



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung

**“Returning to Harmony with Nature –  
What can we do?”**

**Speech**

**by the Federal Minister of Education and Research**

**Dr Annette Schavan, MdB**

**on the occasion of the  
Science and Technology in Society Forum**

**in Kyoto**

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**Check against delivery**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year, a book came out which proposed an interesting thought experiment<sup>1</sup>: What would happen to the earth if humans disappeared from it from one day to the next? The answer: Within a few years, nature would recapture everything that humans have wrested away from it. That ought to give us serious food for thought.

Humans use nature, but they also abuse it. We cultivate it and leave our mark on it. "Human beings are by nature cultural beings", says the philosopher Arnold Gehlen. What distinguishes humans from other creatures is our ability to create culture. We strive after knowledge, develop technologies and create living conditions in which we are able to survive.

Harmony between humans and nature is an important subject in all cultures and religions. That reflects our fundamental need to live at one with nature in order to preserve our natural environment for future generations.

The purpose of the international research agenda is to find ways of achieving this. The "Science and Technology in Society" (STS) Forum here in Kyoto is an ideal setting to discuss the issue.

The entire international community needs to be willing to set certain priorities – this is not just the responsibility of G8 countries, but also of developing and emerging nations.

The initial situations could not be more different, especially when it comes to climate and health. In industrial nations, we are often reckless in our use of energy. In other parts of the world, on the other hand, billions of people do not have access to energy at all. While some people endanger their health by living excessively affluent lifestyles, others have no hope of ever benefiting from a decent health system.

We need to find development opportunities on the basis of these polar opposites.

We need a continuous dialogue that produces high-quality, binding conclusions. Policy-makers and the scientific community alike are responsible for informing the general public about new insights and results and for integrating ordinary people into this process. That is a new aspect of good governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This dialogue will lead to innovations that need to be turned into solution-oriented products, processes and services.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us*, 2007

The quality of the solutions will be measured in terms of the sustainability of the innovation for future generations. As the American philosopher Hans Jonas said: “Act in such a way that the effects of your actions remain compatible with the permanence of authentic human life on earth.” That should be our golden rule.

Science derives its strength from the diversity of scientists and their approaches. We should make use of this potential to find viable scientific answers to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Following Japan’s invitation, universities from the G8 countries and other important nations have come together for the first G8 University Summit. Italy has expressed an interest in organizing a similar meeting next year.

The science academies of the G8+5 nations regularly issue research-based policy recommendations.

The Heads of Research Councils (HORCs) of the G8+5 nations are currently debating whether and how they can set up funding programmes to address global challenges or launch pilot programmes.

In addition, an interdisciplinary institute that will focus on the subjects of the climate, the earth’s system and sustainability is to be created in Germany.

And the annual Nobel Laureate Meetings in Germany provide a forum in which scientific results can be discussed and recommendations for action can be made.

It is about time that we started paying greater attention to science. That is why I would like to thank our hosts for taking the initiative to organize the STS Forum. We need to work together closely if we want to set the right course for the future – to live in harmony with nature.