

Address to the Plenary Session, Earth Summit

delivered by Severn Suzuki at Rio Centro, Brazil 1992

Hello, I'm Severn Suzuki speaking for E.C.O. - The Environmental Children's organization. We are a group of twelve and thirteen-year-olds from Canada trying to make a difference: Vanessa Suttie, Morgan Geisler, Michelle Quigg and me.

We raised all the money ourselves to come six thousand miles to tell you adults you must change your ways. Coming here today, I have no hidden agenda. I am fighting for my future. Losing my future is not like losing an election or a few points on the stock market. I am here to speak for all generations to come.

I am here to speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet because they have nowhere left to go. We cannot afford to be not heard. I am afraid to go out in the sun now because of the holes in the ozone. I am afraid to breathe the air because I don't know what chemicals are in it.

I used to go fishing in Vancouver with my dad until just a few years ago we found the fish full of cancers. And now we hear about animals and plants going extinct every day - vanishing forever.

In my life, I have dreamt of seeing the great herds of wild animals, jungles and rainforests full of birds and butterflies, but now I wonder if they will even exist for my children to see.

Did you have to worry about these little things when you were my age? All this is happening before our eyes and yet we act as if we have all the time we want and all the solutions.

I'm only a child and I don't have all the solutions, but I want you to realize, neither do you!

You don't know how to fix the holes in our ozone layer.
You don't know how to bring salmon back up a dead stream.
You don't know how to bring back an animal now extinct.
And you can't bring back forests that once grew where there is now desert.

If you don't know how to fix it, please stop breaking it!

Here, you may be delegates of your governments, business people, organizers, reporters or politicians – but really you are mothers and fathers, brothers and

sister, aunts and uncles – and all of you are somebody's child.

I'm only a child yet I know we are all part of a family, five billion strong, in fact, 30 million species strong and we all share the same air, water and soil - borders and governments will never change that. I'm only a child yet I know we are all in this together and should act as one single world towards one single goal.

In my anger, I am not blind, and in my fear, I am not afraid to tell the world how I feel.

In my country, we make so much waste, we buy and throw away, buy and throw away, and yet northern countries will not share with the needy. Even when we have more than enough, we are afraid to lose some of our wealth, afraid to share.

In Canada, we live the privileged life, with plenty of food, water and shelter - we have watches, bicycles, computers and television sets.

Two days ago here in Brazil, we were shocked when we spent some time with some children living on the streets. And this is what one child told us: "I wish I was rich and if I were, I would give all the street children food, clothes, medicine, shelter and love and affection."

If a child on the street who has nothing, is willing to share, why are we who have everything still so greedy? I can't stop thinking that these children are my age, that it makes a tremendous difference where you are born, that I could be one of those children living in the Favellas of Rio; I could be a child starving in Somalia; a victim of war in the Middle East or a beggar in India.

I'm only a child yet I know if all the money spent on war was spent on ending poverty and finding environmental answers, what a wonderful place this earth would be!

At school, even in kindergarten, you teach us to behave in the world. You teach us:
not to fight with others,
to work things out,
to respect others,
to clean up our mess,
not to hurt other creatures
to share - not be greedy
Then why do you go out and do the things you tell us not to do?

Do not forget why you're attending these conferences, who you're doing this for – we are your own children.

You are deciding what kind of world we will grow up in. Parents should be able to comfort their children by saying “everything's going to be alright,” “we're doing the best we can” and “it's not the end of the world.”

But I don't think you can say that to us anymore. Are we even on your list of priorities? My father always says, “You are what you do, not what you say.” Well, what you do makes me cry at night. You grown ups say you love us. I challenge you, please make your actions reflect your words.

Thank you for listening.