The Expansive Earth

And the earth, We have made it a wide extent; how well have We then spread (it) out. (al-(Dhariyat, 51/47

وَالأَرْضَ مَدَدْنَاهَا وَأَلْقَيْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَأَنبَتْنَا فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مَّوْزُونٍ وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ وَمَن لَّسْتُمْ لَهُ بِرَازِقِينَ

And the earth - We have spread it forth and made in it firm mountains and caused to grow in it of every suitable thing. And We have made in it means of subsistence for you and for him (whom you cannot sustain. (al-Hijr, 15/18-19

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا أَحْيَاء وَأَمْوَاتًا

Have We not made the earth to draw together to itself; (prepared for) the living and the dead? (al-Mursalat, 77/25-26)

One of the branches of the ever-increasing knowledge of mankind in contemporary times is the methodology of exploiting the earth's natural resources and God-given treasures. Scientists have always been apprehensive that unplanned tapping of the existing resources would engender problems for future generations. For this reason, elaborate and extensive programs and projects have been designed by experts to optimally utilize the natural resources, which are an influential factor in the determination of the wellbeing of human societies. Many conferences have been held to discuss the soundest way to exploit these natural resources, so that adequate attention is paid to the fundamental and vital needs of humanity as well as ensuring that these needs are met in a balanced and equitable manner. No scientist will endorse the principle that each individual is free to exploit nature in a manner that is to his sole and limitless advantage.

However, God, the All-wise – whose wisdom is barely reflected by the entirety of man's knowledge – had also made arrangements for this important issue at the time of the creation of the earth; indeed this is a proof of the intelligent, knowledgeable and capable design that underpins existence. He made man aware of these blessings and invited him to make lawful use of them. Man has been required to take advantage of the Divine bounties in the earth in a thoughtful manner and not to give way to excess and overindulgence in an attempt to acquire

as much as possible, which would ultimately cause a disparity between needs and consumption. If these resources are managed correctly through a system of organization and control, then neither scarcity will affect them nor will these plentiful resources be depleted.

In the days when the human population was not even one-third of the present number and many of the earth's resources had yet to be discovered, poverty and famine arising from ruined crops was much more common than it is today. Indigence and hunger were constant afflictions and would cause widespread death amongst human societies.

Nowadays, although the earth's population has increased manifold, those unfavourable circumstances no longer prevail (in the same abundance), even though contentment and moderation in consumption is not only less than in previous times, but has given way to wastage and shameful excesses. Furthermore, in order to balance their markets, many countries actually destroy a substantial amount of their agricultural produce annually, a fact that distresses the heart of every free-thinking individual.

Thus, poverty and scarcity arises due to the method of exploiting resources and its disproportionate distribution – and not because of a decrease in the earth's natural resources themselves – and consequent to the clash between demand and profiteering and the corruption that arises as a result, the social fabric and harmony is torn apart; in reality this unfair utilization of resources is due the culture of excess on the one hand, and the absence of contentment and the insatiable appetites of today's greedy and selfish individuals on the other.

Let us also cast a glance at the very distant past: It is not known when the earth initially acquired the capacity to support life and when the first living creatures appeared, developed and multiplied on it. The exact date when man walked on earth is likewise shrouded in mystery and thus far no convincing answer to this riddle has been presented by researchers. Whatever has been postulated in this regard is based on a chain of theories and suppositions and not on any conclusive and well-accepted facts.

If we consider this earth, we find that we do not know how old it is, nor do we have any method to determine its age with any certainty, and every opinion on this matter is no more than a conjecture, which does not shed much light on its past and its true nature. When historians commonly disagree about events that are just a few centuries old, what kind of theory can reliably explain an episode that occurred in the system of creation several million, or rather billions of years ago?

We do not even know when life and subsequently, man, first appeared on earth; what we do know for certain, however, is that God has provided an abundant variety of materials for the benefit and needs of every living thing (humans, animals and vegetation) without the least

parsimoniousness.

Every creature and plant can draw sustenance and nutrients for its survival and development from the earth. Since the earth is limited in size, it follows that the food it can produce is also limited. These limitations seem to indicate that the earth would be unable to provide for the needs of all its inhabitants over a prolonged period of time.

This however, through an astonishingly complex and regulated system that governs this small planet – which has so many diverse and different aspects and is intricately linked to its store of resources – every living creature and plant receives its sustenance. And this has been the case from the obscure beginning of creation, and will continue till the end of time, while the resources are not exhausted or even diminished. This amazing miracle of creation is a fact that is undeniable and in this regard, the Qur'an declares that the earth has the capacity to support the entirety of its inhabitants and satisfy their various and diverse needs:

وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ وَمَن لَّسْتُمْ لَهُ بِرَازِقِينَ

And We have made in it means of subsistence for you and for him whom you cannot sustain. (al-Hijr, 15/19)

And so we see a constant and continuous process in the earth which progresses in association with a special system of controls on a pre-planned and guided course.

When man desired to build houses and the supplies he needed were bricks, stone and lime, God placed these simple materials at his disposal so that he could take steps to alleviate his basic needs and make a shelter for himself.

However, nowadays, due to urban overpopulation, especially as people move into the main townships, and due to the problems associated with overcrowding and the increased communication of people with one another, man even needs buildings with more than one hundred storeys. In His infinite wisdom and knowledge that encompasses every particle in the universe of existence, God endowed within the earth – many millions of years ago - the raw materials that would one day be used for construction (stone and clay and iron) in the shape of quarries and mines. He then inspired man to create and invent and made these materials accessible to him so that he may advance in the world by extracting these pre-prepared stores from the depths of the earth and utilizing them in providing for his needs.

The foregoing discussion described the adequacy of the earth's resources in catering for the needs of mankind and his fellow creatures throughout its history and for as long as life-forms exist on it and wish to make use of its provisions.

The Qur'an also emphasises this very same point, and adds that the earth not only sustains every living being, but accommodates the dead as well.

Although man's development and transformation will never evolve away from his fundamental humanness and the essence of his existence and constitution, nevertheless, in his material trappings, man has come a long way in the course of time, and this is evident across the world. Death is the inescapable end of every living being that inhabits the earth and the earth itself is ever ready to welcome the remains of the dead in its embrace. Sooner or later, the bodies of humans go back to the earth, as do the carcasses of animals. Every variety of vegetation – from leaves to the trunks of trees – is likewise gradually assimilated into the earth's stores. Therefore the earth is at once the main support for human life and the source from which mankind can gather bounties, as well as the burial place for all living things; thus, the Qur'an states:

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا أَحْيَاء وَأَمْوَاتًا

Have We not made the earth to draw together to itself; the living and the dead. (al-Mursalat, 77/25-26)

That which resonates with the principles of nature is purpose and the pursuit of perfection; indeed these are the distinct and well known properties that permeate creation and are the immediate and consecutive fruits of Divine planning. Therefore, imperfection and diminution - which are the outcomes of chaos and unwise planning – have no place or meaning in the system of existence.

Thus, when we contemplate the foundations of existence, we come to realize that it abounds with splendour, grandeur and greatness. The Qur'an states in this regard:

مَّا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِن تَفَاوُتٍ فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِن فُطُورٍ

You will not see any incongruity in the creation of the Beneficent Lord; then look again, can you see any disorder? (al-Mulk, 67/3)

Behind the system of creation of the all-Merciful God, one will not find inadequacy and disorderliness; carefully look again and again, do you see any flaw? No!

Therefore, indifference towards, and ignorance of the various phenomena that are manifested in the world and of what goes on around mankind, has consequences that will form obstacles to the ultimate felicity of humanity.