

Oslo

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MIDDAGSTALE FOR LATIN-AMERIKANSKE AMBASSADØRER I OSLO, 1. JULI  
1987 - VERDENSKOMMISJONEN FOR MILJØ OG UTVIKLING.

Your Excellencies,  
Dear guests

It is a great pleasure for me to meet all the Heads of Missions of the Latin American embassies here in Oslo. I personally, and the other Norwegians present have been looking forward to renewing and improving our contacts and to provide information that the Norwegian Government is eager to bring to the attention of your governments.

I have, in fact, invited you in a double capacity, as Prime Minister of Norway, but also as Chairman of the World Commission on Environment and Development.

The Commission was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1983 to take a fresh look at the interrelated issues of environment and development. 22 Commissioners from all corners of the globe worked together for 900 days and presented their report in april this year. Latin American members of the Commission are Margarita Marina de Botero from Columbia, Sridath Ramphal of Guyana, who is also Secretary general of the Commonwealth of Nations, and Pablo Gonzalez Casanova of Mexxico, who ceased to participate in the Commissions work for personal reasons in 1986 and recently has congratulated the Commission with the conclusion of its work. The majority of the

Commissioners come from the developing countries, reflecting the composition of the United Nations.

While we were working, we clearly recognized that the presentation of our work to the regions of the world where we held our meetings was equally important to the deliberations themselves. We would not like to see the report filed and forgotten. We believe that our analysis and recommendations deserve an active international follow up. That the magnitude, complexity and not least the urgency of the problems require that all nations respond to our report and start bringing about changes that will set development on a sustainable course.

The Commission has held several meetings already, in Europe, Africa, and next week we are meeting South Asian governments in New Delhi. Presently there are uncertainties about whether a full meeting in Latin America will take place. And even if such a meeting should be arranged, domestic obligations this early fall now will prevent me personally from going.

Our meeting here tonight is a clear expression of the importance that I attach to the Latin American group of countries when the report is being dealt with in the General Assembly this fall and in other international fora.

I believe that a follow up of the report is in the common interest of us all, even if many maintain that it is a "south" report. Obviously, the developing world is central to our common future. But all nations should realize that it is in everybody's self interest that our basic analysis be studied and used in the design of policies, nationally and internationally.

"Our Common Future" is not a scientific report, but a political document. Its overriding political concept is that of sustainable development. Sustainable development is not the same as ecologically sound development. That alone would not be sufficient. Sustainable development is a concept for economic and social progress, and as such a concept for economic growth

The report focuses on poverty as a main cause and effect of environmental degradation. Poverty in itself, and impoverishment of nations, both are signs of imbalances and imbalances that cause environmental degradation. Poor people are forced to overuse the natural resources they have access to, not because they are ignorant, but because they have no choice. On the international level, the economic systems force developing countries to deplete their natural resources to service debts made unbearable by soaring interest rates. Deteriorating terms of trade and ever falling commodity prices force many countries to apply more of the same medicine. Short sighted economic demands work against the natural resource base and thereby against both social progress and national economies.

These trends will have to be reversed. The commission calls for a new era of economic growth, but the content of growth will have to be changed. Only growth can alleviate poverty. Only growth can create the capacity to solve environmental problems.

The report covers food security, industry, energy, the urban challenge and the protection of genetic resources. It focuses upon how we can assure enough food for a growing world population and at the same time avoid the environmental damage of large-scale agriculture. How can industry produce all the goods needed to remove poverty and squalor without depleting the world's natural resources? How can we meet the growing need for energy in developing countries without a global environmental breakdown? And how can we protect the genetic material of the living species facing possible extinction?

Certainly there are thresholds that cannot be crossed without accentuating the threats to planetary life support systems, many of which are in danger today. But we believe that humanity has the capacity, ingenuity and technological basis to chart a better future. This requires that economy and ecology must be merged in decision-making at all levels. International organizations must adjust their policies to promote sustainable development. Many are already making that shift of priority. The decisions taken

this year will have a decisive impact on our prospects to succeed. The Latin American countries will be key players.

I invite your governments to study "Our Common Future and to share your views with us, even at early stages in your own process of evaluation. Our people in the ministries will look forward to discuss further with you, be it in Oslo, or anywhere else.

But for now let me say how pleased we are to have you with us tonight. I propose a toast to the Heads of Missions of the Latin American embassies in Oslo.