

WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

OPENING ADDRESS

by

MRS GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

CHAIRMAN

OF THE WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
AND PRIME MINISTER OF NORWAY

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Your Excellency, Prime Minister Mugabe, Minister Chitepo,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I should like, on behalf of all of the Members of the Commission, to express to you personally, and to the people of Zimbabwe, our gratitude for hosting our meeting in Africa. Here in Harare and next week in Nairobi, we expect to obtain at first hand the insights and advice of leading African institutions and individuals on the issues that concern us, to learn what steps you have already taken, and what measures you feel are needed to put development on a sound and sustainable path.

We have already noted with particular interest that the Government of Zimbabwe only a few days ago launched an ambitious new National Plan for conservation of resources and sustainable development. We again congratulate the Government of Zimbabwe on this progressive venture which brings out a true sense of responsibility for a common future.

The experiences we are here to share will help to broaden our understanding and, I have no doubt, inspire us in our conviction that it is possible to build a more prosperous, just and secure world for all.

Indeed, it was out of this conviction that the General Assembly of the United Nations established the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983. The World Commission on Environment and Development is a completely independent body, free to address any issues and to present any views and recommendations. We come from all corners of the globe, North and South, East and West. Although many of us are active ministers in government, we serve on the Commission in our personal capacities.

When we were created, there was a feeling that the machinery created by governments and peoples for the management of our small planet was not working. It was necessary to re-think the issues from new perspectives, and we were asked to propose national strategies and new forms of international co-operation.

In the course of our work, we have travelled to hear the views of governments and public officials, and to interact with people through public hearings. We are particularly grateful to see so many of your people in the audience today. You are

really truly welcome. Our Commission has been specifically mandated to speak to and to hear the views of youth. During our travels, we have met with youth from many parts of the world, and they have shared with us their concerns and hopes for the future.

We are meeting today at a time when the global family is faced with a unique combination of adverse forces and challenges - a breakdown in the international economic system, underdevelopment in many parts of the world and over-consumption in others, widespread poverty, exploding population growth, severe ecological stress, a spiralling arms race, and here, in Southern Africa, racism. These forces interact. All are interdependent, none can be dealt with in isolation. In many ways, they are most evident in Africa. It is therefore fitting that our Sixth official Meeting is being held in Zimbabwe. Southern Africa occupies a central position in the network of regional solidarity that has been created to find lasting solutions to the difficult challenges facing this continent. Our mandate is a mandate for change, and the need for change in the way we manage this planet, the way we perceive and define our own national self-interests and the way nations relate to, and interact with, each other is no more evident or urgent than in relation to Africa.

It is also appropriate that we begin our discussions here today in the same venue where the Government of Zimbabwe earlier this month - and with great success - hosted the Summit of the Non-Aligned Countries. The non-aligned movement embodies principles of international co-operation which lie at the core of the Commission's mandate. In its Economic Declaration the Summit welcomed the establishment of our Commission and its objective of focussing global attention on the interrelated issues of environment and development. It expressed the hope that our work would help to mobilize a large volume of resources to enable developing countries to pursue long-term policies harmonious with environment and development objectives.

The Commission is heartened to see that the Non-Aligned Countries recognize the critical importance of incorporating environmental considerations into the development process, and we are pleased to learn of their high expectations for our work.

Mr Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'd like to share with you some thoughts I had on my long trip from the North. The geography of Africa makes a profound impression on any visitor. The sense of the land is overwhelming. The vast brown plains, the great rivers, impenetrable forests, huge lakes and desert wastelands. The

land that gave birth to mankind seems scarcely changed at all by its offspring. The majesty of the land reduces man's traces to insignificance seen from this perspective. On the ground, though, it is man - and especially woman - that impresses. In the countryside one sees that much of the land is too dry, too steep, too stony or too carved by erosion for agriculture. And yet, with enormous daily effort, families are growing food, collecting fuelwood and water, always in motion, working very hard, carrying heavy loads, digging the earth and hacking at bush. This, too, is Africa where the people and their traditions of hard work and community spirit are the richest resource.

In the past few decades we have seen the leaders and the people of newly independent nations of Africa set out with hope to develop the continent. And we have seen this development take root and begin to grow, only to be choked, as vines choke a young tree, by strangling international economic trends - falling prices for exports, rising debts to pay for imports, and misdirected aid projects. There are added difficulties posed by the fast growth in population and by the demand for more food and fuel. All this leads to insupportable inroads on the environment, followed by a decline in production, ecological stress and the tragedy of catastrophic famine. To meet these problems of sheer survival, short-term solutions have been forced on governments against the long-term interests of the land and its capacity to provide for people. It is not just economic development which is at risk. Social development, political stability, and even peace become threatened.

we know that there are many success stories in Africa. There are countries where food production has increased quite rapidly. There are also countries where, despite very low incomes, major improvements in health and education have been achieved. Yet, one can speak of a crisis in African development. The statesmen of Africa have expressed this concern in the deliberations of the Organization of African Unity and the meeting of the African Ministers of Environment. The international community has recognized the special nature of African problems in the Action Plan which emerged from the recent Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly. In fact, the governments and peoples of Africa have travelled much further along the path of self-examination and self-criticism than the rest of us.

Mr. Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this point in human history Africa occupies a special position in the global concern for development and the environment. Africa is today preoccupied first of all with survival. The OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government,

in reviewing the continent's economic situation, emphasized the priority need to ensure survival of the many millions of Africans who are victims of environmental, economic and political disasters. Their concern is the concern of us all. We must all understand the reasons for their plight and formulate innovative, concrete and realistic plans to ensure their future. And we must all work hand in hand to see that those plans are carried out. We are still discussing these issues, but believe the key lies with helping the rural sector to increase food and energy production without taking more out of the land than can be maintained for the use of generations to come.

The poor do violence to their environment because they have no alternative. Yet investment in land management and services, provision of seeds, tools, fertilizers, irrigation and, above all, reform of inequitable land holding systems and pricing policies can provide those alternatives. So can erosion control and soil regeneration. So can promotion of family planning and the education of rural populations, especially women - the food and fuel and water managers of many societies.

These are some of the things we know will relatively quickly rehabilitate the land, raise food production and rural income, check the migration to cities and enhance the quality of life. Redirecting financial resources to provide the considerable investment required involves political decisions and responsibility at the national and international levels. Can anyone here argue that we really have a choice? The decisions have been put off too long already and the results of temporizing have been tragic.

These decisions, however, must be taken in consultation and full partnership with the rural populations who will co-operate enthusiastically only when they have a stake in a sustainable future. They must not be pawns in the game, but key players.

Industrialized nations must rethink their role too. What good does it do to force a developing country to distort its use of land resources, clearing forests and replacing food crops with cash crops to repay loans if this distortion eventually results in the need for more relief aid? What good does it do to dump agricultural surpluses on a recipient country at prices that drive local farmers out of the market and out of production if this, too, results in the need for more relief aid? Where is the common sense in the fact that industrialized countries, even at the height of the flow of aid to Africa, were taking more money out of the stricken continent than they were putting in?

Environmental stress and developmental failures are not unique to Africa. Our Commission has seen variations on these themes in all the countries we have visited. The problems are planetary, but they are not insoluble. I believe that history will record that in this crisis the two greatest resources, land and people, will redeem the promise of development. If we take care of nature, nature will take care of us. This is the essence of what we call sustainable development, an idea whose time has now come.

There are many dimensions to this idea of sustainability. First, it requires the elimination of poverty and deprivation. Second, it requires the conservation and enhancement of the resource base which alone can ensure that the elimination of poverty is permanent. Third, it requires a broadening of the concept of development so that it covers not merely economic growth but also social and cultural development. Fourth, and most important, it requires the unification of economics and ecology in decision making at all levels.

This may sound obvious, but until very recently, conservation of the environment was perceived as something external to the development process. How mistaken were those views! Soon, they were amply belied by unfolding human tragedy and ecological stress. Indeed, one of the outstanding impressions that we as a Commission have acquired during our visits and deliberations in different continents is precisely the critical role that environment plays in attaining key economic, social and political development objectives. Environmental protection and development, far from being in conflict, are in fact closely interdependent - locally, nationally, regionally and globally. Our chosen title reflects this. We are the World Commission on Environment and Development. It is not one or the other, but both, or none.

The issue is not merely one of a link between environment and development but between both of these and the threats to peace. With environmental degradation deepening in many parts of the world, it is likely that hazards to peace will multiply, with military means being used or threatened to tackle what are non-military problems. Unless we deal with environment and development far more seriously than we do at present, such threats could become a reality and shatter peace, with environmental bankruptcy adding new and unpredictable twists to global and national insecurity. Armaments will not remove these threats to peace, but sustainable development and wise environmental management can.

Mr Prime Minister,

Here in Zimbabwe and in Southern Africa, countries live under the constant shadow of South African aggression. Yet, now more than ever, it is crucial that the region devote its energies and resources to environment and development issues for the survival of its nations and people. But we all realize that Southern Africa will remain a troubled region as long as apartheid exists. Many of the Members of the Commission play active parts in politics, also outside the World Commission. As Prime Minister of Norway, I would also like now to address the situation in Southern Africa.

The black population in South Africa is no longer willing to tolerate the oppressive apartheid system, and demands the right to be treated as equal citizens with the same political rights as the white population. History shows that these aspirations cannot be suppressed indefinitely. The question is not whether the apartheid system will fall, but when it will fall. The South African Government would be well advised to look to Zimbabwe in this regard.

South African attacks against Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe represent a further escalation of the conflict in Southern Africa. The Frontline States deserve our firm support in the face of South African aggression. In their recent report, the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group drew the depressing conclusion that the South African Government does not seem prepared for a genuine dialogue with the opposition, and that outside pressure is essential for any prospect of peaceful change.

I believe this is a correct conclusion and that the South African Government will only abolish apartheid when it feels it has no choice.

The case for sanctions against South Africa is a strong one. Apartheid is a flagrant violation of the most basic human rights. In today's interdependent world, the practice of race supremacy cannot be accepted, and the international community has a clear responsibility to act against apartheid and South Africa's aggression against the people of Namibia and the Frontline States. The adoption of sanctions would send a powerful message to South Africa that apartheid cannot be reformed, but must be abolished.

The Norwegian Government is presently preparing a bill on an economic boycott of South Africa, and is prepared to increase its assistance to the Southern African region in the event of South African reprisals against the SADCC countries.

The international community has an obligation to create an atmosphere conducive to peaceful change by showing determination in the fight against apartheid. By being firm in our actions we will hasten the downfall of apartheid and shorten the suffering in South Africa. Let us all join our forces to achieve this noble goal. We have no time to lose!

Mr Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Speaking again as the Chairman of the Commission, as we formulate our suggestions on strategies for enduring environmental security and sustainable development, we shall not forget that our primary task where Africa is concerned will be to build on and strengthen initiatives arising from Africa's own institutions. We support the initiatives taken by the Cairo Environment Ministers' Conference. We follow closely the work of the Organization of African Unity, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, and the efforts of all African governments. The task facing these organizations and governments is how to implement the strategies they have proposed in the Lagos Plan of Action. That is also the task facing the World Commission on Environment and Development and all world governments to whom the Commission, through the General Assembly, will be making its proposals.

Perhaps Africa's ordeal of drought and famine is a turning point, a shock that will bring men and nations to their senses. This wonderful planet has been likened to a living organism. In Africa it has called to us with a warning that applies to everyone, everywhere. We are not, and never can be, masters of the earth. We are merely a part of its intricate life-supporting networks. The land was here before us and it will remain when we are gone. It will sustain us if we take from it only our share - and with our ingenuity and organization, we are capable of making that share provide a good life for every man, woman and child in this and in succeeding generations. If Africa can help the rest of the human family to understand this, then we have come a long way.

Thank you.