

HOLD FOR RELEASE

Tuesday, January 12, 2010
12:00 PM EST, 1700 GMT

Contact: Gudrun Freese
+44(0)20 7841 1930
gudrun.freese@earthscan.co.uk

***State of the World 2010: From Madison Avenue to Mad Max?*
Consumer Cultures Need Overhaul to Avert Ecological Collapse, Says Worldwatch**

Washington, D.C.—Without an intentional cultural shift that values sustainability over consumerism, no government pledges or technological advances will be enough to rescue humanity from unacceptably hazardous environmental and climate risks, concludes the Worldwatch Institute in the latest edition of its flagship annual report, *State of the World 2010*. The book, subtitled *Transforming Cultures From Consumerism to Sustainability*, defines “consumerism” as a cultural orientation that leads people to find meaning, contentment, and acceptance primarily through what they consume.

“We’ve seen some encouraging efforts to combat the world’s climate crisis in the past few years,” says project director Erik Assadourian. “But making policy and technology changes while keeping cultures centered on consumerism and growth can only go so far. To thrive long into the future, human societies will need to shift their cultures so that sustainability becomes the norm and excessive consumption becomes taboo.”

In 2006, people consumed \$30.5 trillion worth of goods and services, up 28 percent from just 10 years earlier. This rise in consumption has resulted in a dramatic increase in resource extraction; the world digs up the equivalent of 112 Empire State Buildings worth of materials each day, with the typical American consuming an average of 88 kilograms (194 pounds) of stuff daily—more than most Americans weigh. If the whole world lived like this, Earth could sustain only 1.4 billion people, or just a fifth of the current population, the report notes.

“Cultural patterns are the root cause of an unprecedented convergence of ecological and social problems, including a changing climate, an obesity epidemic, a major decline in biodiversity, loss of agricultural land, and production of hazardous waste,” says Assadourian.

The report's 60 authors present strategies for reorienting cultures that range from "choice editing"—deliberately striking options from consumer menus—to harnessing the power of religious groups and rituals to internalize sustainability values. Some examples from *State of the World 2010* include:

- School menus in Italy and elsewhere are being reformulated to use healthy, local, and environmentally sound foods, transforming children's dietary norms in the process.
- In suburbs such as Vauban, Germany, bike paths, wind turbines, and farmers' markets are not only making it easy to live sustainably, but are making it hard not to.
- At the U.S.-based carpet company Interface Inc., CEO Ray Anderson radicalized a business culture by setting the goal of taking nothing from the Earth that cannot be replaced by the Earth.
- In Ecuador, rights for "Pachamama" (Mother Earth) have entered into the Constitution.

The report examines the institutions that shape cultural systems. Business has played the leading role in shifting cultures to center on consumerism, making an array of resource-intensive products such as bottled water, fast food, cars, disposable paper goods, and even pets seem increasingly "natural."

Government has also promoted consumerism as a lynchpin of policy, often making it synonymous with national well-being and job creation. As the global economic recession accelerated in 2009, wealthy countries primed national economies with \$2.8 trillion of new government stimulus packages, only a small percentage of which focused on green initiatives.

Today, an intentional shift is necessary and is already taking root thanks to cultural pioneers around the world who are starting to use six culture-shaping institutions—education, business, the media, government, traditions, and social movements—to reorient cultures toward sustainability.

In 26 articles and 23 short text boxes, the report details dozens of innovative efforts that are tapping these key institutions, from changing business cultures and starting social enterprises to cultivating social marketing efforts, shifting family-planning norms, and tapping the power of primary schools, universities, and even school menus.

"As the world struggles to recover from the most serious global economic crisis since the Great Depression, we have an unprecedented opportunity to turn away from consumerism," says Worldwatch President Christopher Flavin. "In the end, the human instinct for survival must triumph over the urge to consume at any cost."

—END—

State of the World 2010 Facts at a Glance (organized by section)

The Rise and Fall of Consumer Cultures

- The world's **richest 500 million people** (roughly 7 percent of the world's population) **are responsible for 50 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions**, while the poorest 3 billion are responsible for just 6 percent. (p. 6)
- **Business-as-usual is projected to lead to a 4.5 degree Celsius increase by 2100.** Even if all countries stuck to their most ambitious proposals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, temperatures would still go up by 3.5 degrees Celsius. (p. 5)
- To produce enough energy over the next 25 years to replace most of what is supplied by fossil fuels, the world would need to build **200 square meters of solar photovoltaic panels and 100 square meters of solar thermal every second, and 24 3-megawatt wind turbines every hour** nonstop during this period. (p. 7)
- A study of British children found that they could identify more Pokémon characters than common wildlife species. And an investigation of **U.S. two-year olds** found that although they could not identify the letter M, **many could identify the M-shaped golden arches of McDonald's restaurants.** (p. 9)
- In 2006, some **83 percent of the world's population had access to television** and 21 percent had access to the Internet. (p. 13)
- **Two pet German shepherd dogs use more resources in a year than the average Bangladeshi.** (p. 14)

Traditions Old and New

- **72 percent of Americans say religious beliefs** play at least a “somewhat important” role in their **thinking about environmental stewardship and climate change.** (p. 24)
- **Women with no schooling worldwide average 4.5 children each.** Women with some primary school average 3 children, and those who complete at least one year of secondary school average 1.9 children. **After 1–2 years of college, fertility drops to 1.7 children,** well below population-maintaining “replacement” fertility. (pp. 38-39)
- Several of **the world's longest-lived peoples eat just 1,800–1,900 calories a day,** no processed foods, and minimal animal products. By comparison, the average American consumes 3,830 calories a day. (p. 49)

Education's New Assignment: Sustainability

- **U.S. marketers now spend \$17 billion annually targeting children,** up from \$100 million in 1983. (pp. 63-64)
- **U.S. children now spend more time in front of television screens than in any other activity besides sleeping:** about 40 hours a week outside of school. **Nineteen percent of U.S. babies under the age of one have a television** in their bedroom. (p. 65)
- Some **67.5 percent of the food served in Rome's schools is organic,** 44 percent comes from “bio-dedicated” food chains that focus exclusively on organic products, 26 percent is local, 14 percent is certified “fair trade,” and 2 percent comes from social cooperatives that employ former prisoners or that work land confiscated from the Mafia. (pp. 73–74)

Business and Economy: Management Priorities

- In the United States, the **Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI)** neared its per capita peak in 1975, at a time when per capita GDP was about half what it is today. (p. 86)
- A study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research found that **if the United States were to shift to western European patterns of time use, U.S. energy use could decline 20 percent even without changes in technology.** (p. 93)
- In 1900, every \$1 spent on a typical U.S. foodstuff item yielded an estimated 40¢ for the farmer, with the rest split between input and distribution. **Today, only some 7¢ of every retailed food dollar goes to the farmer,** rancher, or grower, while 73¢ goes to distribution. (p. 114)

Government's Role in Design

- **Australia's "ban the bulb" policy is projected to save 4 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions annually** by 2012 and also bring sizable economic savings. (p. 119)
- **Ireland's levy on plastic shopping bags has reduced usage by 90 percent.** (p. 120)
- The **United States will spend \$65 on military costs for each \$1 devoted to climate programs** in fiscal year 2010. (p. 129)
- The travel demand management program TravelSmart in Perth, Australia, led annual **patronage on the city's rail system to increase from 7 million to 110 million in 17 years,** moving public transport from 5 to 10 percent of work journey trips taken. (p. 136)

Media: Broadcasting Sustainability

- **Spain's government voted to ban commercials on public television stations** starting in 2010. (p. 149)
- In 2008, **spending on advertising exceeded \$271 billion in the United States** and \$643 billion worldwide. (p. 151)
- **Only one in every 1,000 marketing dollars in the U.S. is spent on broadcast public service announcements** that market for the public good—and only a tiny fraction of that is spent on sustainability messaging. (pp. 151-152)

The Power of Social Movements

- The **average American puts in 200–300 more hours at work each year** than the average European. (p. 174)
- **Western Europeans now live longer than Americans.** They are also a little more than half as likely on average to suffer from chronic illnesses such as heart disease, hypertension, and type-2 diabetes after the age of 50. (pp. 174-175)
- U.S. researchers found **that for every 1 percent increase in unemployment, U.S. mortality declined by half a percent.** (p. 173)
- A 2003 study found that **per capita emissions in two German ecovillages were 28 and 42 percent, respectively, of the national average.** (p. 186)

Notes to Editors:

To interview Erik Assadourian, Christopher Flavin, or *State of the World 2010* authors, please contact:

Darcey Rakestraw, Communications Director, Worldwatch Institute
(+1) 202-452-1992 x 517; drakestraw@worldwatch.org

Julia Tier, Communications Associate, Worldwatch Institute
(+1) 202-452-1992 x 594; jtier@worldwatch.org

For copies outside the U.S., Canada, and India:

State of the World 2010 is published in English by Earthscan for sale outside the U.S., Canada, and India. To obtain a review copy, contact Gudrun Freese at gudrun.freese@earthscan.co.uk; Tel: +44 (0)20 7841 1930.

State of the World 2010 sells for £14.99 plus shipping and handling. It can be purchased through the Earthscan website at www.earthscan.co.uk, by e-mailing earthinfo@earthscan.co.uk, or by calling +44(0)1256 302 699 with ISBN number 9781849710541.

For reviews published in these territories please use the [Earthscan cover image](#) and reference the Earthscan edition, i.e.: *State of the World 2010* (£14.99) is published by Earthscan (2010). Available from good bookshops and www.earthscan.co.uk

Worldwatch E-mail List:

If you would like to receive Worldwatch press advisories regularly, please send your request to Julia Tier at jtier@worldwatch.org or call (+1) 202-452-1992 x594.

About the Worldwatch Institute:

Worldwatch is an independent research organization based in Washington, D.C., that works on energy, resource, and environmental issues. The Institute's *State of the World* report is published annually in more than 20 languages. For more information, visit www.worldwatch.org.