



NORWAY

PERMANENT MISSION OF NORWAY TO THE UNITED NATIONS 825 THIRD AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY, 10022 - TEL: 421-0280

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

S T A T E M E N T

BY

H.E. MRS. GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

PRIME MINISTER OF NORWAY

CHAIRMAN OF THE THE WORLD COMMISSION

ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

AT THE 42ND SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE UNITED NATIONS

ON

19 OCTOBER 1987

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished representatives,

It is a great pleasure for me to present to the General Assembly the unanimous report of the World Commission on Environment and Development - "Our Common Future".

The World Commission on Environment and Development was given a challenging mandate by the General Assembly. We were asked to take a fresh look at the interrelated issues of environment and development and to define shared perceptions on long-term environmental issues and aspirational goals of the world community to the year 2000 and beyond. During the 1000 days since our Commission's inception there has been an endless information flow about increasing threats to the global environment and about environmental disasters often caused or aggravated by our own policies and actions.

Early, we came to recognize that poverty is the main cause and effect of environmental degradation in many developing countries. 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.

The Commission became collectively convinced that present development patterns cannot be allowed to continue. While economic and social development suffer from severe national and global imbalances, threats to the environment are becoming global in scope and devastating in scale. The survival of this planet requires that we act now!

The Commission came out equally convinced that the necessary changes are also possible. Our report is not a prophecy of doom, but a positive vision of the future. Never before in human history have we had greater possibilities. The time and the opportunity has come to break out of the negative trends of the past. We need not only a new vision, but political commitment and a broad mobilization of human ingenuity. We need intensified multilateral cooperation based on recognition of the growing interdependence among nations.

I believe that today's meeting conclusively demonstrates that the idea of sustainability and the interlinked issues of environment and development have now risen to the top of the international political agenda. Our common concerns for the future can create a momentum for change.

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.

Poor people must not be condemned to remain in poverty. It is mass poverty which drives millions of people to overexploit thin soils, overgraze fragile grasslands, and cut down yet more of the rapidly disappearing tropical forests, these great lungs vital for the global climate and thereby for food production.

I need not dwell here on the familiar catalogue of environmental deterioration. Global warming is expected to change agricultural and settlement patterns and flood seaports. Acidification is moving into the developing world. Six million hectares of productive dryland turns into desert each year. Against this grim backdrop, we welcome the recent achievements in Montreal on the protection of the ozone layer.

All nations will ultimately share the same destiny. Our environment and economies have become so intertwined that we may no longer choose to remain apart. The environment respects no national boundaries. We cannot act as if it did.

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.

Debilitating debts, soaring interest rates, interrupted financial flows, and adverse terms of trade offer developing countries few options but to overuse their resource base while their capacity to address environmental issues remains low. These trends have too long been working against developing countries. New international economic conditions must be designed to enhance the resource base of developing countries.

The industrialized world must take a full share of responsibility to ensure that the international economy helps rather than hinders sustainable development. This is also in their own interest. Commodity markets must be strengthened. Restrictive trade practices should be abolished. Terms of trade must change to favour developing countries rather than to impoverish them.

Urgent action is necessary to alleviate the debt crisis in ways that represent a fairer sharing between debtors and lenders. The massive drain of resources from developing countries must be reversed. What is needed is new loans on concessional terms, new investments, and economic reform.

In many countries massive assistance from external sources will be needed. Donors, lenders, and investors must make a fundamental commitment to sustainable development. There is no alternative to substantial increases in financial flows. Additionality - both in quantity and in quality - must be based on equality and mutual self-interest. Internationally agreed targets are far from being met. The concern for our environment and our common future can help us to move forward.

Sustainability objectives should be of serious concern to us all. 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.

The Commission was emphatic in coupling its demand for higher quality and environmental sensitivity in aid and lending with substantially increased aid flows.

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

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 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.

Growth must promote a fair distribution of income. It must be firmly based on the stock of natural capital that sustains it.

To achieve this the Commission advocates full integration of environment and economics into decision-making at all levels, nationally and internationally. We must attack the problems at their source. We must clearly recognize that the policies of sectoral ministries such as Ministries of Finance, Industry, Energy, Agriculture are the ones that determine the state of the environment and consequently our

options for the future. Sustainable development objectives must be integrated into the goals of all branches of public administration as well as the legislative bodies and municipal democratic institutions.

We must break away from our sectoral ways of viewing economy and ecology. We must learn to accept the fact that environmental considerations and economic growth are parts of a unified management of our planet. The one is dependent on the other.

In this connection, I believe that a very special role is to be played by our Secretary General. In exercising his overriding and coordinating responsibilities for implementing sustainable development in the UN system, he needs our total support. We should all give the Secretary General that support.

It is indeed appropriate that our leading international civil servant assume a key role in pursuing the basic objectives for our survival: peace, development, and environment.

The United Nations system was brought into existence to provide multilateral solutions to shared problems. At this point in history, when we face the prospect of genuinely cooperative relations between the major powers, should we not have the courage to use the global international organization we have created to provide political and intellectual leadership in saving this planet from degradation and collapse? Should we not adopt sustainable development as a central goal of the United Nations itself, assisted in that process by a strengthened UNEP, which can then fully perform its catalytic role?

The Commission has proposed that 'Our Common Future', upon due consideration, be translated into a UN Action Programme for Sustainable Development. We are heartened by the large number of countries that have spoken favourably about our call for action.

Time has come to move forward towards a true revival of multilateralism. Time has come to restore the authority of the United Nations.

A broad and genuine process of global change will entail a further evolution of open societies, based on more effective popular participation in decision-making. The status of women will have to be further enhanced. Political reforms and broad access to knowledge and resources are required.

Disabled people, whose handicaps may come from hunger, war, or environmental decline or disasters, must participate on an equal basis.

The NGOs play an essential part. Their access and influence are central to sustainable development. They play an active role in translating political programmes into action.

Industry should be at the forefront and be encouraged to develop more sustainable techniques. Trade unions must be engaged in this essential process.

Most important of all is the interaction between all these key players based on exchange of information, creative dialogue, and inspiration.

The Commission's open method of work has generated great hopes and expectations in many parts of the globe. This General Assembly has the opportunity to respond to these expectations.

I cannot mention all the groups, organizations, or governments who have supported us and placed faith in us. We have received political, financial, and intellectual support from a broad spectrum of sources. The Commission benefited from endless hours of committed people's hard work. I offer a brief thank you to all from this rostrum as a humble gesture of profound gratitude.

The Secretary General himself has been a most ardent supporter. His role and the close cooperation with UNEP and its Executive Director Dr. Tolba gave us all an additional measure of mutual strength, conviction, and dedication.

Mr. President, the Commission commends the report 'Our Common Future' to the peoples of the United Nations. I thank you.