

Stockholm

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SPEECH AT THE NORDIC CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND
DEVELOPMENT, 9 MAY 1987 IN STOCKHOLM

Who would have thought a quarter of a century ago that environment and development would stand out clearly as the major challenge facing mankind today, when we have only half as many years left to the turn of the millenium. In the early sixties our view of development was so much simpler than it is now. Indeed, it was unconditionally optimistic. And - seemingly - with good reason. Our material well-being was improving at a rapid rate. Health was improving all over the world. Peoples who had endured centuries of domination were gaining self-confidence, establishing their own identities as free and sovereign nations. Man's belief in his own power reached a new peak as he penetrated outer space. Growth rates were soaring.

But during these past 25 years we have witnessed an ever-increasing body of evidence that development has not been only beneficial. We have become increasingly aware that human activity systematically has been destroying important life-support systems. We have certainly been on a fast track, but not on the right track.

The Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 was the result of growing concern among an informed public and of a political cry for action.

And the Stockholm conference was only the first in a series of international conferences which have been held in response to frustration among people and nations. The United Nations' Environment Programme emerged from a strong sense of urgency. The conferences on water supply, food, women, human settlements, new and renewable energy sources, those involving people's access to the means to chose the size of their family, all offered a hope of improved cooperation on major issues. Yet, a sense of frustration and inadequacy prevailed. The world was growing closer, but the gaps between us were widening.

The World Commission on Environment and Development was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1983. The call from the General Assembly was an urgent one and the Commission's broad mandate reached around the globe. When the Secretary General asked me to establish and lead

Poverty is both a cause and effect of environmental degradation.

Population growth is inextricably linked to environment and development issues and our success in the fight against poverty will largely determine our success in stabilizing the world's population some time during the next century. This year it is estimated that the global population will exceed 5 billion. Close to 100 million people will be added to the world every year.

90 per cent of this growth will take place in developing countries. The demands for education, health, housing, access to food and energy, especially by the poorest of the poor in rural areas, where population growth rates continue to increase, represent enormous challenges. While demand in the rural areas will continue to increase, we can expect millions of poor people move to the cities, to a life they believe will entail opportunities to leave poverty and misery behind.

But what they leave behind often consists of remnants of once arable lands which are now threatened by desertification. That threat is more than real. Forests the size of Denmark are lost every twelve weeks, every nine months an area the size of Switzerland is turned into desert, and world-wide soil erosion is now considered to be Problem No 1 by the Food and Agricultural Organization.

If we continue to burn fossil fuels at present rates we can be almost certain that at least the world's oil reserves will be used up during the coming century. The combustion itself releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The resulting greenhouse effect threatens to gradually warm up the globe as solar heat is trapped near the surface of the earth. Global climatic changes could well be the outcome, entailing dramatic implications for food production and settlement. There is scientific evidence which indicates that a global warm up would raise the level of the sea enough to flood many low-lying coastal cities and river deltas.

Acidification, which is too well known to us in this part of the world, is gradually becoming a global problem. Other industrial gases threaten the protective ozone shield, and we know of no method that can restore it. We face the possibility of its depletion, which could result in an increase in the incidence of cancer and in the extinction of life forms at the base of the marine food chain.

All these phenomena stand out as solid evidence of serious mismanagement of vital global issues. They make it absolutely imperative for us to chose a new and better course for the future.

Faced with the facts, one could perhaps expect that the Report of our Commission would paint a gloomy picture; that we would see no way out; that we would join the ranks of the pessimists

sustainable. It requires more equitable distribution and equal opportunities within and among nations. It must be a goal for all nations, developed and developing alike. Indeed it is a goal for the global community as a whole.

But sustainable development cannot, and will not, be achieved in a world ridden by poverty. Our Commission has therefore called for a new era of economic growth, one that is forceful, global and at the same time environmentally sustainable, with a content that enhances the resource base rather than degrading it. We are deeply convinced, as Sonny Ramphal so eloquently illustrated yesterday, that world wide growth is the only remedy for overcoming mass poverty. But we are equally convinced that sustainable growth can create the capacity to solve environmental problems. The process of economic development must be more soundly based on the realities of the stock of capital that sustain it. 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, beset by a variety of problems, work against the interests and opportunities of the developing countries in so many ways. The challenge to the future lies partly in the complex web of national policies, both in rich and in poor countries. And it lies not least in some genuine dilemmas we face when trying to attack the problems. For example, as industrialized countries use less materials and energy in their production, they provide smaller markets for commodities and minerals from the developing countries. Yet, if developing nations focus their efforts upon eliminating poverty and meeting essential human needs, then the domestic demand will increase for agricultural products, manufactured goods and services. The very logic of sustainable development requires internal stimulus to Third World growth.

On the global level, growth is being stifled by heavy debt burdens, depressed commodity prices, protectionism in many industrialized countries and stagnating flows of development finance. Certain short-term positive developments have been offset not least by a considerable worsening of terms of trade. Real commodity prices have not been as low since the international economic depression in the 1930s. The countries of Africa that are almost entirely dependent on one or two commodities for export revenues are drawing especially heavily on non-renewable resources in order to obtain the trade surplus needed to service their debts.

We in the industrialized countries will have to accept the obligation to see to it that international economic relations help rather than hinder the possibility of ecologically sound development. This is our duty. But it is also in our own self-interest.

people to exercise their right to choose to limit the size of their families.

The production of enough food to feed a doubled world population seems within our reach. But securing access to food for those who need it, and ensuring environmentally sustainable agricultural practices, will require fundamental policy changes. The Commission calls for a shift in global agricultural production patterns. Northern agricultural production systems often run on the basis of large-scale and short-sighted subsidies, - and on the intensive use of fertilizers and pesticides. It over-exploits farmland and introduce harmful chemicals into food and water. The rich industrial countries need to examine very carefully the impact of their agricultural surpluses. The practice of dumping surpluses must be halted. At present, these surpluses often go to developing countries in ways that depress prices for local farmers, marginalize the poor, undermine agriculture and suppress the political reform which is so desperately needed.

We call for a reorientation of these policies, - to secure farm income, while enhancing rather than undermining, the resource base. Much greater resources are needed to promote sustainable agriculture in the Third World, using techniques adapted to local conditions. Western style plowing has been a major cause of soil erosion in many areas. Furthermore, overgrazing, land clearance, commercial logging, and slash-and-burn agriculture rob soil of its cover and reduce agricultural yields. We call for a shift of the centres of food production to where the demand is, in Third World countries, and to promote this, for a change in the terms of trade in agricultural products.

The threat to the diversity of living species - the genetic resource base - is as closely linked to unsustainable agricultural practices as it is to industrial practices and energy use. Today scientists believe that living species are becoming extinct at alarming rates. On the average, nature's own extinction rate is estimated at 1 species a year. Due to the activity of man the present rates are a hundred times higher, and the species that we endanger are those which have been least documented.

The genetic material in wild species contributes billions of dollars yearly to the world economy in the form of improved crops, new drugs and medicines, and raw material for industry. We cannot afford to continue losing these resources that cannot possibly be restored. We commend the UNEP and other organizations for their untiring efforts to promote the conservation of species and ecosystems, but the collective endeavours are tiny given the magnitude and implications of the problem. The Commission calls for a broad spectrum of measures at all levels, local, governmental, regional and global. We call for sanctuaries to be established, inventories to be kept, agreements to be worked out, including the investigation of a global species

I have endeavoured to highlight some of the priorities described in "Our Common Future". The task which the Commission set out to accomplish was to make an analysis of the issues and recommend actions about what needs to be done to change the present clearly unsustainable trends and policies. One of the greatest barriers to change is the organisation of society on the national as well as the international level.

Our analysis is clear. Environment is not a separate sector, distinct from key economic sectors such as industry, agriculture and energy. Environmental agencies need to be upgraded politically and expanded financially, yes, but the real changes will only come about when central economic agencies, such as ministries of finance, energy and others, are held responsible for the environmental effects of their policies.

This implies that economy and ecology will have to merge. Environmental concerns must become an integral part of decision making at all levels. Sustainable development must become the overriding goal of all governments - also in their external relations. Development assistance agencies which manage and direct 4/5ths of the total ODA must reorient their policies and ensure that all projects support sustainable development.

Our Report can, and I hope, will serve as a new motivation in a global transition to sustainable development. But success in achieving this transition will require increased political will and heightened public pressure to hold governments and institutions responsible.

The Norwegian Government has now requested all ministries to review and study the Commission's Report and to compare our domestic and foreign policies against its principles and recommendations. They have been asked to note where our present policies differ, and if they do, to consider what steps can be taken to bring them into line with the Report's recommendations. This process will be guided by a Board of State Secretaries and taking advice from a broad national hearing soliciting the views of trade unions, industry, farmers' associations, fishermen, municipal authorities and private organizations, etc. A broad information campaign is already under way seeking to inspire a nation-wide discussion of the report and its implications. A concrete example of national political steps that need to be stimulated was yesterday's decision to propose to Parliament an import duty reduction for cars which satisfy the strict US exhaust gas requirements.

We will pursue "Our Common Future" on a broad international basis. We will use it actively to influence the policies of international organizations. The coming months will provide ample opportunity for this. The meetings of the UNDP, UNFPA, UNCTAD VII, UNEP's Governing Council, WHO, ILO, FAO, etc., will be events this year, where Norway, in concert with other countries, will promote the concepts and

principles contained in "Our Common Future". Recent examples of cooperation, in particular with the other Nordic countries at meetings of the World Bank and the Asian Developing Bank, were excellent starting points of a lasting process.

We believe that sustainable development is a goal and obligation that will strengthen the UN and its specialized agencies, and help restore their credibility and status globally. Sustainable development is a major challenge. It should give added impulse to a revival of multilateralism, a crucial issue, after years of isolationism and lack of understanding for our common responsibilities.

In this way Norway has entered into a process of national and international follow-up and implementation, a type of process that we would hope all countries would choose to initiate.

Sustainable development should not require the creation of new international institutions.

At the multilateral level, there is considerable institutional capacity available which should be redirected to serve the cause of sustainable development. This will have implications for budgets, mandates, recruitment and programmes of all international organizations; particularly for the UN system and its specialised agencies. The UN itself and its Secretary General should take the lead in this, coordinating the process of making the transition to sustainable development. We call for a UN Board on sustainable development under the chairmanship of the Secretary General. We call upon the General Assembly to transform "our Common Future" into a UN Action Programme for Sustainable Development. We call for a strengthening of UNEP to be the principal source of environmental data, assessment and reporting and the principal advocate and agent for change and co-operation on critical environment and natural resource protection issues. But its Fund must be increased considerably to allow it to perform a catalytic role.

The role of multilateral finance institutions is the key to the transition towards sustainable development. The World Bank has taken a positive attitude toward the World Commission and its report, and I have a clear impression of determination to make a fundamental commitment to sustainable development. The World Bank can become the trendsetter for other finance institutions.

It is not only governments or international institutions that face a giant challenge. The call for change should rest on a broad consensus. Scientists, industry, trade unions, teachers, non-governmental organizations, all have important roles to play. I would call upon them as well as I did in London, Washington and Brussels in meetings with the NGO community and the European and international trade union movement, to use "Our Common Future" as a basis upon which to judge their governments' and the international institutional community's efforts and commitment to sustainable development. In this way the Report can engage the creativity and energies of millions of committed people

in a global effort to begin the process of change that is called for. Humanity has come to a historic crossroads. We have the capacity to change planetary systems, for better or for worse. The interconnected issues of environment and development aptly illustrates the fact that national and political borders will have to be made more transparent. Ecosystems respect no boundaries. We cannot act as if they did.

Environmental issues teach us that we are all simply neighbours, and that our acts and omissions affect everybody. There is time for a new solidarity, and a new ethic. But we must begin now.

The Nordic countries have a special responsibility. We live in a corner of the globe where social tensions are low. We value equality and the just distribution of income.

We are few in number, but our opportunities are many, and our responsibility is great. If we succeed in cooperating with each other and with others, we can serve peace and we can improve its quality.