



WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT OF THE
WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
TO
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by

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Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished representatives,

First, Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you upon your election and to thank the Governing Council for this opportunity to present the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development entitled "Our Common Future".

On behalf of the Commission, and on my own personal behalf, I also take great pleasure in expressing our sincere gratitude to the Executive Director, Dr. Mostafa Tolba, for his continuous interest, advice and support.

Our Commission, like the Intergovernmental Intersessional Preparatory Committee, originated in the General Assembly of the United Nations which gave us challenging terms of reference in its resolution 38/161. At its inaugural meeting in October 1984, the Commission decided to meet these challenges in an open, receptive and responsive manner. We invited the views of individuals, scientific institutions, NGOs, business and trade unions, governments and intergovernmental organizations on the critical issues we were to address.

We have benefitted greatly from the exchanges of ideas with the IIPC and from the views of governments expressed to us through the IIPC. Our meetings with its governmental representatives were essential for us, and I hope useful also for them. I would also like to extend the Commission's gratitude to the past Chairmen of the IIPC, Ambassador Bencheikh of Algeria, High Commissioner Rana of India, Ambassador de Medicis of Brazil and to the current Chairman, Ambassador Choudhury of Bangladesh. Each of them has been most helpful in facilitating our continuing dialogue with the IIPC. The Commission is grateful and happy that the Environmental Perspective, which the IIPC has developed, builds upon a range of perceptions and recommendations discussed and formulated by the Commission.

We have conducted public hearings in all parts of the globe. We have been hearing and sharing as many views as possible. The result, and the political characteristic of our report, is a broad consensus on shared perceptions and concrete recommendations addressed to the international community.

The first message we want to convey is that the present pattern of development cannot continue and must be changed.

On the one hand, it does not solve the acute problems of mass poverty. The numbers of absolute poor have passed 700 million and are increasing every year. The per capita income of many

of the least developed countries has not been so low since the sixties. The gap between the rich and the poor nations is widening.

On the other hand, we witness growing threats to the environment, many are regional and even global in scale. Some raise crucial questions of planetary survival.

I will not repeat here today the painful list of disasters and grim statistics of which the Governing Council is well aware. They have surely alerted all thinking people to the grave crisis facing our planet.

The Commission fully recognizes the vast achievements since environmental protection became a primary concern of the United Nations. But the complexity, the magnitude and the apparent irreversible trends of environmental degradation surpass present conceptions. Available remedial means are clearly insufficient.

A second message - and one of hope - is that change is not only necessary - it is also possible. Humanity has the knowledge, technology, ingenuity and resources. Never before in our history have we had similar capacities. What we need is new concepts, new values and to mobilize will. We need a new global ethic.

The overriding political concept of "Our Common Future", is the concept of sustainable development.

Sustainable development is a familiar concept to people concerned with environment. Still I venture to say that sustainable development, as defined by the Commission, is an elaborated and much broader concept. We believe it could be the key to open new doors of perception and entail new inspiration for humankind in its quest for progress and survival.

We define sustainable development in simple terms as paths of progress which meet the needs and aspirations of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Contrary to widely held beliefs, sustainable development does not imply absolute limits to growth itself, though it clearly recognizes that we are approaching critical thresholds in many areas. It is not only a new name for environmentally sound management, it is a social and economic concept as well. Sustainable development, as seen by the Commission, is a new concept for economic growth.

It is conceived as a broad process of change, comprising every field of human activity. It requires policy reforms across the spectrum of human imagination. It requires fair access to

knowledge and resources and a more equitable distribution within and among nations. It requires broad participation in decision-making.

The ability of future generations to meet their own needs can be compromised as much by affluence - the excesses of industrial and technological development - as by the environmental degradation of underdevelopment.

Sustainable development must be a goal for all nations, developed and developing alike. Indeed it is a goal for the global community as a whole.

Based on this broad concept of sustainable development, the Commission has analysed the major problems facing us, which at the same time are crucial for development and poverty alleviation, and critical for the globe's natural resources and ecosystems.

The report discusses food security, industry, energy, the urban challenge and the protection of genetic resources. How can we assure enough food for a growing world population and at the same time avoid environmental damage from large-scale agriculture? How can industry produce all the goods to remove poverty and squalor without depleting the world's natural resources? How can we meet the rapidly growing needs of energy in developing countries without a global environmental

breakdown? How can we curb rapid urbanization and remove the urban slums? Is it within reach to protect the genetic resources of the planet's plants and animals species?

The report clearly demonstrates and underlines the close interlinkages between all these issues, as well as the relationship between peace, security, development and environment, and the need for improved management of the global commons.

We came to focus on poverty as one overriding issue - not least as a major cause and effect of environmental degradation.

International economic inequalities are the root cause of this problem. Clearly the impoverished developing nations will not have opportunities to follow sustainable paths of progress unless external conditions offer them reasonable choices and hopes for a better future.

Deteriorating terms of trade, soaring interest rates, and strangling debts place intolerable burdens on poor people. These conditions force developing countries to apply measures that only in the short term can alleviate payment problems and current account deficits. They have no choice but to overuse their lands and forests. Consequently the resource base of many countries, and thus the welfare of future generations, become the real loser in present international economic relations.

Against this background, the Commission calls for a concerted action to launch a new era of economic growth.

It has been a surprise to many that a group studying the environment, seemingly has turned on its head the zero growth dogma of the early 70's, and even made growth a clear imperative.

I believe this call is an important eye opener. It has the potential of inspiring a new debate and new insights into the key issues of the global challenge. It carries the hope of a new deal and revival of common concern for our planet, for humanity, for survival.

Growth is absolutely necessary to overcome mass poverty. And when there is superimposed on present needs those of a vast additional population in the next century - perhaps as much again as the world's current population - with 90 per cent of the increase occurring in the Third World - how else, without growth, can we hope to cope? Developing countries have no option but to seek to grow by at least 5 per cent a year - far faster than in the 1980s so far - if they are to escape the poverty trap.

At the same time as we call for a revival of economic growth, we urge that the quality of growth be changed. Growth must promote a fair distribution of income. It must be soundly based on the stock of natural capital that sustains it, instead of overusing it. It must respect limits to environmental resources such as clean air and

water, forests and soils; it must maintain genetic diversity; it must be based on more effective uses of energy and raw materials. The environment must become an ally, not a victim of development.

To pursue a new era and quality of growth we need to breathe new life and foresight into international economic relations, which now work against the interests and opportunities of the developing countries in so many ways.

We in the industrialized world have to accept an obligation to ensure that the international economy helps rather than hinders the possibilities for sustainable development. Commodity prices must provide a fair international distribution of income. Increased capital transfer and development assistance are equally necessary.

This will require changes in the policies of the international organizations responsible for trade, aid, technological and financial assistance, with the general objective to increase incomes in developing countries. The negotiations which will take place in GATT, in UNCTAD, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, regional development banks, UNIDO, UNDP, WHO, and FAO, to mention some very key agencies, will be at the core of the process of change that we call for.

The impacts of agricultural policies is one example of the interlinkages that are in operation. The production of enough food to feed a doubled world population may be within our reach. But securing access to food for those who need it, and

ensuring environmentally sustainable agricultural practices, will require fundamental policy changes. To realize the full potential of the small family farmer is a major priority in many developing countries. Therefore, the Commission calls for a shift in global agricultural production patterns.

In many countries another major priority is to slow population growth. It is difficult to see how a disastrous cycle of declining living standards and a deteriorating environment can be averted if present trends continue. We feel convinced that there is no short cut to lower birth rates. Population strategies must deal with the underlying social and economic conditions of underdevelopment, and must be based on improved health service and education. In many countries, little can be done until the status of women is raised, their economic contribution recognised, and their literacy increased. Only in a world that is safer, one which gives the poor more self-respect and hope for their lives and future, will poor people have real choices, including the choice to limit the size of their families.

But the population issue in the context of environment and development is not one of numbers alone. It is also one of consumption patterns and lifestyles. We know too well how people in the North use the world's natural resources at rates that cannot be sustained, while hundreds of millions consume far too little.

Policy changes will require revisions of institutional and legal arrangements. The Commission advocates a full integration of environment and economics in decision-making, at all levels, public and private. We must recognize that environment and economics are not in contradiction to one another. They are parts of a unified management of our planet. In practice, this means that we must break away from our traditional sectoral approach. Sectoral organizations tend to pursue sectoral objectives, and to treat impacts on other sectors as more or less irrelevant for their own. Sustainable development requires that such fragmentation be overcome. It also requires a new deal in international cooperation.

Firstly, we must prevent environmental degradation by getting at the sources. We must recognize that the policies of sectoral ministries and agencies such as Ministries of Finance, Economy, Industry, Agriculture and Energy are the ones that in fact determine the size of the problems. Therefore, sustainable development objectives must be incorporated into the goals of all branches of government and the legislative bodies.

Equally, at the regional and global level all international organizations must be made responsible and accountable for ensuring that their policies support sustainable development. This will have implications for their budgets, mandates,

recruitment and programmes. The UN and the Secretary General should provide guidance and leadership. Responsibly meeting humanity's goals and aspirations will, however, require the active support of us all.

Secondly, we need to strengthen the role of environmental protection and resource management agencies, both at the national and international level.

In this connection, the Commission has discussed thoroughly the essential role of UNEP within this broad international action for sustainable development.

UNEP has assured leadership, advice and guidance on protecting the ecological basis for sustainable development. This role should be strengthened.

UNEP should be given greater possibility to monitor, assess and report on changes in the environment and natural resources.

It should be given a more central role in guiding and supporting scientific research.

UNEP should also be given the means for increased support to countries that seek advice and assistance in the management of key ecosystems, and in setting up and strengthening institutional capacity.

It should encourage and promote international agreements and cooperative arrangements on critical environment issues. It should be the active advocate for further development of international environmental law.

The catalytic role of UNEP is needed most strongly in guiding the development banks, the UNDP, and other UN agencies about the environmental dimension of their programmes. As we succeed in raising awareness that the development-environment link is the most important issue on the international political agenda today, demands on UNEP will only increase. Governments must give active support to allow it to perform this vital role.

A key concern for the Commission has been to improve and widen the basis for making informed choices. The roles of NGOs, trade unions, the media and the scientific community must be central in the broad political debate on environment and development issues. This requires access to information and improved co-operation and exchange between the different players. Industry should be at the forefront and be encouraged to move into new eras of resource-efficiency and shared responsibility.

A better and safer future will not come free of charge. Developing countries will need massive assistance to free themselves of poverty and realize their full human and

economic potential, while protecting and enhancing the resource base. Donor and lending agencies must make a fundamental commitment to sustainable development. New trends in the World Bank and the regional development banks offer great promise, and should be further encouraged.

Mr. President,

The report from the World Commission on Environment and Development is a strong call for renewed international cooperation. Mutual interests bind us all - rich and poor - together.

Disappearing forests are not of concern only to the countries where the forests are cut. The depletion of the earth's ozone layer, acid rain and nuclear fallout are common concerns. Human progress now demands that we realize that we are neighbours on a small and fragile planet, and that our duty of care for each other is not only a mutual moral obligation, but also in our self-interest.

We are convinced that sustainable development is a goal and obligation that will strengthen the UN and its specialized agencies, and help to enhance their credibility and status globally. Sustainable development should give a strong impulse to the revival of multilateralism.

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.

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How, then, can countries in practice, on the national level, use our report and work towards sustainable development? We offer a series of concrete recommendations, but our overriding ideas must be interpreted and adjusted to the situation of each individual country.

My country, Norway, has initiated such a process. Recognizing the imperative necessity of information and education, a broad campaign for environment and development has been launched as a joint venture of private organizations and public authorities.

We have asked all ministries, including the ministries of finance, justice, defense and others not normally perceived to be close to these issues, to assess "Our Common Future" and to identify where we can improve. We intend to develop a consistent foreign policy for environment and development.

We have all experienced how sectoral, national, ministries tend to picture national policy priorities in their international work. A concern by all nations, across the board, and by cabinets as a whole, would be a great benefit also to the international community and to future generations.

The report will now be in the hands of the whole international community. When you at this Governing Council meeting transmit the report to the General Assembly, I hope that the process that created it - the building of consensus among individuals from 21 countries - will inspire a responsible and enlightened follow-up.

We would like to share our own experiences with as many as possible. As the Commission worked, nationalism and artificial divides between industrialized and developing countries, between East and West, receded. In their place emerged a common concern for the planet and the interlocked ecological and economic threats with which its people, institutions and governments now grapple.

Our process of debating and learning proves that it is possible to agree on the analysis of the problems and what needs to be done to build a world that is more prosperous, more just and more secure. But the necessary changes require action - and they require it now.

Thank you.