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Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland
Chairman of the World Commission on Environment and Development

PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT OF THE WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT
AND DEVELOPMENT TO THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF STATE AND
GOVERNMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY, ADDIS ABABA, 27
JULY 1987

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege for me to have been given this unique opportunity to address this 23rd Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity and to present the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. As Prime Minister of Norway I also value the invitation to address you as a token of the longstanding bonds of friendship and cooperation between my own country and the countries of Africa.

I venture at the outset to state that the interrelated questions of environment and development today clearly stand out as the major issue on the international political agenda, equalled in importance only by the vital issues of disarmament and security. Nowhere are the issues of environment and development more relevant and critical to humanity's prospects for the future than on this vast continent, the focus of centuries of exploitation and of current struggles for economic and social progress.

True, significant achievements have been made in many countries of Africa. There are countries where food production has increased rapidly, countries where more people can read and write than ever before, where health and education are improving and life expectancy is increasing. Yet we can speak of a development crisis in Africa. There are more people hungry and malnourished today than ever before, more people who lack safe water, proper shelter, food and energy. And the continent's capital, its environment and natural resources are seemingly caught in a downward spiral of degradation: drought, desertification, deforestation, soil-erosion and loss of genetic resources are increasing at alarming rates.

In the 1960s newly independent African nations set out with high hopes for a better, independent future. They attained remarkable growth rates. In the early seventies, however, these growth rates and international economic cooperation reached an apogee, leading into a decade and a half of stagnating cooperation, of isolationism and bilateralism. The gap between the rich and the

poor nations of the world is widening. A complex set of circumstances is now working against the interests of Africa and its people.

Since the Stockholm Conference frustrations about our present institutions' inability to deal effectively with the crucial development and environment issues has been growing. The global conferences on water supply, food, women, human settlements, new and renewable energy resources and population, all offered hope that progress could be achieved despite of temporary setbacks. Yet the frustrations have prevailed.

It was against this background that the General Assembly of the United Nations welcomed the establishment of our Commission. The UN General Assembly asked the Commission to take a fresh look at the interrelated issues of environment and development and to formulate concrete recommendations for action based on shared perceptions of long-term environmental issues.

The World Commission's report, "Our Common Future", is a political document which covers the global political agenda and which carries the consensus signature of commissioners from 21 countries, most of them from developing countries and five of them from Africa.

During our work we came to focus very strongly on Africa, its plight and possibilities. We benefited greatly from views expressed by African governments and African organizations, not least during our public hearings in Harare and our meetings in Nairobi. While we were working, the drought and famine which led Africa and millions of its people through an ordeal inconceivable to many outside the continent, were brought home to us. Few other single catastrophes have more clearly demonstrated the links between environment and development, the links between international and national economic conditions and their impacts on the environment, and between environmental degradation and its long-term effects on the prospects for development.

We on the Commission came to recognize that while pollution problems, mainly a Northern or urban feature, have significant effects on the global environment, poverty is the main cause of environmental degradation in many developing countries. It is also one of the main effects of environmental degradation. Viewed in the context of short-term needs, each decision by the individual poor is rational, even if it means eating next year's seed corn to stay alive, overexploiting soil when faced with ever shrinking incomes from agriculture, or over-grazing fragile pastures or cutting scarce forests for fuelwood. These might simply be the only ways to survive. Clearly it is totally unacceptable and incompatible with human decency and solidarity to even suggest that the poor must remain in poverty in order to protect the environment. What is needed are national and international strategies that offer real options, that secure and enhance incomes as well as the environment on the local, national and international level.

While the Commission emphatically warns that changes must be made if disastrous mistakes, with global implications, are to be averted, the Commission also believes that it is possible to make changes which are so urgently needed. We point to the fact that human resources, knowledge and capabilities have never been greater, that indeed it is possible to create a future that is more prosperous, more just and more secure for all.

The overriding political concept upon which our report is founded is that of sustainable development. It is a broad concept for social and economic progress. We define it as paths of human progress that meet the needs and aspirations of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It requires political reforms, a fair access to knowledge and resources, and a more just and equitable distribution within and among nations.

Sustainable development can only be achieved if we realize that there are thresholds that cannot be crossed without dire consequences. We in the North have too long neglected the signs that our paths of development have been playing lethal games with important life-support systems. We have used the atmosphere as the ultimate sink of our industrial excesses. Too long have we discarded the warnings that global heating caused by industrial emissions may disturb the global climate and consequently also agricultural and settlement patterns. Too long have we overlooked the devastating effects of acidification, of overuse of chemical products and pesticides, and too long have we exported our first generation of environmental problems to the Third World.

Sustainable development recognizes that there are thresholds imposed by nature, yes, but not limits to growth itself. In a world ridden by poverty growth is absolutely necessary. Growth is the only answer to the problems of developing countries. But the contents of growth must be changed. Growth cannot be based on overexploitation of the resources of Third World countries. Growth must be managed to enhance the resource base on which they all depend. The environment and the natural resources of developing countries must cease to be the victims in a world economy troubled by serious imbalances. The victims must instead become allies in the struggle for survival.

But for this to happen, fundamental changes are necessary in the international economy. A revival of the multilateral approach to solving problems is essential. All of us - in developing and industrialized countries alike - need to realize that it is in our mutual interest to chart a new course of action. The industrialized countries will have a critical role to play. They will have to accept an obligation to ensure that the world economy enhances rather than hinders possibilities for sustainable development.

Nowhere is this obligation more evident than in respect of the debt crisis still facing much of the developing countries. Debt servicing is placing intolerable burdens on the economies and the environment of many African countries that currently depend on

commodity exports in their struggle to earn foreign currency. Under present conditions many countries are caught in a vicious circle of having to tax their natural resources at rates that will lead to rapid depletion and devastation. The alarming tendency that more and more exports are tied to debt servicing will have to be reversed. Interest rates must come down. In the face of commodity prices, which have never been so low in real terms since the thirties, urgent action is needed to alleviate debt burdens in ways that represent a fairer sharing between debtors and lenders. North and South must both realize that it is in their own best interest to expand trade with and increase capital flows to developing countries.

Let us be frank. Much of the debt will not and cannot be paid back in any real sense. What is needed are new loans on concessional terms, new investments and economic reforms. New policies must comprise debt relief, long-term rescheduling and conversion to softer terms.

The UN Program of Action for African Economic Recovery adopted last year has been followed by efforts on the part of African governments. Many have taken enormous burdens on themselves to restructure their economies.

The crucial question is: Will the international community be able to come to Africa's assistance in such a magnitude and scope as to assure the African people and governments of an earnest desire and commitment to the continent's recovery and accelerated development - not just in terms of official development assistance but also and more importantly in terms of addressing the commodity issue and the debt problems?

The flows of finance will have to be turned back to Africa. In that regard, I would note that too long donor countries have neglected to make serious efforts to reach internationally agreed aid targets. I take the liberty of pointing my finger on the basis of the fact that for several years my country has contributed more than 1% of GNP to ODA. The 0.7 per cent GNP target, reiterated recently at the summit of the seven major Western industrialized nations, must be followed by concrete commitments. Developing countries need much larger financial inflows, and new funds must be forthcoming for projects that aim at sustainable development.

Some countries might be sceptical about the application of the Commission's sustainability criteria and perceived it as a new form of conditionality.

Our Report aims at raising global awareness among governments, aid agencies and others concerned with development of the necessity of integrating environmental considerations into economic decision-making and planning at all levels.

It is clear, however, and I emphasize this point, that this integrated process must be made operational by the governments themselves as part of their national strategies for development. External assistance will be needed, from UNEP and other organizations, to help many countries establish their

professional and institutional capacity to conduct this integration in practice. Such assistance must come at the request of countries concerned and must be assisted by the international community.

The Commission was emphatic in coupling its demand for higher quality and environmental sensitivity in aid and lending with substantially increased aid flows. Our report cannot be read or implemented à la carte. Donors or lenders cannot unilaterally impose environmental conditions in flows of aid or lending that go against the sovereign priorities of developing countries. Borrowers carry an equal obligation with lenders and donors to set their development priorities on the basis of long-term sustainability criteria. These notions are inherent in our concept of sustainable development, which is based on equity and the joining of forces rather than on the imposition of external will and power.

The Lagos Plan of Action - which was an ambitious, but in wide circles outside Africa a far too neglected design for a better future - Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery and the recently issued Abudja statement all clearly demonstrate the determination of African countries to agree on development goals for the future and their ability to establish priorities which are in line with sound sustainability criteria. The similarities between these documents and our report are striking in many respects, not least in the setting of priorities. Cooperation on sustainable development in Africa should come in response to those priorities.

Mr. Chairman,
Lending and aid alone will fail to bring about the common objectives unless the developing countries are secured a fairer income from their traditional exports. Commodity prices must be increased. The terms of trade must be reversed to favour Africa rather than to impoverish it. Commodity agreements must be strengthened and new ones must be established. The expansion of many countries into manufacturing and high technology, so far oppressed by external conditions, must be based on more equitable economic exchanges.

The ongoing negotiations in UNCTAD and GATT, as well as in other fora such as the World Bank, the IMF, regional development banks, UNIDO, UNDP, WHO and FAO will be at the core of the process we call for. A new international consensus must provide the basis for integrating the concept of sustainable development into all policies and programmes.

The Commission's report focuses on food security as essential to human progress. We have the possibility of feeding a doubled world population some time during the next century, and many experts believe that parts of Africa could in fact become a granary sufficient to serve the whole continent. Presently, international policies have hampered future possibilities. The Commission calls for a shift in agricultural production patterns to where the demand is. Only then will we be able to secure access to food for those who need it. Agricultural practices can be made compatible with environmental requirements. Greater

resources must be directed towards developing techniques adapted to local conditions. Prices on the national as well as the international level must increase the income of smaller subsistence farmers. Policies should become the incentives for sustainability in agriculture.

The Commission dealt at length with the energy challenge. How can we possibly secure sufficient energy for the enormous unmet energy needs in many developing countries, and how shall we in the North stabilize and even decrease our consumption while maintaining high growth levels?

The fuelwood crisis is the reality with which the majority of people in Africa now grapple. In many regions vast afforestation campaigns are needed which involve people more closely in the process. Trees must be treated as a subsistence crop. But policies should explore the dissemination of more efficient, economical techniques, while increasing regional and local efforts to secure adequate supplies from internal and external sources of hydrocarbons. Renewables can become an increasingly important factor in the future, but large-scale research supported by joint international efforts are needed.

The energy and food crises are felt most strongly by women, who in many countries bear the main responsibility for providing for their families. Their status and real participation must be improved, as must their access to education. Unless the status of women is improved, it is difficult to see how living standards in many regions will improve.

Only if the full potential of human resources is realized, only when people have real hopes for a better future will they have real choices, including the choice of limiting the size of their families.

Population strategies, which need to be developed by many countries, must deal with the underlying social and economic conditions of underdevelopment, and differ from country to country as does the carrying capacity of the land. Policies must comprise better health services and education. But the population issue is not one of numbers alone. It is also one of consumption patterns and life styles. Many people - mainly in the North - use the world resources at rates that cannot be sustained, while hundreds of millions consume far too little.

Nowhere are these inequalities more extreme, more unjust and more obscene than in the south of this continent, in South Africa. The minority regime in Pretoria is holding the majority of South African citizens hostage to a political system that is an insult to basic principles of civilization. One of the many ways by which the apartheid regime institutionalizes both conflict and environmental degradation is by allocating, through the homeland system, 14 per cent of the nation's land to 72 per cent of its population. Thus racist marginalization has become a source of tension, and the conflict is being pursued by the Pretoria government into neighbouring states.

These trends and threats also demonstrate the interdependence between environment, development and armaments which consumes far too much of scarce resources. The frontline states in particular have been forced to uphold and expand their defence efforts in the face of threats and aggression from South Africa, thereby demanding even larger yields from their scarce resources.

The apartheid regime must and will come to an end. The black population will no longer tolerate the oppressive apartheid system and will demand to be treated as equals and to be given their inherent right to political equality. The black population and the frontline states deserve our firm support in the face of apartheid aggression. So far we have not seen any evidence of a genuine dialogue emerging in the region. It is not enough to insist that "doors are open" when the reality is the opposite.

Sanctions against South Africa have been all too leniently imposed. This spring my own country adopted a comprehensive trade boycott against South Africa. We have prohibited sales of oil and oil transport on Norwegian and Norwegian-controlled ships. We have further strengthened our cooperation with the SADCC countries, and we are prepared to increase our assistance in the event of further South African reprisals against these countries.

We have responded to the laudable initiative of the Non-Aligned Movement by contributing 10 million Norwegian kroner to the newly established Africa Fund, and we urge other countries to respond in a similar manner. The international community as a whole has an unfulfilled responsibility towards the oppressed people of Southern Africa. We need to be firm in our action to bring down apartheid. The North has a special moral responsibility as well as the means to do this.

The fact that apartheid exists speaks for the inadequacy of present international cooperation. Ten years ago the United Nations Security Council adopted the only mandatory measure against South Africa. The time has now come to move forward.

The time has now come to restore the authority of the international institutions we have created.

Mr. Chairman,

Unlike previous independent commissions, the World Commission has a mandate from the United Nations. Following its positive reception at the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, our report now moves to the General Assembly of the United Nations where it will be dealt with this fall.

In our report we call upon the UN General Assembly, as a step towards sustainable development, to transform "Our Common Future" into a UN Action Programme for Sustainable Development. Needless to say here, before one-third of the members of the world organization, Africa is essential to "Our Common Future". Your support is vital.

In concluding, let me say that during the 900 days we worked as a commission, we gained renewed confidence in people's ability to cooperate. We went to five continents, to Harare and Nairobi, to Moscow, Oslo, Jakarta, Sao Paulo, Tokyo and Ottawa. We heard the views and concerns of people from all walks of life who face the real problems, be they farmers, scientists, politicians, or ordinary people. During our process of learning and sharing, the nationalism and artificial divisions between East and West, between North and South receded. In their place emerged a strong sense of unity and common responsibility. There also emerged a deep awareness that existing threats to sustained human progress demand that we realize we are all neighbours on a small and fragile planet and that it is not only our duty, but also in our own interest to care for each other.

It is my hope that a transition towards sustainable development, as called for by "Our Common Future", will lead to a new deal in international cooperation.