

WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

ADDRESS

by

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PRESS SEMINAR

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Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press,

Although you have already been welcomed to this media session, I would like to say, on behalf of the World Commission on Environment and Development, how happy we are to have this opportunity to meet so many distinguished members of the press and to provide some information about the state of the work of the Commission and of some of the important issues that we are dealing with. Last week in Harare and here in Nairobi, we have obtained and will obtain at first hand, the insights and advice of leading African institutions and individuals on the issues that concern us, to learn more about steps that have already been taken, and what measures they feel are needed to put development on a sound and sustainable path.

The first and most urgent task facing the world community is to manage the risks which threaten the survival and well-being of the human community. The threats, of war and regional conflict are the concern of us all, but also critical life support systems are at stake.

The Commission is convinced that these new imperatives can only be seriously addressed by defining the goals of economic activity in terms of sustainable development.

Cooperation for mitigating these problems is essential for our own survival.

But ensuring survival is not enough. The quality of life is as important. A most urgent task is to accelerate the process of development, ~~remove widespread poverty~~ and raise living standards in the developing countries. This will require a recovery from the economic stagnation of recent years and a new aera of growth in the world economy. But it cannot be a repetition of the non-sustainable development patterns of the past several decades which ended up in the development crisis of the 80's.

What we have seen in recent years is not just a cyclical fluctuation in the growth process. It is a deeper crisis caused by a variety of internal and external factors which have been operating for a long time:

First, the processes of savings and investment were interrupted in most of the developing countries and led to a recourse to unsustainable levels of foreign borrowing.

Second, the neglect of the ecological factors led to unsustainable pressures on land and water resources which, in Africa, resulted in a serious food emergency.

Third, these impacts have been aggravated by rising interest rates, falling commodity prices and the general decline in development co-operation.

Fourth, most developing countries do not as yet have the economic, organizational and technical flexibility which can make them less vulnerable to crisis.

Fifth, in many countries, social tensions have increased because of the co-existence of poverty and consumerism.

Finally, the relative neglect of the social, cultural dimensions of development has led to a waste of human resources.

We do not discard the many positive aspects of development.

However, the roots of many development failures lie in the neglect of environmental factors in the design of projects, programmes, policies and plans.

Equally, the failure of many efforts at environmental improvement lies in the fact that the efforts were not integrated with developmental activities. The solution to these problems is not to be found in technical fixes, but in more basic changes in the orientation of all economic policy. Similarly, the long-term objectives of economic and social development require the conservation and enhancement of the ecological base for such development.

Sustainable development requires that we manage this planet and our lives in a way which secures the basic needs and a decent quality of life for present and future generations. Today, we are constantly overdrawing the account which nature has opened for us. To reverse unsustainable trends, we must INTRODUCE the concept of sustainable development at all levels of decision-making.

The situation in Africa is both a major concern and a serious reminder that we have no time to lose. Until very recently, conservation of the environment has been perceived as something external to the development process. In fact, Julius Nyerere reminded us in Harare that he himself and other African leaders, not so many years ago, regarded environmental concerns as ideas imposed from the North, ideas that would hamper development and slow it down,

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thereby cementing existing structures to the benefit of the North. Now, Nyerere gave a direct appeal on behalf of the environment and concluded that if the Commission could succeed in placing the environment solidly on the agenda in Africa, it would in fact have made a major achievement in fulfilling its mandate.

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 this continent. And we have seen this development take root and begin to grow, only to be choked by strangling international economic trends. 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, 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.

The Commission knows 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. This will have to be overcome, not by national measures alone, but through strengthened co-operation with and among regional institutions as well as on a global scale.

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.

During our meeting in Harare it was strongly underlined that the poor of Africa 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 the rural population, especially women.

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These are some of the things that we know relatively quickly will 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.

Such 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.

What we should aim at is sustainability in relation to the available resource base and adequate living standards. It is in this context that the Commission has been dealing with the issue of population and development of human resources.

In its submission to our Public Hearings in Harare, the Economic Commission for Africa stressed that demographic factors will constitute a daunting challenge for Africa in the years ahead as the race between population and economic growth intensifies. And it posed some critical questions: How can Sub-Saharan Africa produce enough food for an additional 15 to 20 million people each year when it is unable to feed its present population?

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Can Africa provide primary education to 137 million children who will require it in in the year 2000? And can it provide secondary education for the 80 million who will require it by the end of the century?

I believe that the conclusion drawn is one that should be taken very seriously. "These demographic phenomena constitute the heart of the African development problematique. They are the data that lead most analysts to project a continuing and deepening crisis in Africa. There is no doubt that there is an imperative and urgent need for a far-reaching population policy to be adopted and vigorously implemented by African governments."

A broad attack on all the important sources of environment and development degradation must also include the realization that there are considerable areas in Africa where population growth is in urgent need of being more effectively addressed. I say this knowing that the choice of national policies can differ and requires sensitivity to cultural and social patterns. However, the problem should be taken very seriously by all concerned with the future of Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me again underline that to ensure the survival of Africa, industrialized nations must rethink their role. 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

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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? If we take care of nature, nature will take care of us. This is the essence of sustainable development, an idea whose time has now come.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It will have been noted, I think, that I commented on South Africa in my opening speech in Harare. One of the reasons for doing this was to point out that now more than ever, it is crucial that the Southern African region devote its energies and resources to environment and development issues for the survival of its nations and peoples. But we all realize that Southern Africa will remain a troubled region as long as apartheid exists.

As Prime Minister of Norway I said that the case for sanctions against South Africa is a strong one and that the Norwegian Government is preparing a bill on 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.