



**Environment at the crossroads.
Aiming for a sustainable future.**
Gulbenkian Conference 2009
27 and 28 October

Chances for a Sustainable Future

Jonathan Porritt

In terms of securing a sustainable future for humankind, we've left it pretty late. Over the last fifty years, huge increases in both human numbers and environmentally-damaging economic activity have created an astonishing "momentum for destruction". Although all eyes are now on the Copenhagen Conference at the end of year, politicians seem to ignore the fact that accelerating climate change is just the worst of countless symptoms of inherently unsustainable economic growth.

All of which means we have to accept the need for a profound transformation of our current model of progress – even as we seek to create the conditions for radically decarbonising today's economy. For politicians, this is not a happy prospect, as it entails a complex mix of science, technology, economics psychology, philosophy and human values – at a time when trust in those very politicians is at an incredibly low level.

It seems inevitable, that things are going to get a lot worse (especially on the climate front) before they start getting better. But there's no reason why societies should not be able to confront these deep structural problems, and emerge, after a period of dramatic discontinuity with far better prospects for a sustainable future than we can currently lay claim to.



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Jonathon Porritt is Founder Director of Forum for the Future. He is an eminent writer, broadcaster and commentator on sustainable development. Established in 1996, Forum for the Future is now the UK's leading sustainable development charity, with 70 staff and over 100 partner organisations, including some of the world's leading companies.

Jonathon was Chairman of the UK Sustainable Development Commission between 2000 and 2009, the Government's principal source of independent advice across the whole sustainable development agenda. In addition, he is Co-Director of The Prince of Wales's Business and Environment Programme which runs Senior Executives' Seminars in Cambridge, Salzburg, South Africa and the USA. In 2005 he became a Non-Executive Director of Wessex Water, and a Trustee of the Ashden Awards for Sustainable Energy, and in 2008 a Non-Executive Director of Willmott Dixon Ltd.

He was formerly Director of Friends of the Earth (1984-90); co-chair of the Green Party (1980-83) of which he is still a member; chairman of UNED-UK (1993-96); chairman of Sustainability South West, the South West Round Table for Sustainable Development (1999-2001); a Trustee of WWF UK (1991-2005), and a member of the Board of the South West Regional Development Agency (1999-2008). His latest books are *Capitalism As If The World Matters* (Earthscan, revised 2007), *Globalism & Regionalism* (Black Dog 2008) and *Living Within Our Means* (Forum for the Future 2009). Jonathon received a CBE in January 2000 for services to environmental protection.