

Akershus

Prime Minister

Gro Harlem Brundtland

DINNER SPEECH - THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION, OSLO, 30 SEPTEMBER  
1988

Your Excellencies,

Dear guests,

It is a great honour and privilege for the Norwegian Government to receive this distinguished assembly. We are truly proud that so many outstanding individuals have come together here in Norway to assess the status of East-West relations.

Having witnessed 4 meetings between President Reagan and General-Secretary Gorbachev, and 29 meetings between foreign ministers Shultz and Shevardnadze, we may safely contest the truth in Kipling's saying that "East is East and West is West, and never the two shall meet".

At this time of rapid changes in international relations, when familiar concepts are being reconsidered and new ones being developed, we need the intellectual contribution of the Trilateral Commission to help us all be better prepared to face the challenges of our time. I welcome every one of you to Norway and wish you a successful session.

We now find ourselves at a crossroads. The improved relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, epitomized by the INF-Treaty, will undoubtedly have positive effects on negotiations regarding disarmament, economic relations and humanitarian issues

We seem to be confirming the observation by Albert Einstein that our differences are infinitely small compared with the danger that threatens us all.

The United Nations, too, has effectively used the present momentum in many regional conflicts. The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the UN peace-keeping operations can and will increase the authority of the blue and white flag and help the United Nations to serve as a real catalyst for progress towards a more peaceful world.

Still, humankind is exposed to several and urgent risks; political risks, economical risks, and ecological risks. Thus, in the next decade, vital and difficult decisions will have to be taken.

While the 1980s may go down in history as a decade marked by real progress in respect of international peace and security, it is also a decade of lost opportunities for the Third World. As we approach the turn of the millenium, we face the challenge of overcoming the global development crisis.

The challenge that confronts us is ethical as well as political. Stability and social and economic progress are coming to different parts of the world at different speeds. It is quite clear that corrective action is needed.

I read a very civilized legal text the other day, which said: "If a man owe a debt, and the storm inundates his field and carry away the produce, or if the grain has not grown in the field, in that year he shall not make any return to the creditor, he shall alter his contract and he shall not pay interest for that year".

That was taken from the Code of Hammurabi, King of Babylon, which dates from the year 2250 BC.

4000 years later, the debt burdens and the decline in flows of resource transfers are trends that would have upset the legislators of Babylon. The industrialized countries - in the West and East alike - have a great responsibility to live up to their abilities.

The recent proposals made by the Managing Director of the IMF are steps towards real solutions to the debt crisis, which is a common crisis, - both for the North and the South.

The world's population may double by the middle of the next century. To sustain such a large population will require strong economic growth supported by a global campaign to protect the environment and natural resources.

Far-reaching changes will be necessary. We have the capacity to destroy life on this planet, but we also have the capacity to preserve and enhance it, provided we use our human ingenuity and the knowledge we possess.

We need a coalition of reason and a real coordination of policies. We need common priorities and common initiatives. 40 years ago Ernest Bevin said that "What you have got to do in foreign affairs is not to create a situation". That still holds some truth.

But what we need to have in foreign relations is creativeness and mastery of the situations that we create. I trust the Trilateral Commission will take on its share of the intellectual, political and ethical challenge confronting us all and that it will continue to provide valuable and significant contributions to our understanding of a rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world.

I propose a toast to the Trilateral Commission and to a successful session here in Norway.