Panelist's Remarks
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I begin with the simple observation that we have all come from different places, that there is great pluralism in this room. Second, that the concern for putting into practice our deepest commitments has been a constant throughout our conversations this morning. And with that I would like to turn to a joke as follows:

There was a marvelous old house, and in this house there lived three animals: a dog, a cat, and a mouse. And the three got on rather well because they were all quite clever. The mouse in particular, was quite smart. He lived in a little hole in the wall, and every time he heard "bow wow, bow wow," he ran out of his little house to get crumbs and pieces of string, whatever he needed. On the other hand, every time the mouse heard "meow," he stayed in his hole.

Life went on well until one day the mouse hearing "bow wow, bow wow," ran out of his hole and directly into the cat. With one quick movement of his paw, the cat caught the mouse. The little mouse, his heart beating, looked up into the large green eyes of the cat and said, "what happened? I have lived in this house a long time, and every time I heard 'bow wow,' I never had a problem." The cat smiling back said: "sometimes it takes two languages to do business."

An important aspect of the problem of putting into practice our diverse communi- ties'commitments to sustainable development can usefully be framed in terms of language. Imagine, if you will, a large circle which for lack of a better term we can call a "public circle." This is the circle that we share, and it is manifest here in this assembly. For in spite of all of our diver- sity, we are here today concerned together about the problems of sustainable development.

Around that public circle is a whole series of other highly particular circles. These circles are denominated by deep systems of belief, fre- quently defined by culture and religion. As an illustration think of religion. There is, if you will, a large Buddhist circle and across time it has demonstrated that it is a deeply dynamic, genetic circle. There is also a dynamic and genetic Islamic circle, a Christian circle, and so on. There are also other ideologies and other forms of culture that knit groups together with a common set of meanings and values. Each of these groups is distinct and quite different from the public circle we have convened today. Surely the language that is being used in each of these outer circles is distinct, and it is also remarkably different from the language of our shared circle.

If you would allow me to simplify my point, I would like to suggest that virtually all of us belong to two circles: one of the outer circles, and the public circle. If this is so, then the human family is challenged to become "bilingual" in terms of these two types of circles. In fact this bilingual skill is going to be one of the major requirements for us to tackle anything as com- plex as how we can live together harmoniously, if we are not all going to abandon our respective

backgrounds and live by some reductive least common denominator.

The outer circles, which can be represented dramatically by the religious communities, are perhaps the deepest collective memories of what it means to be a human being in community. How can these extraordinary memories be put at the service of sustainable development? I would suggest that highly creative activity is required, both within each outer circle and between each outer circle and the public one. I was deeply moved by the first presentation this morning, and the suggestion that creativity is the essential requirement that we all need to summon if we are to rise to the challenge of sustainable development. I believe creativity is the essential clue to what needs to be transacted, both within the outer circles and between them and the public one.

Let us think about what has to take place within each of the outer circles. What happens when a religious tradition is faced with a challenge? Fundamentally, it has to move in two directions. First, it has to "move back" to hear its own past, it has to consult its own heritage, which is a profoundly creative activity. What story in the past, what episode, what text, what custom can be related to the present challenge? None of our religious traditions were formed around the issue of global development. They did not start there, but in order to face this challenge they have to go back and listen to their traditions from the perspective of today's new problems.

However, this first set of creative acts involved in "hearing the tradition" has to be complemented by a second set of creative acts involved in "saying anew" what one has heard. Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, and Muslims must "say anew" the relevance of their traditions in relationship to ever-changing new problems. If they do not, their great historical memories will remain locked up, unrelated to the present challenges. Both the "hearing" and the "saying anew" are profoundly creative sets of activities, and both are driven by the encounter of real challenges to the human family, in our case the challenges of sustainable development.

Let us now consider the public circle. One of the remarkable features of the public circle is its short history. It simply does not have a long "memory" of what it means to be a person in community. Moreover, the public circle—by virtue of its public state—cannot make normative any one of the inclusive visions of human dignity and responsibility so characteristic of each of the outer circles. Instead the public circle is restricted to positions supportable by public warrants. Historically, this has de facto meant the virtual canonization of scientific empiricism, including an emphasis on social sciences that put a premium on empirical data and eschewed the so-called soft human factors that are in many ways the most striking features of the visions of the outer circles. There arises, not surprisingly, the complaint that the public circle has begun to fashion communities modeled more on the laws that govern machines than the values of community. Yet the public circle is the only one in which we can all talk together about what really counts.

How can the outer circles relate to the public circle? Again the clue is creativity. Each of the outer circles is challenged to "transpose" its deepest sense of moral care regarding a given issue into public speech, supportable with public warrants. It is in this sense that I am suggesting each of us must become bilingual. On the one hand we must engage in the creative acts within our respective primary circles, speaking the language of that primary circle to its respective participants. On the other hand people in the primary circles are also challenged to express their concerns in ways appropriate to the public circle. In doing so they can contribute to the development of the public circle itself.

What I am suggesting is already clearly under way in the arena of multireligious cooperation. Today each of the world's religions is learning how to both hold on to its own primary speech and map out areas of shared concerns with other religions. The discerned areas of shared moral commitment are expressed in public language. No doubt public warrants can be made for the positions held in common. The interesting point is that each of the respective communities also has its own warrants for the shared public positions rooted in their respective primary discourse. They are, in a word, becoming bilingual, and this bilingual capacity promises to enrich our public circle in an ongoing and dramatic way.

Switching to a different point, I would like to make one additional suggestion. I would like to suggest a simple—but nonetheless fertile—way of thinking about a basic public norm for sustainable development. I believe that this simple suggestion could be much more rigorously developed than I will attempt this morning. Put simply, development should not contradict or undercut its own condition of possibility, its own sustainability. Any development activity that violates the conditions of possibility of development is self-contradictory, at least from the standpoint of the activity of development. Development arises out of a series of ever-less-complex manifolds: chemical, biological, personal, social, and so on. If develop-ment activities undercut one of the early mani-folds that is essential for the emergence of the next manifold, it is inherently self-contradictory. Thus if development activities poison the elegant car-bon chemistry from which the ecosystem and other subsequent levels of development emerge, it is patently self-contradictory.

It is a simple line of thought which, if care-fully disciplined, would have certain merits, due to the fact that from it we could establish public warrants for sustainability intrinsic to the activ-ity of development itself. If we could also each transpose our own communal value concerns into that public discourse, we would have a rich conversation indeed.