

Pace Environmental Law Review

Volume 13
Issue 2 *Spring 1996*
Symposium Edition

Article 14

April 1996

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Recommended Citation

Raimondo Florin, *Strategic Principles for Sustainable Development*, 13 Pace Envtl. L. Rev. 583 (1996)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58948/0738-6206.1416>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/pelr/vol13/iss2/14>

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Strategic Principles for Sustainable Development

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Dr. Florin is the Executive Director of the Business Council for Sustainable Development.

Dr. Florin discussed the theme of sustainable development, beginning by reference to his document, which addresses strategic principles for sustainable development.¹ The document makes the point that there has been a major change in the Post-Rio period from discussing the industrial sector as the cause of all environmental problems to seeing private corporations as a principal source of new solutions for the creation of a sustainable future. The document adds that environmental programs, which were once perceived as protectors of the public against the negative impacts of industrial operations, must now address the problem more comprehensively and deal with the need for individual and community education and involvement.

Dr. Florin believes that the rapid pace of change in the private sector dictates the need for public regulations to accommodate that change, as well. It is particularly important that the public sector system for protecting the environment be reformed so that the costs of compliance can be clearly determined and corporate liability under the program be readily assessed. Without this certainty and predictability, economic development will be impeded. The importance of cost efficiency, today, cannot be overstated.

The difficulty with a system of regulations that is intensely legal and focused on strict compliance with detailed

1. This draft document is called A Preliminary Plan Regarding Basic Environmental Laws Establishing Minimum Standards (Anteproyecto de Ley Basica Ambiental "Presupuestos Minimos").

regulatory standards is that it can greatly restrict competitiveness and the expansion of private sector employment. During its two years of existence, the Argentine Business Council for Sustainable Development has labored to understand these issues and to educate others about them. It is developing, with the thirty companies that belong to the Council, some standards for creating a system that corresponds to this view. This proposal contains recommendations for environmental regulation, but it emphasizes self-regulation within the industrial sector. The emphasis is on maximizing this self-regulatory process and minimizing the creation of strict public standards to which private enterprise must conform. This appears to be the best method of achieving sustainable development which embodies the concept of growth and competitiveness.

The next step of the Business Council is to establish an effective program of self-regulation. The private sector recognizes that if it does not create such a system at the company and industry levels, Argentina will not move toward sustainable development, but toward a more costly regulatory system.

The emphasis in sustainable development, Florin believes, must be on self-regulation at the initiative of the private sector, rather than waiting for the public sector to take full responsibility through a tightly administered public regulatory regime.