Twenty years ago, Denis Hayes dropped out of Harvard Law School to stage the largest demonstration in history. It was called Earth Day, and its phenomenal success launched the modern environmental movement. Almost two decades and thousands of environmental crises later, Mr. Hayes was at work to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Earth Day, April 22, 1990, with a massive international event in 1990 that will propel the environmental movement into a new decade of activism and on into the twenty-first century.

On the heels of Earth Day 1980, Mr. Hayes founded Environmental Action and became the director of the National Environmental Coalition. The first generation with Strontium-90 in its bones (from atmospheric nuclear testing), we were inheriting, we vowed that we were not going to pass on to our children a world that was peaceful, just, and ecologically sustainable. That was twenty years ago. Today, the angry young warriors of Earth Day 1990 sound the environmental alarm in the 1990s, and events such as the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969 and the Storm King battle in New York gave rise to local waves of concerned activists, but a full-blown national movement emerged only in 1970.

Following the original Earth Day—April 22, 1970—the American conservation movement exploded in size and broadened its agenda to encompass emerging ecological issues such as industrial pollution, urban air-and-water quality problems, and solid waste disposal. Flushed with its new-found strength, the environmental movement won a string of spectacular successes on Capitol Hill, including the passing of the Clean Air and Water Acts, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, and the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act, and a host of other laws that fundamentally changed the rules under which American enterprise operates.

Whatever government agencies or corporations attempted to flaunt these new laws, environmental groups would haul them into court. The movement's talent, idealistic lawyers have won hundreds of precedent-setting decisions. When litigation proved to be too slow or ineffective, the environmental movement's guerillas put their bodies on the line in actions explicitly modeled upon the civil disobedience of the civil rights movement. Such nonviolent direct action has, at least temporarily, halted some of the worst polluting abuses and most devastating destruction of old-growth forests. Yet, despite these accomplishments, we are in serious trouble, and the problems are compounding with every passing year.

There is no evidence that our leaders have the intelligence, the integrity, and the guts to lead us into a new era. The leadership has to come from us. In 1970, the goal of Earth Day, as articulated eloquently by then Senator Gaylord Nelson, the "father" of Earth Day, was to demonstrate to corporations, politicians, and our somnambulant neighbors that nobody is immune to the threats posed by environmental pollution and no one can avoid culpability. Twenty years later, some of the symptoms have changed, but the problem remains the same—us.

Sure, there are lots of villains to point fingers at: uncaring corporate monopolies; sleeky businessmen out to make a quick buck regardless of the damage left in their wake; and politicians too dependent upon polluters' contributions to reelection campaigns and more than willing to turn a blind eye. However, no one's holding a gun to our heads as we willy-nilly drive ourselves into the green house age, depleting ourselves with nuclear power scenarios. We have to change the rules of the game, exchange one set of problems for another, including the quick proliferation of weapons-grade uranium into dozen of countries. Nothing short of a society-wide commitment is needed to turn our backs on the "disposable society" and toward the vision of a society that lives in harmony with the environment. The twentieth anniversary of Earth Day is an auspicious time to signal corporatism, politicians, and ourselves that such a profound shift is needed. The alternative is catastrophe.

The Concept

The concept of Earth Day was American in its origin. However, the problems that Earth Day addressed were—and are—global in nature. Where Earth Day 1970 was the catalyst for the creation of the modern American environmental movement, Earth Day 1990 is designed to catalyze the creation of a truly global environmental movement and to make the 1990s a decade of significant environmental achievements.

Unfortunately, it took the discovery of holes in the ozone layer, widespread fires in the Amazon, and convincing proof of the threats posed by global climate change to make the environment an issue worthy of international press in...
... The time is well nigh to set aside narrow self-interest to focus on the global environmental issues that threaten... the human race.

terest and pride of place at the most recent summit of the leaders of the major industrial powers. Now that environmental issues have captured the attention of our politicians and the press, we are presented with an unprecedented opportunity to translate public concern about the environment into concerted action. Earth Day 1990's campaign will send a clear signal to the world's leaders that the time is well nigh to set aside narrow self-interest to focus on the global environmental issues that threaten the continued existence of the human race. The time has come to focus our collective energies on making "sustainable development" more than a pleasing rhetorical phrase.

The Constituency
To meet the formidable challenge of building a constituency for sustainable development, Earth Day 1990 is seeking the assistance, participation, and commitment of leaders from all sectors of society. Earth Day 1990's national board of directors is drawn from government, educators, labor unions, civil rights groups, corporations, academia, and the arts and includes the CEO of every major national environmental organization in the United States.

At the grass-roots level, Earth Day 1990 has built a national network of local and regional organizations that has given birth to regional offices opening across the country. Local grass-roots and student organizations now exist in hundreds of cities, including all of the nation's largest metropolitan areas. Individuals involved in local Earth Day 1990 coalitions are a study in diversity, with participation ranging from members of neighborhood-improvement associations to city council members, from environmentalists to civil rights activists, from students to senior citizens. Many have never been involved with an environmental campaign before.

Supplementing our field organizing activities, Earth Day 1990 has developed public education programs that reach people in their homes, workplaces, and recreation centers. These programs are designed to change how people shop and affect how they vote and raise their children. Some are applicable primarily to a U.S. audience, while others have been adapted for use in other countries.

Education
To reach the next generation of leaders with lessons that we have yet to learn, Earth Day 1990 has developed formal educational materials including a lesson plan and survey for students in grades K-12 and a campus environmental audit for colleges and universities. At the K-12 level, students will work with their parents to complete a survey that they can use to measure the environmental soundness of their homes. The campus audit will help students, faculty, and administrators to gauge accurately the impact their college has on the community's environment through the generation of solid, medical, radioactive, and hazardous waste as well as its air and water pollution, procurement policies, and dangers in the workplace.

Investment
Drawing on the examples of the antiapartheid and other social-justice movements, the environmental movement has launched an ambitious campaign to apply environmental concerns to decisions in the corporate boardroom. I cochair the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES), which includes environmental organizations and financial institutions. Last fall, CERES unveiled a new ten-point corporate code of ethics, which addresses the damaging impacts of products and production processes on consumers, employees, communities, and the global environment.

Already, the Principles have been endorsed by state, city, and religious pension funds totaling over $150 billion in assets. In conjunction with other coalition members, Earth Day 1990 is working with corporations, state treasurers, portfolio managers, universities, and cities to urge the wide adoption of the Valdez Principles as an effective gauge for corporate performance and a guideline for socially responsible investing.

Global Cities
Responding to a surge of municipal environmental activism, Earth Day 1990 has developed the Global Cities Project, which offers city and county authorities practical assistance in expanding or creating programs that fulfill the maxim, "Think globally. Act locally."

Under the Global Cities Project, Earth Day 1990 will assist cities and counties to develop or expand existing programs in areas such as ride-sharing, recycling, energy and water conservation, hazardous-waste reduction, and tree planting. Cities participating in the project also will receive an "Earth Day Project Planning Guide" and will be eligible to attend project-planning seminars held throughout the country. The response has been enthusiastic, with participants ranging from Newark, New Jersey, to San Diego, California, to Atlanta, Georgia.

International Earth Day
On the international level, Earth Day 1990 has a growing international board of sponsors, which spans every continent and includes two heads of state and the leaders of ten international organizations, including two United Nations agencies. More than 120 countries have Earth Day coalitions representing thousands of nongovernmental organizations, universities, and government agencies. Diversity is predominant; planned activities range from an "Indigenous Peoples Consultation on Bio-Diversity" in the Philippines to a "Green Train" bearing Earth Day 1990's logo on its side as it travels through twenty-one major Italian cities testing pollution levels with its on-board laboratory.

The Global Challenge
International Earth Day is a concept whose time has come. Global environmental issues exemplify the interdependence of communities around the world. If we truly want to develop solutions to global warming, ozone depletion, ocean pollution, and the rest of the global ecological horrors that we've created, world leaders need to take the pragmatic step of setting aside parochial priorities and focusing on threats to the global commons. Earth Day 1990's global campaign will provide the politicians of the world compelling evidence that there indeed exists an informed and angry constituency that considers the health of the planet an issue second to none.

If You Want to Get Involved
If you want to join the Earth Day 1990 process, contact our main office in Palo Alto, California. Regardless of where you live, our field staff can put you in touch with a local grass-roots coordinator. For further information, contact: Earth Day 1990, PO Box AA, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94309; (415) 321-1990.