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Prime Minister
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NUESTRO FUTURO COMUN

A crucial question is before the present generation: Will we devote our abilities, our energy, our time to further our own material well-being on a short term basis, or will we dedicate part of ourselves to working to enhance future life on planet Earth. Many of us have made the latter choice. Millions more will have to follow.

At the start of this century we did not have the power to alter planetary systems radically. 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.

Due to a prevailing sense of endemic inadequacy in multilateral cooperation, the World Commission on Environment and Development was established by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1983. 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.

The Commission's report, "Our Common Future", was issued one year ago in the English language. Today it is available in another world language, Spanish. I am deeply grateful to my colleague, Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez, for his initiative to have "Nuestro Futuro Común" presented here today in the Asociación de Periodistas Europeos. I am very grateful for the kind remarks of Secretary General Angel Aguilar, and for the important role played by Minister Sáenz Cosculluela in making the Commission's report available to the more than 200 million Spanish-speaking people of the world.

The Commission's Report, "Our Common Future", is a document of political consensus. It was formulated by people with different backgrounds and varied experience from 21 countries, the majority of whom came from developing countries, - to reflect the real world.

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 a continuation of present patterns is not the solution to the challenges we face.

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

About 150 plant and animal species 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. 150 000 km² of forest disappear, equal to nearly a third of the area of Spain. Most of this is tropical forests which is being destroyed on a virtually inconceivable scale.

Desert land is increasing by 60 000 km² a year, or almost twice the area of Belgium, and 200 000 km² 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 CO₂ and industrial gases in the atmosphere. We cannot exclude a rise of the sea level by several metres in the next century. A one to 3 meter rise would affect ten million people in Egypt alone, completely flood the Maldivé Islands, and disrupt agricultural production patterns all over the world.

Today, more than thirty countries, including Norway, have signed the Montreal Protocol from last September on protection of the ozone layer and we are pleased to learn that Spain will sign very soon. The Protocol 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.

However, new scientific data has shown that the situation is much worse than we thought. Only speedy and deeper reduction measures can prevent far-reaching consequences. 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.

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

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, we in Europe, have too long neglected many of 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 Spain, historically one of Europe's windows towards the world.

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.

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. Spain can play a pivotal role through its strong ties with across the seas, not least with Latin-America

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.

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.

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.

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, and take a rational approach to energy pricing.

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.

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.

The rich industrial countries need to examine the ramifications of their agricultural surpluses very carefully. 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 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.

I have endeavoured to highlight some of the priorities described in "Our Common Future". Our conclusion is clear. The environment is not a separate sector, distinct from key economic sectors such as industry, agriculture and energy. The real changes will come about when all key economic players accept a clear responsibility for the environmental effects of their policies.

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 the Western and Moorish cultures are found within your borders. Adid rain and atmospheric pollution must not be allowed to destroy it.

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.