

# 'Environmentalism has failed as a movement,' noted scientist says

April Reese, Environment and Energy Publishing, 11-8-12

SANTA FE, N.M. -- More than four decades after the first Earth Day, environmental concerns are a low priority and few people consider the ecological impacts of their day-to-day decisions, according to a celebrated Canadian scientist and author.

"I think environmentalism has failed as a movement," said David Suzuki, who is also a broadcaster and activist.

Speaking last night at an event sponsored by a Santa Fe-based arts organization, Suzuki said environmentalism has flopped because it's seen as a "specialty."

"It's not a specialty, it's a way of seeing the world," said Suzuki, the host of Canadian public television's "The Nature of Things." "We need everyone to see through that lens."

He pointed to the absence of environmental issues in the presidential debates.

"It was all about the economy, all about the market," he said, noting that President Obama did mention climate change in his speech after being declared the victor in Tuesday's election.

Western societies -- and, increasingly, much of the rest of the world -- tend to place far more value on the economy than the environment, he said. That philosophy, he said, could lead humanity to an untimely end.

"We've come to a place where we have to decide whether our species will live into the next century."

Economic growth is not sustainable, because it requires more environmental degradation, Suzuki said.

Living in alignment with nature, he said, will require a major paradigm shift to emphasize contentment over consumption.

"Even the tea party would have to agree that as living beings, photosynthesis and biodiversity have to be protected" for people to survive, he added. "Then we ask, based on those needs, how do we build an economy?"

Western countries could learn something from Bhutan, a Himalayan country of 800,000 people that has come up with an alternative economic index to the gross national product called "gross national happiness," Suzuki said.

Bhutan measures prosperity based on how content its people are, rather than on how much they contribute to the economy. Key to a nation's collective contentment are good health, ecological diversity, community vitality and education, according to Bhutan's gross national happiness guide.

The average income in Bhutan is about \$110 per month, but Businessweek has ranked the country as the happiest nation in Asia and the eighth happiest in the world.

After Bhutanese officials presented their gross national happiness concept to the United Nations last year, 68 countries signed onto a resolution to explore a more "holistic" approach to development that incorporates quality-of-life measures. Officials are now developing uniform criteria for measuring gross national happiness, which they will present to the United Nations in two years, Suzuki said.

Bolivia in 2006 elected the world's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, who has made protecting the natural environment a priority in government decisionmaking, Suzuki said. And in Ecuador, he said, President Rafael Correa, an economist educated in the United States, prohibited the development of newly found oil deposits beneath Yasuni National Park, believed to contain the most biodiverse lands in the world.

Ecuador also found a way to profit from protecting its rainforest, he said. Governments from around the world have contributed more than \$100 million to compensate Ecuador for not extracting oil from the park.

Those changes in the way governments value the natural environment offer hope that more countries might come around to the idea of putting the world's life support system first, Suzuki said.

"There is opportunity to see a radical shift in the way we see the world."