets. It is life itself - human life, the innumerable species of our planet - that we wantonly destroy. It is life itself that we must battle to preserve.

For over 40 years that has been the main task of the United Nations: to bring peace where there was war, comfort where there was misery, life where there was death. The struggle has not always been successful. There have been years of failure. But recent events have brought the promise of a new dawn, of new hope. Relations between the Western nations and the Soviet Union and its allies, long frozen in suspicion and hostility, have begun to thaw.

In Europe, this year, freedom has been on the march.

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In southern Africa - Namibia and Angola - the United Nations has succeeded in holding out better prospects for an end to war and for the beginning of prosperity.

In South-East Asia, too, we can dare to hope for the restoration of peace after decades of fighting.

While the conventional political dangers - the threat of global annihilation, the fact of regional war - appear to be receding, we have all recently become aware of another insidious danger. It is as menacing in its way as those more customary perils with which international diplomacy has concerned itself for centuries. It is the prospect of irretrievable damage to the atmosphere, to the oceans, to Earth itself.

Of course, major changes in the Earth's climate and the environment took place in earlier centuries when the world's population was a fraction of its present size. The causes are to be found in nature itself - changes in the Earth's orbit; changes in the amount of radiation given off by the sun; the consequential effects on the plankton in the ocean; and volcanic processes. All these we can observe, and some we may be able to predict. But we do not have the power to prevent or control them.

What we are now doing to the world, by degrading the land surfaces, by polluting the waters and by adding greenhouse gases to the air at an unprecedented rate - all this is new in the experience of the Earth. It is mankind and his activities that are changing the environment of our planet in damaging and dangerous ways.

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We can find examples in the past. Indeed, we may well conclude that it was the silting up of the River Euphrates which drove man out of the Garden of Eden.

We also have the example of the tragedy of Easter Island, where people arrived by boat to find a primeval forest. In time, the population increased to over 9,000 souls and the demand placed upon the environment resulted in its eventual destruction as people cut down the trees. This in turn led to warfare over the scarce remaining resources, and the population crashed to a few hundred people without even enough wood to make boats to escape.

The difference now is in the scale of the damage we are doing.

We are seeing a vast increase in the amount of carbon dioxide reaching the atmosphere. The annual increase is 3 billion tonnes, and half the carbon emitted since the industrial revolution still remains in the atmosphere.

At the same time as this is happening, we are seeing the destruction on a vast scale of tropical forests which are uniquely able to remove carbon dioxide from the air. Every year an area of forest equal to the whole surface of the United Kingdom is destroyed. At present rates of clearance we shall, by the year 2000, have removed 65 per cent of forests in the humid tropical zones. The consequences of this become clearer when one remembers that tropical forests fix more than 10 times as much carbon as do forests in the temperate zones.

We now know, too, that great damage is being done to the ozone layer by the production of halons and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). But at least we have recognized that reducing and eventually stopping the emission of CFCs is one positive thing we can do about the menacing accumulation of greenhouse gases. It is of course true that none of us would be here but for the greenhouse effect. It gives us the moist atmosphere which sustains life on Earth. We need the greenhouse effect, but only in the right proportions.

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More than anything, our environment is threatened by the sheer numbers of people and the plants and animals which go with them. When I was born the world's population was some 2 billion people. My grandson will grow up in a world of more than 6 billion people.

Put in its bluntest form, the main threat to our environment is more and more people and their activities: the land they cultivate ever more intensively; the forests they cut down and burn; the mountain sides they lay bare; the fossil fuels they burn; the rivers and the seas they pollute.

The result is that change in future is likely to be more fundamental and more widespread than anything we have known hitherto - change to the sea around us, change to the atmosphere above, leading in turn to change in the world's climate, which could alter the way we live in the most fundamental way of all. That prospect is a new factor in human affairs. It is comparable in its implications to the discovery of how to split the atom. Indeed, its results could be even more far-reaching.

We are constantly learning more about these changes affecting our environment, and scientists from the Polar Institute in Cambridge and the British Antarctic Survey have been at the leading edge of research in both the Arctic and the Antarctic, warning us of the greater dangers that lie ahead. Let me quote from a letter I received only two weeks ago from a British scientist on board a ship in the Antarctic Ocean. He wrote,

"In the polar regions today, we are seeing what may be early signs of man-induced climatic change. Data coming in from Halley Bay and from instruments aboard the ship on which I am sailing show that we are entering a spring ozone depletion which is as deep as, if not deeper than, the depletion in the worst year to date. It completely reverses the recovery observed

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in 1988. The lowest recording aboard this ship is only 150 Dobson Units for ozone total content during September compared with 300 for the same season in a normal year."

That is, of course, a very severe depletion.

He also reports on a significant thinning of the sea ice, and he writes that in the Antarctic

"Our data confirm confirm that the first-year ice, which forms the bulk of sea ice cover, is remarkably thin and so is probably unable to sustain significant atmospheric warming without melting. Sea ice" - he continues - "separates the ocean from the atmosphere over an area of more than 30 million square kilometres. It reflects most of the solar radiation falling on it, helping to cool the Earth's surface. If this area were reduced, the warming of Earth would be accelerated due to the extra absorption of radiation by the ocean.

"The lesson of these polar processes" - he goes on - "is that an environmental or climatic change produced by man may take on a self-sustaining or 'runaway' quality... and may be irreversible".

That is from the scientists who are doing work on a ship that is at present considering these matters.

These are sobering indications of what may happen, and they led my correspondent to put forward the interesting idea of a world Polar Watch, amongst other initiatives which will observe the world's climate system and allow us to understand how it works.

We also have new scientific evidence from an entirely different area, the tropical forests. Through their capacity to evaporate vast volumes of water vapour, and of gases and particles which assist the formation of clouds, the

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forests serve to keep their regions cool and moist by weaving a sunshade of white reflecting clouds and by bringing the rain that sustains them.

A recent study by our British Meteorological Office on the Amazon rain forest shows that large-scale deforestation may reduce rainfall and thus affect the climate directly. Past experience shows us that without trees there is no rain, and without rain there are no trees.

The evidence is there. The damage is being done. What do we, the international community, do about it?

In some areas the action required is primarily for individual nations or groups of nations to take. I am thinking, for example, of action to deal with the pollution of rivers - and many of us now see the fish back in rivers from which they had disappeared. I am thinking of action to improve agricultural methods - good husbandry which ploughs back nourishment into the soil rather than the cut-and-burn which has damaged and degraded so much land in some parts of the world. And I am thinking of the use of nuclear power which, despite the attitude of so-called Greens, is the most environmentally safe form of energy.

But the problem of global climate change is one that affects us all, and action will be effective only if it is taken at the international level.

It is no good squabbling over who is responsible or who should pay. Whole areas of our planet could be subject to drought and starvation if the pattern of rains and monsoons were to change as a result of the destruction of forests and the accumulation of greenhouse gases.

We have to look forward, not backward. We shall succeed in dealing with the problems only through a vast international, co-operative effort.

Before we act, we need the best possible scientific assessment; otherwise we risk making matters worse. We must use science to cast a light ahead so that we can move step by step in the right direction.

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The United Kingdom has agreed to take on the task of co-ordinating such an assessment within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an assessment which will be available to everyone by the time of the second World Climate Conference next year. But that will take us only so far. The report will not be able to tell us where the hurricanes will be striking, who will be flooded or how often and how severe the droughts will be, yet we will need to know these things if we are to adapt to future climate change. That means we must expand our capacity to model and predict climate change. We can test our skills and methods by seeing whether they would have successfully predicted past climate change for which historical records exist.

Britain has some of the leading experts in this field and I am pleased to be able to tell the Assembly that the United Kingdom will be establishing a new centre for the prediction of climate change, which will lead the effort to improve our prophetic capacity. It will also provide the advanced computing facilities that scientists need and it will be open to experts from all over the world, especially from the developing countries, who will be able to come to the United Kingdom and contribute to this vital work.

But as well as the science we need to get the economics right. That means, first, that we must have continued economic growth in order to generate the wealth required to pay for the protection of the environment; but it must be growth which does not plunder the planet today and leave our children to deal with the consequences tomorrow. Secondly, we must resist the simplistic tendency to blame modern multinational industry for the damage which is being done to the environment. Far from industry's being the villain, it is on industry that we rely to do the research and find the solutions. It is industry which will develop safe

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alternative chemicals for refrigerators and air conditioning. It is industry which will devise biodegradable plastics. It is industry which will find the means to treat pollutants and make nuclear waste safe - and many companies, as we know, already have massive research programmes. The multinationals have to take the long view. There will be no profit or satisfaction for anyone if pollution continues to destroy our planet.

As people's consciousness of environmental needs rises, they are turning increasingly to ozone-friendly and other environmentally safe products. The market itself acts as a corrective: the new products sell and those which caused environmental damage are disappearing from our shelves. And by making those new products widely available industry will make it possible for developing countries to avoid many of the mistakes which we older, industrialized countries have made.

We should always remember that free markets are a means to an end. They would defeat their object if by their output they did more damage to the quality of life through pollution than the well-being they achieve by the production of goods and services.

On the basis, then, of sound science and sound economics we need to build a strong framework for international action. It is not new institutions that we need; rather we need to strengthen and improve those which already exist, in particular the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The United Kingdom has recently more than doubled its contribution to UNEP and we urge others, who have not done so and who can afford it, to do the same.

The central organs of the United Nations, like the General Assembly, must also be seized of a problem which reaches into virtually all aspects of their work and

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will do so still more in the future. The most pressing task which faces us at the international level is to negotiate a framework convention on climate change, a sort of good-conduct guide for all nations. Fortunately we have a model in the action already taken to protect the ozone layer. The Vienna Convention, in 1985, and the Montreal Protocol, in 1987, established landmarks in international law. They aimed to prevent, rather than just cure, a global environmental problem.

I believe we should aim to have a convention on global climate change ready by the time the world conference on environment and development meets in 1992. That will be among the most important conferences the United Nations has ever held. I hope that we shall all accept a responsibility to meet this timetable. The 1992 conference is indeed already being discussed among many countries, in many places. I draw particular attention to the very valuable discussion that members of the Commonwealth had under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Malaysia at our recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

But a framework is not enough; it will need to be filled out with specific undertakings, or protocols in diplomatic language, on the different aspects of climate change. These protocols must be binding and there must be effective régimes to supervise and monitor their application; otherwise, those nations which accept and abide by environmental agreements, thus adding to their industrial costs, will lose out competitively to those which do not. The negotiation of some of these protocols will undoubtedly be difficult and no issue will be more contentious than the need to control emissions of carbon dioxide, the major contributor - apart from water vapour - to the greenhouse effect.

We cannot just do nothing. But the measures we take must be based on sound scientific analysis of the effect of the different gases and the ways in which they

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can be reduced. In the past there has been a tendency to solve one problem at the expense of making others worse. The United Kingdom therefore proposes that we prolong the role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change after it has submitted its report next year, so that it can provide an authoritative scientific basis for the negotiation of this and other protocols. We can then agree targets to reduce the greenhouse gases and how much individual countries should contribute to their achievement. We think it important that this should be done in a way which enables all our economies to continue to grow and develop.

The challenge for our negotiators on matters like this is as great as that for any disarmament treaty. The Intergovernmental Panel's work must remain on target, and we must not allow ourselves to be diverted into fruitless and divisive arguments. Time is too short for that.

Before leaving the area where international action is needed I would make a plea for a further global convention, one to conserve the infinite variety of species - of plant and animal life - which inhabit our planet. The tropical forests contain half of the species in the world, so their disappearance is doubly damaging. It is astonishing but true that our civilization, whose imagination has reached the boundaries of the universe, does not know to within a factor of 10 how many species the earth supports. What we do know is that we are losing them at a reckless rate - between 3 and 50 each day on some estimates - species which could perhaps be helping us to advance the frontiers of medical science. We should act together to conserve this precious heritage.

Every nation will need to make its contribution to the world effort, so I want to tell the Assembly how Britain intends to contribute, either by improving our own national performance in protecting the environment or through the help which we give to others. I shall deal with this under four headings.

(Mrs. Thatcher, United Kingdom)

First, we shall be introducing over the coming months a comprehensive system of pollution control to deal with all kinds of industrial pollution, whether to air, water or land. We are encouraging British industry to develop new technologies to clean up the environment and minimize the amount of waste it produces - and we aim to recycle 50 per cent of our household waste by the end of the century.

(Mrs. Thatcher, United Kingdom)

Secondly, we shall be drawing up over the coming year our own environmental agenda for the decade ahead. That will cover energy, transport, agriculture, industry - everything which affects the environment.

With regard to energy, we already have a £2 billion programme of improvements to reduce acid-rain emissions from our power stations. We shall be looking more closely at the role of non-fossil fuel sources, including nuclear, in generating energy. And our latest legislation requires companies which supply electricity positively to promote energy efficiency.

On transport, we shall look for ways to strengthen controls over vehicle emissions and to develop the lean-burn engine, which offers a far better long-term solution than the three-way catalyst in terms of carbon dioxide and the greenhouse effect. We have already reduced the tax on lead-free petrol to encourage its use. That is an example of using market-based incentives to promote good environmental practice. And we shall see whether there are other areas where the same principle can be applied.

With regard to agriculture, we recognize that farmers need not only to produce food - which they do with great efficiency - but to conserve the beauty of the priceless heritage of our countryside. We are therefore encouraging them to reduce the intensity of their methods and to conserve wild-life habitats. We are planting new woods and forests - indeed, there has been a 50 per cent increase in tree planting in Britain in the last 10 years. We also aim to reduce chemical inputs to the soil and are bringing forward measures to deal with the complex problem of nitrates in water. All that is part of our own 10-year programme coming up to the end of this century.

(Mrs. Thatcher, United Kingdom)

Thirdly, we are increasing our investment in research into global environmental problems. I have already mentioned the Climate Change Centre that we are establishing. In addition, we are supporting our own scientists' and in particular the British Antarctic Survey's, crucial contribution to the World Ocean Circulation experiment, as well as the voyages of our aptly-named research ship, the Charles Darwin. We have also provided more money for the climate and environment satellite monitoring programmes of the European Space Agency.

Fourthly, we help poorer countries cope with their environmental problems through our aid programme. We shall give special help in managing and preserving the tropical forests. We are already assisting in 20 countries and have recently signed agreements with India and Brazil. As a new pledge, I can announce today that we aim to commit a further £100 million bilaterally to tropical forestry activities over the next three years, mostly within the framework of the Tropical Forestry Action Plan.

That is what we are doing in Britain under those four headings - all of those things.

The environmental challenge which confronts the whole world demands an equivalent response from the whole world. Every country will be affected and no one can opt out. We should work through this great Organization and its agencies to secure world-wide agreements on ways to cope with the effects of climate change, the thinning of the ozone layer and the loss of precious species. We need a realistic programme of action and an equally realistic timetable. Each country has to contribute, and those countries that are industrialized must contribute more to help those that are not. The work ahead will be long and exacting. We should embark on it hopeful of success, not fearful of failure.

(Mrs. Thatcher, United Kingdom)

I began with Charles Darwin and his work on the theory of evolution and the origin of species. Darwin's voyages were among the high-points of scientific discovery. They were undertaken at a time when men and women felt growing confidence that we could not only understand the natural world but master it, too. Today, we have learned rather more humility and respect for the balance of nature, but another of the beliefs of Darwin's era should help to see us through - the belief in reason and the scientific method. Reason is humanity's special gift. It allows us to understand the structure of the nucleus. It enables us to explore the heavens. It helps us to conquer disease. Now we must use our reason to find a way in which we can live with nature and not dominate nature.

At the end of a book which has helped many young people to shape their own sense of stewardship of our planet, its American author quotes one of our greatest English poems, Milton's "Paradise Lost". When Adam in that poem asks about the movements of the heavens, Raphael the archangel refuses to answer. "Let it speak", he says,

"the Maker's high magnificence, who built
So spacious, and his line stretcht out so far,
That man may know he dwells not in his own,
An edifice too large for him to fill,
Lodg'd in a small partition, and the rest
Ordain'd for uses to his Lord best known."

We need our reason to teach us today that we are not, that we must not try to be, lords of all we survey. We are not the lords, we are the Lord's creatures, the trustees of this planet, charged today with preserving life itself - preserving life with all its mystery and all its wonder. May we all be equal to that task.

The PRESIDENT: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the important statement she has just made.

Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was escorted from the rostrum.

AGENDA ITEM 16

ELECTIONS TO FILL VACANCIES IN SUBSIDIARY ORGANS

- (b) ELECTION OF TWELVE MEMBERS OF THE WORLD FOOD COUNCIL: NOTE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/44/357)
- (c) ELECTION OF SEVEN MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND CO-ORDINATION: NOTE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/44/358)

The PRESIDENT: The Assembly will now proceed to the election of 12 members of the World Food Council. In this connection, the Assembly has before it document A/44/357, which contains the nominations by the Economic and Social Council.

The 12 retiring members are: Argentina, Burundi, Colombia, France, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sweden and Tunisia.

The following States have been nominated by the Economic and Social Council:

- (a) Three African States for three vacancies: Burundi, Egypt and Rwanda;
- (b) Three Asian States for three vacancies: Democratic Yemen, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Japan;
- (c) Two States from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States for two vacancies: Argentina and Peru;
- (d) One socialist State of Eastern Europe for one vacancy: Hungary;
- (e) Three States from the Group of Western European and other States for three vacancies: Denmark, France and Italy.

The number of candidates nominated from among the African States, the Asian States, the Latin American and Caribbean States, the socialist States of Eastern Europe and Western European and other States is equal to the number of seats allocated to each of those regions.

(The President)

In accordance with paragraph 16 of decision 34/401, the Assembly may dispense with balloting when the number of States nominated from each region is equal to the number of seats to be filled.

I take it that the Assembly wishes to declare those States elected members of the World Food Council for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 1990.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: I congratulate the States that have been elected.

We have concluded our consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 16.

The Assembly will now turn to sub-item (c), "Election of seven members of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination". Document A/44/358 contains the nominations by the Economic and Social Council to fill the vacancies in the Committee which will occur as a result of the expiration on 31 December 1989 of the terms of office of Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, China, Indonesia, Japan and Tunisia.

The following States have been nominated by the Economic and Social Council:

- (a) Three African States for three vacancies: Algeria, Cameroon and Morocco;
- (b) Three Asian States for three vacancies: China, Japan and Sri Lanka;
- (c) One State from the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States for one vacancy: Argentina.

The number of candidates nominated from among the African States, the Asian States and the Latin American and Caribbean States is equal to the number of seats allocated to each of those regions.

In accordance with paragraph 16 of decision 34/401, the Assembly may dispense with balloting when the number of States nominated from among the regions is equal to the number of seats to be filled.

(The President)

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to declare those States elected members of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 1990?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: I congratulate the States that have been elected. We have concluded our consideration of sub-item (c) of agenda item 16.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.