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Prime Minister  
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ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT - OUR COMMON FUTURE.

40 - 70 000 years ago, humankind, starting to use simple tools, took up its struggle with the biosphere. 200 years ago, with the advent of the industrial revolution, humankind gained the upper hand in that struggle.

Since early times we have had the capacity to lay waste parts of our habitat. At the start of this century, however, neither human numbers nor human technology had the power to alter planetary systems radically. It was not until we gained access to vast energy resources that we acquired the irrevocable power to destroy the biosphere. As this century draws to a close, a greatly increased human population and its activities have that power, and major, unintended changes are occurring in the biosphere.

Who would have thought only a quarter of a century ago that environment and development would today emerge as a major challenge on the international agenda, rivalled in importance only by the vital issues of security and disarmament? In those days our view of development was so much simpler. Indeed it was optimistic. High rates of growth and employment, and low rates of inflation were predominant features of the economic recovery in Western Europe. And in the South, peoples who had endured centuries of domination were gaining self-confidence, establishing their own identities as free and sovereign nations.

The international institutions we had created expanded the scope and scale of their activities and new institutions were established, not least in the United Nations system. In the UN Charter, we committed ourselves to saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war which had brought such untold sorrow to mankind.

But in the early seventies it dawned upon us that development had an environmental price. The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment was one response to a growing concern that human activities were destroying important life support systems. Existing institutions had not proved capable of dealing with the by-products of our economic activities.

Global conferences on water supply, food, women, human settlements, new and renewable energy resources, and population all offered hope of improved international cooperation on major issues. Yet a sense of frustration and inadequacy prevailed.

This was the setting in which 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 was given a broad, global mandate. We were asked 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.

Commissioners from 21 countries initiated a series of thorough investigations on all continents. In connection with this, public hearings were held in which a broad cross-section of the population was involved. I was indeed gratified when Volker Hauff agreed, without hesitation, to serve on the Commission. His political experience and profound knowledge of the issues made him a prime mover in the Commission's work. I am therefore particularly pleased to be here today, and to have the opportunity to express this gratitude before such a distinguished German audience, and I am most grateful to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung as well for inviting me to present our report.

I am also very grateful for the Federal Government's support of the Commission during its work, which included a special meeting in Land Berlin, and for the very supportive remarks about the Commission made by Foreign Minister Genscher before the UN General Assembly last fall.

The Commission's Report, "Our Common Future", which has now been published also in German, is a document of political consensus. It was formulated by people with different backgrounds and varied experience, the majority of whom came from developing countries, - to reflect the real world. The members enriched our deliberations with their cultural values and ethics. That is why I can safely say that our political consensus rests on a common cultural denominator.

As we worked, commissioners with an environment background and those with a development background moved towards an ever broadening consensus based on a shared understanding of the issues. This is a process that many others will have to share if disastrous mistakes are to be averted.

What, then, are the main threats to our common future? The world's population has reached the 5 billion mark. This single, finite earth will have to provide food and energy, and meet the needs of a doubled world population sometime in the next century. The earth may be required to sustain a world economy which is five to ten times larger than the present one. It is quite clear that this cannot be done by perpetuating present patterns.

Admittedly there have been many success stories in the last century. Infant mortality is falling, human life expectancy is increasing, access to education, and equality of access for boys and girls is improving in most countries. Global food production is increasing faster than the world population.

Still, nearly 800 million people live in absolute poverty. below the standards set for nutrition, health and housing; and their numbers are growing every year

It is estimated that about 150 plant and animal species, most of them unknown to specialists and laymen alike, are being exterminated every day, usually because we are destroying their natural habitats. Genetic variation is being reduced at an alarming rate especially in the original varieties of the species we cultivate for food.

Our forests are vanishing. Need I say this in the country which, has made "Waldsterben" an international word? Every year, 150 000 km<sup>2</sup> of forest disappear, equal to more that half the area of the Federal Republic. Most of this is tropical forests. Up to 60 million years old, this enormously rich treasure is being destroyed on a virtually inconceivable scale.

Desert land is increasing by 60 000 km<sup>2</sup> a year, or almost twice the area of Belgium, and 200 000 km<sup>2</sup> of arable land or pasture are annually destroyed or degraded all over the world. Good soil is being washed away at an alarming rate. The loss of topsoil is considered environmental problem No. 1 by the Food and Agricultural Organization.

There is growing anxiety about the climatic effects of increased amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> and industrial gases in the atmosphere. Rising temperatures may melt the polar ice caps and lead to thermic expansion of the oceans causing a global rise in sea levels. A recent conference in Washington produced reports which did not exclude a rise of several metres in the next century. A one to 3 meter rise would affect ten million people in Egypt alone, completely flood the Maldiv Islands, and disrupt agricultural production patterns all over the world.

Today, more than thirty countries, including both the Federal Republic and Norway, have signed the Montreal Protocol from last September on protection of the ozone layer. This was a milestone in international cooperation in that it gave nature the benefit of the doubt. Available evidence was accepted even if we could not prove our case one hundred per cent.

Since September, however, new scientific data has shown that the situation is much worse than we thought. Agreed measures will not do. Only speedy and deeper reduction measures can prevent far-reaching consequences on human health and the environment. All states must urgently ratify the Montreal Protocol, but we must move further. Science knows of no way to restore this layer once it has been destroyed. The Nordic countries have agreed on much more ambitious measures. Norway hopes to achieve a 90% reduction by 1995. We challenge others to follow that course.

European countries have had some success in dealing with sulphur compound emissions. The 30% reduction protocol is in force, but should give no reason for complacency. A protocol on nitrogen-oxide may be within reach this year even if the present consensus is held to be too weak by. Many other tasks which

require a common international approach lie ahead. The atmosphere respects no boundaries, we cannot act as if it did.

As these ominous clouds gather, our report sounds an urgent warning. Present trends and policies can not continue. They will destroy the resource base on which we all depend.

There are few signs that we are winning our battle against poverty, which continues to tie hundreds of millions of people to an existence which cannot be reconciled with human dignity and the need for solidarity. The Commission found that it is not a question of environment versus development. Environmental degradation and the unequal distribution of wealth and power are in reality different aspects of the same set of problems.

Our second and equally important message is one of hope and optimism. While the Commission emphatically warns that changes must be made if disastrous mistakes having global ramifications are to be avoided, we also believe that it is possible to make the changes which are so urgently needed. We point to the fact that human resources, knowledge and capabilities have never been greater, and that it is possible to create a future which is more prosperous, more just and more secure.

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 which meet the needs and aspirations of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It requires a fairer distribution of wealth within and among countries. It requires political reforms, fair access to knowledge and resources, and real participation in decision-making.

We need a process of change in which economic and fiscal policies, trade and foreign policies, energy, agriculture, industry and other sectoral policies all aim to induce development that is not only economically but also ecologically sustainable. This is a goal for all nations, developed as well as developing, for the world community as a whole.

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 course of development have been playing lethal games with vital life-support systems. We have used the atmosphere as the ultimate sink of our industrial excesses. For too long we have disregarded the warning that global heating caused by industrial emissions may disturb the global climate and, consequently agricultural and settlement patterns. For too long we have overlooked the devastating effects of acidification, of overuse of chemical products and pesticides, and for too long we have exported our first generation of environmental problems to the Third World.

Sustainable development recognizes that there are thresholds imposed by nature, to be sure, but not limits to

growth itself. Forceful economic growth is the only feasible weapon in the fight against poverty and squalor. And only economic growth can create the capacity to solve environmental problems.

However, 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 we all depend. The ability of future generations to meet their needs can be compromised just as much by affluence - the excesses of industrial and technological development - as by the environmental degradation which is the result of underdevelopment. The environment and natural resources must cease to be victims in a world economy troubled by serious imbalances, and become allies in our struggle to restore the planet's natural balance.

But for this to happen, fundamental changes in the international economy are necessary. We in the industrialized countries will play a critical role. We will have the responsibility to ensure that the world economy enhances rather than hinders the potential for sustainable development.

The decade of the 1980s has, however, witnessed a severe discontinuity and reversal of the earlier more hopeful trends in growth performance globally. Sharp deterioration in the international economic environment has played by far the major role in triggering the acute crisis which now afflicts the Third World.

Indicators of this critical situation are unsustainable, crushing burdens of external debt; the substantial decline in export earnings due to acutely depressed commodity prices and increasing protectionism, the steeply declining flows of resource transfers; and the chronic instability of the international currency market, as well as in the abnormally high levels of real interest rates.

In this harsh reality, developing countries have little alternative but to tax their natural resources, often beyond the limits of recovery, to get funds to service foreign debt, not to speak of their futile efforts to maintain necessary imports. It is absurd that Africa is transferring more to the industrialized countries than it receives.

These trends will have to be reversed, not only because the situation is in itself unacceptable, but also because it is in the self interest of the developed countries. Development aid, and lending are essential and must be increased. but the ultimate goal must be to forge an economic partnership based on equitable trade.

In their quest for development, however, developing countries must avoid the heavy impacts of first generation industrial pollution. They can not afford it and their environments will neither absorb it nor recover as it to some extent has in Europe and North America.

To me this challenge seems highly relevant here in the Federal Republic of Germany, a centre of gravity of the Western economy, and in Hamburg, as harbour city historically one of Europe's windows towards the world. It is in industrial centres such as Hamburg that our future can be spearheaded. From here emanate technological innovations and new industrial processes which will shape the future. It is also from such dynamic centres that we can expect changes that will promote the objectives of sustainable development.

Industry has a key part to play in the developments which lie ahead. Creating awareness of industry's role in relation to development will therefore be of tremendous importance, and industry must itself define its clear responsibilities.

The industry of tomorrow will have to be more environmentally benign. Environmentally sound technology will unquestionably be a competitive edge for European industry as it moves towards the 1990s and beyond. But we have no time to lose. Time itself is a scarce resource.

Throughout history Europe has been a cradle of innovation and ideas that have pointed towards a better future, not only for Europeans themselves, but also for the entire world. However, Europe's role in the world today does not reflect its real potential or responsibility.

Europe is facing a challenge - the challenge of incorporating the objective of sustainable development. The real strength of Europe lies in its versatility and in the magnitude of the force it can generate. But the liberation of this force is impeded by a cobweb of borders, political as well as technical, of which the East-West divide is the most significant and the most demanding.

I believe that the issues of environment and development can help us to overcome obstacles to closer cooperation, in Western Europe, and across the East-West divide, as well as on a global scale. Such cooperation should fuel Europe to successfully assume the role and strength it can and should have.

In a development context, the transfer of technology to developing countries is one of today's greatest challenges. Moving chemical industries to low-cost, "flag of convenience" countries lacking environmental standards and control systems is certainly not going to lead to sustainable global development. The welcome given to that type of industry by the governments of some developing countries is not making the problem any easier to deal with. They are up against real dilemmas in their wish to exploit their environments to gain competitive advantages.

Admittedly, it is the industrialized countries which have produced 98% of today's dangerous industrial waste. Thus the distribution of production among more countries may in itself seem sensible. But the recovery, control and safe storage of such waste should satisfy the same strict requirements, regardless of where it is produced.

In the final analysis, what is at risk is nature's productive capacity, and human lives and health.

In a transnational world, it is ironic that the problem of industrial hazards assumes such life-threatening proportions just when the present system of international cooperation is at the weakest it has been for several decades. The effectiveness of a number of international organizations has been seriously eroded.

In the absence of binding international regulations, the challenges to a market economy posed by an endangered environment have to be taken seriously by all parties involved. The more self-regulatory measures industry takes, the less states will have to intervene.

I believe there is a new awareness among corporate managers and government officials that their authority is inevitably going to be challenged whenever serious mistakes are made that result in major disasters. There is absolutely no doubt that the first line of defence in coping with industrial hazards lies with industry itself.

Your country and mine are united by the North Sea. We depend on it, and we share a common responsibility for it. Its resources must be managed on a sustainable basis. We cannot allow it to serve as a rubbish dump. The first North Sea conference was a German initiative. The second conference last November brought us an important step closer to our goals. Most countries now seem to accept the principle of precautionary action and the fact that emissions of pollutants must be strictly limited. We owe it to ourselves and to coming generations.

The state of the North Sea largely depends on land based sources of pollution and on international rivers such as the Elbe and the Rhine. The Federal Republic has made some important progress in limiting its own emissions and has managed to increase the quality of pan-European cooperation on the environment, also through the perigee in East-West relations in the first half of this decade. Its "Ost-Politik on the environment" is important for the whole of Europe.

In the EC The Federal Republic belongs to the group of countries with the higher ambitions. The catastrophe in Basel resulted in new and improved standards set by German industry itself. No other European country has as many neighbours. That is why the Federal Republic has such a great responsibility and such a great opportunity to be a front runner in our European quest for sustainable development.

Energy is a field of primary importance. If we continue to burn fossil fuels at present rates, we can be fairly certain that at least the world's oil reserves will be used up during the coming century. Energy supply and use are of decisive importance to economic development, to the environment and to the fight against poverty. There is an enormous difference in energy consumption between the North and South. On average, a person in the industrialized world uses 80 times as much energy as a person

in Southern Africa.

More than half of the world's population relies on fuelwood for cooking, light and heat.

A safe, environmentally sound and economically viable energy programme that will sustain human progress into the distant future is clearly called for. Developing countries will need much more energy to continue to develop, but we in the North should strive to stabilize our energy consumption. A low energy future is our only real option. This need not mean shortages. We in the industrialized countries could reduce energy input by 50 % and still obtain the same benefits. This would be possible if nations were to make energy efficiency the cutting edge of their energy policies.

A rational approach to energy pricing would facilitate this. Energy prices very rarely reflect the cost of damage to health, property and the environment inflicted in connection with energy consumption. If the recent momentum of energy efficiency is to be maintained, governments will have to designate this as their explicit goal. Oil prices are crucial to energy efficiency as well. In order to ensure necessary investments in energy conservation and in the development of alternative sources of energy, there is a strong need to stabilize oil prices at a reasonable level.

Energy efficiency is not, however, the final solution. No single combination of energy sources that could be sustained into the future exists today. Renewable sources not yet available or developed will have to play a dominant role. Far more funding must be allocated to research in new and renewable sources of energy. If we are to succeed in providing energy for a global population of 10 billion people, broad international cooperation is needed to direct, guide and fund the large-scale research that clearly is necessary.

Nuclear energy proved to be a difficult issue for the Commission, and no wonder given the various background and experience of its members. Our consensus conclusion, however, is that the generation of nuclear power is only justifiable if there are solid solutions to the presently unsolved problems to which it gives rise. The highest priority must be accorded to research and development on environmentally sound and economically viable alternatives as well as on means of increasing the safety of nuclear energy.

Food production is another key area. The production of sufficient food to feed a doubled world population seems within our reach. However, securing access to food for those who need it and ensuring environmentally sustainable agricultural practices will require fundamental policy changes. Northern agricultural production systems are often run on the basis of large-scale, short-sighted subsidies - and on the intensive use of fertilizers and pesticides. They over-exploit farmland and introduce harmful chemicals into food and water supplies. The rich industrial countries need to examine the ramifications of their agricultural surpluses very carefully. 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 reforms which are so desperately needed.

The Commission calls for fundamental policy changes in order to secure 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, and techniques must be adapted to local conditions. There is clearly a need for a shift in the centres of food production to where the demand is and for a change in the terms of trade as regards agricultural products.

I have endeavoured to highlight some of the priorities described in "Our Common Future". The conclusion is clear. The environment is not a separate sector, distinct from key economic sectors such as industry, agriculture and energy. Indeed, environmental agencies need to be upgraded politically and expanded financially. But the real changes will only come about when all key economic players accept a clear responsibility 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. We know, however, that it will not be easy to shift the mind sets, cultures and traditions of organizations, public or private. The attraction of short-term gain is seemingly far stronger than the politics of long term sustainability. Yet we have no choice if we want to retain our options.

The Report can, and I hope will, provide new motivation for a global transition to sustainable development. But success in achieving this transition will require increased political will and public pressure in order to hold industry, governments and institutions responsible for their actions.

At the institutional level, the Commission calls for a number of far reaching changes, especially in the UN system. The crucial task is to make sustainable development an overriding objective of the entire UN.

Given the enormous structural and other problems of the UN, we felt that the Secretary General himself will have to assume leadership in this area. And it is indeed appropriate that the leading international civil servant assume a key role in pursuing the basic objectives for all human beings: peace, environment and development.

In Norway the Government has now requested that all ministries study the Commission's Report and review our domestic and foreign policies in the light of its principles and recommendations. They have been asked to consider what steps can be taken to bring our policy more into line with the Report's recommendations. A broad information campaign is under way aimed at inspiring a nation-wide discussion of the report and its implications.

Norway will vigorously pursue "Our Common Future" on a broad international basis, and we will use it specifically to influence international cooperation. The various agencies of the United Nations will be playing a central part in the work of following up the report. To facilitate and stimulate discussion and follow-up among the UN agencies, the Norwegian Government, following consultations with the Secretary General of the United Nations and with his ardent support and cooperation, has invited the Heads of many important agencies to a Special Conference in Norway in July. We are pleased that it is envisaged that the Secretary General too will attend this conference

We will also convene a regional European conference in 1990 to promote sustainable development in Europe and to explore the economics of sustainability. This can be one important step as we prepare Europe for entry into the 21st century.

Before concluding, allow me to touch upon a subject which is highly relevant to your country. The task of preserving our cultural and architectural heritage is particularly challenging. Some of the greatest monuments of Western civilization are found within your borders. It took 600 years to complete the dome in Cologne. We must not allow it to deteriorate because of a few decades of uninhibited fuel consumption. This heritage belongs to the German people and to the world. Acid rain and atmospheric pollution must not be allowed to destroy it.

To the many sceptics, I would say that no one has claimed that we can solve all the problems at once. But a counsel of perfection should not blind us to what can be achieved. Nor should the want of omnipotence be cause for abstaining from such options as are available.

The follow-up process will require untraditional thinking. This is the time for deepening our understanding of the changes taking place, for looking ahead, and for assessing what needs to be done if we are to stay in control of our own future. Developments in science and social organization are altering the world profoundly - too profoundly for conventional ways of thinking to grasp. History suggests that mankind rarely understands revolutionary changes while they are taking place. The revolutionary changes of today and tomorrow are characterized by their great magnitude and speed. Their impact is both centrifugal and centripetal, dispersing, yet at the same time concentrating activities, influence and decisions.

Politicians and scientists, the commercial sector and the voluntary organizations: We all share a common responsibility - a common responsibility for our common future.