

**STATEMENT UPON RECEIPT OF
CARL VON CARLOWITZ SUSTAINABILITY AWARD**
Chemnitz, Germany, November 4, 2022

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fifty years ago, our book *The Limits to Growth* warned about the possibility of global overshoot and collapse. *The Limits to Growth* asked the world to keep the human ecological footprint below the carrying capacity of planet Earth. We called for global sustainability.

Initially, there was much opposition and little response. The world continued to grow the human footprint. Today, 50 years after *The Limits to Growth*, the most important and most scary result is the dramatic overshoot in annual climate gas emissions. Every year humanity emits into the atmosphere twice as much CO₂ as is being absorbed by the world's oceans and biomass. The other half accumulates in the atmosphere, leading to ever rising temperatures. The ultimate result could be global environmental collapse – unless there is dramatic cut in man-made emissions - fast.

In the last decade there has been growing response to the climate challenge. My worry is that even this is too slow to solve the climate problem – to keep global warming below the Paris target.

Last month my colleagues and I published a new study of world development towards the year 2100. The book *Earth for All* warns that slow societal response will lead to a decline in human wellbeing over the next generation. A decline caused by rising temperatures (and ever more scary extreme weather), and rising inequality among and within nations.

If such decline is not stopped, it may evolve into national breakdown – into local social collapse. Continuing decline will erode the voters' trust in the nation's ability to solve the underlying problem. And without the support of its people, the nation won't be able to solve the problem. The result will be further reduction in wellbeing and further erosion of trust. Ultimately, the nation may find it impossible to agree on the strong collective action that is needed to solve most sustainability problems.

During the next generation I fear that social collapse – national breakdown – is more likely than environmental collapse. The environmental crisis will still build strength – but on a much longer time horizon. Thus, the sustainability community should use its energy to fight the decline in human wellbeing – with a focus on the wellbeing of the working majority.

Earth for All argues this is best done through the rapid implementation of 5 global turnarounds – in poverty, inequality, empowerment, food, and energy. While keeping the human ecological footprint within planetary boundaries. The goal is a fair and prosperous world, preserving biodiversity and a suitable climate for future generations.

So the goal remains global sustainability. But I fear the world can only achieve sustainability in the long run if the world avoids local social collapse in the short term. For example, by having the world's richest 10 % pay the cost of rising wellbeing for the global majority.

Thank you!