

U.S. arrogance spoiling planet

One hundred and ninety-one countries have gathered in Johannesburg, South Africa, last week to discuss the world's most pressing environmental and economic issues, and the world's most powerful country is snubbing it. Our president is the only leader of a developed country not to attend, sending instead Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Mr. Powell, in addition to being toured through Angola, whose population The Economist calls "the most wretched on Earth," is getting 190 earfuls, no doubt. He has been instructed by his boss to resist setting any new targets since 1992's first World Summit on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro. In fact, the president would prefer to un-sign the promises made there.

The themes on this summit's agenda are difficult ones: water, energy, health, farming and biodiversity. There are contentious disagreements between the rich and poor nations over globalization. And the U.S. more and more is choosing a unilateral approach to these problems: our way or the highway.

The U.S. way, while dependant on the highway, is not the high way: while fossil fuel use worldwide has increased 10 percent since the Rio summit, ours has grown a staggering 18 percent.

America has what many countries don't, and that is choices. In our greed and arrogance, we are turning down the opportunity to lead for the good and instead are choosing, using Bush's vocabulary, evil.

I am ashamed at my country's lack of leadership in the areas where it is needed the most.

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