

OSLO

Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland
Chairman of the World Commission on Environment and Development.

THE OSLO CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - OPENING
STATEMENT, 9 JULY 1988.

Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Dear friends and colleagues,

It is a great honour for Norway that all of you have been able to come to Oslo for this Conference. This is the first time ever that the top executives of the UN system have met outside of the regular UN framework. We value the significance of the presence of every one of you.

The Government of Norway and the Norwegian people are among the staunchest supporters of the multilateral system. Our political culture, and that of the Nordic countries more generally is marked by a belief in the value of dialogue and consensus, a sense of solidarity with the weaker members of the global community, belief in the need for multilateral order and international concern, and a strong sense of the environmental values which acknowledge our responsibility towards future generations.

The gravest problem that we face today, beside the threat of nuclear war, is the deterioration of the environment and the prospects for development. The growing interdependence between countries and the close interlinkages between issues, present acute challenges to international cooperation and to the partnership between governments and the multilateral institutions.

The purpose of this meeting is to stimulate discussion on priority issues and inter-agency cooperation and coordination, and to identify opportunities for, as well as possible constraints to a synergetic effort to achieve sustainable development.

We hope that this conference will bring us one step forwards in improving the life and opportunities of today's 5 billion people and for the 10 billion people sometime in the next century.

Last year the World Commission on Environment and Development, which I had the honour to chair, issued its report "Our Common Future". Later in the year, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 42/187 which welcomed the report and

which determined the course of a follow-up process for the entire UN system.

Many of the organizations represented here have been active in the field of environment and development for a long time. It is clear, however, that the combined present efforts are not sufficient.

The scale and complexity of the problems we face have outgrown the capacities of our present institutional arrangements. This is so both on the national and the international level.

Coordinated integration of environmental concerns through government's sectoral policies is necessary on the national level, but in many countries, these concerns are not given the attention they must have. Many governments are struggling with the tyranny of the immediate. Too few have been really able to address medium and long term issues. This is too often reflected in their positions also in international organizations.

My question is: How can we best stimulate integration and counter fragmentation nationally and internationally?

Unless governments develop a consistent national and foreign policy for sustainable development, chances are less that their delegates will act consistently in international institutions. How often have you found yourselves confronted with the same governments pursuing inconsistent policies in different UN organs.

Agencies in the UN system which do not sufficiently coordinate their activities may end up pursuing different and even opposite objectives. Thus, it is of vital importance that they coordinate their policies and actions. Only through effective coordination and integration, on the national and international level, will we be able to achieve a mutually reinforcing partnership between governments and the multilateral organizations.

Together we should strive for a revival of multilateral diplomacy because the problems that we face can only be solved through our collective global and regional efforts.

I have noted with great interest the Secretary-General's remarks on the need for a wider pattern of effective consultations and cooperations to address urgent issues on the international agenda, and that the Cancun summit was one such example.

More often than not we have heard budgetary constraints be used as an argument for not being able to take action. But what exactly are the constraints here? If the Norwegian Government does not deal with a threatening environmental problem, it will be heavily criticized.

Will this not apply to people's attitudes to international organizations as well? Isn't it probable that people will be more inclined to support international institutions if they engage in activities that are sustainable rather than practises that are not?

The financial crisis is more than real. It is acute. But it can not be permanent. The analysis and agenda set by the World Commission can and should be used as a lever to mobilize further resources and political support, but we must also ask what can be done by using the financial and human resources available at present.

The fact that member countries have the final say about the amounts and allocations of resources should not prevent the various organizations from proposing changes, taking new initiatives, giving signals and supporting activities that aim towards sustainable development. Not every new adaptation to new needs must necessarily be delayed pending additional resources.

Many of the organizations here today have made considerable progress in integrating sustainable development considerations into their work. Inter-agency cooperation functions well with respect to many programmes and projects. Still, we should investigate if the common endeavours are used to achieve sustainable development with maximum efficiency.

We need to set common targets and coordinate international action. Above all, we need leadership. We need a global conscience for monitoring development trends and proposing concerted action.

I have addressed the need to concentrate institutional efforts on sustainable development.

The grim facts and trends that we analysed in the World Commission are known to you all. Yet even though the situation is serious, let us not disregard some of the recent, positive trends.

These are in particular the decisions of the Paris Club, the Toronto Summit's declaration in environmental issues which endorsed the concept of sustainable development, the Montreal Protocol on the protection of the ozone layer, the recent conference in Toronto, "The Changing Atmosphere", where Prime Minister Mulroney and I called for a global convention on protection of the climate, and the agreement on a regime for mineral activities which effectively protects the environment of Antarctica.

However, there is less evidence of real signs of increase in aid flows from the industrialized world, to counter poverty as a root cause also of environmental damage. Last year aid flows fell in real terms and are less than half of the UN target.

Some of you have shown interest in what Norway has done to follow up the Commissions recommendations.

One year ago, all the ministries were asked systematically to assess their policies in the light of the report and to assess what could be done in the short and medium term to bring our policies into line with the recommendations of the Commission. At the same time we launched a broad national hearing on the report.

We established a cabinet committee to coordinate the Government's follow-up work. An action plan for sustainable development will be presented to parliament before the end of this year.

We have endeavoured to develop a national and foreign policy for sustainable development. Papers describing this policy are available to you all at this conference.

1.14 per cent of Norway's GNP will be used for Official Development Assistance this year. Around half of it is channelled through multilateral organizations. In 1988 Norway will be spending at least 265 million NOK for the promotion of food security, 165 million NOK on resource management and conservation, and 190 million NOK on population activities under the direction of the various organizations.

Norway is supporting the very constructive policy reorientation of the World Bank and we are ready to contribute by approximately 130 million NOK in 1988 for World Bank initiatives, most of which will be used for environmental projects and mainly in Africa. A certain amount will be used to strengthen the environmental capacity of the Bank.

The further action that we have taken is described in the annex to my written opening statement.

Internationally there has been a considerable increase in awareness and concern about environment and development in a number of countries. We must build on and expand this new awareness.

In his speech before the General Assembly on 19 October last year, the Secretary-General proposed that we forge a contract with the youth of the world and embark on a global educational campaign. The Secretary-General made concrete proposals about how such a campaign could be organized.

Which of your organizations should play a role and what kind of initiatives are needed to respond to the Secretary-General's call? We should all support his idea.

The Commission defined several survival issues. How can the UN respond to them and what should be the priorities?

The Conference on the Changing Atmosphere in Toronto at the end of June called for an Action Plan for the Protection of the Atmosphere, including an international framework convention. The Conference also called for a World Atmosphere Fund financed in part by a levy on the fossile fuel consumption of industrialized countries to finance new energy sources which are less damaging to our biosphere. These proposals strike at the core of both the heat trap problems and the threat to the ozone layer.

-How is this feasible?

-Which are the constraints?

-Which agencies would be involved?

-Where should such efforts be coordinated?

-Do we have the mechanisms we need to deal with global

issues on energy, industry and environment?

We may ask similar questions with respect to several other issues.

In many areas population growth must be slowed.

While free trade is clearly called for, there is also a need to parallel the operation of the market by measures that secure and raise the export earnings of developing countries.

How can we jointly provide food security for the poor and raise the income of the small farmers?

Who should take primary responsibility for protecting the genetic diversity? Presently FAO, UNEP, UNESCO and the IUCN are actively involved, but there seems to be an artificial division of responsibility for wild and domesticized species. How is the concern for genetic diversity taken into account by all the other agency's activities?

How can we breathe new life into talks on technology transfer?

Isn't it likely that many organizations would do better than a few in convincing governments of the need for a safe regime on hazardous wastes?

How can we raise the substantially larger resources that will be urgently needed to facilitate the changes towards sustainable development?

Take the field of energy, a key factor for sustainable development. On the institutional side we have IAEA, the western countries have IEA, and there is OPEC. But where is the overall responsibility for energy in general? How are we going to chart a sustainable energy course to secure sufficient energy for the hundreds of millions of poor, and how are we going to establish and coordinate the research needed to develop renewable energy as a basis in the next century? Is it possible to develop a global energy programme, and who should coordinate it?

Another striking example is offered by the ongoing work to save the tropical forests. Trees literally form the roots of many natural systems. Deforestation cause severe soil loss, aggravate droughts and floods, disrupt water supply and reduce land productivity. Hundred of millions rely on wood for cooking and heating, and trees play a crucial role in the global cycling of carbon. 2,8 billion people will lack fuelwood by the year 2000 if deforestation is not countered effectively.

On the average, 10 trees are felled for every new tree that is planted. To counter the present deforestation, I have been informed that treeplanting would have to cover an area the size of France yearly.

The Plan of Action to Combat Deforestation adopted by the UN in 1977 is acutely underfunded. The funding that has been made available over the past 10 years amount to a ridiculous 0,3% of

the needed amount. There isn't any remote chance that the plan will be implemented given this absence of support.

The Tropical Forest Action Plan which is being coordinated by FAO and which involves UNDP, the World Bank and the World Resources Institute, is it designed to offer real solutions? How does the inter-agency coordination work? Should other agencies be involved? Is it sufficiently known by donor and recipient governments?

The questions are many. There is not one answer. Noone has the final answers to the challenge we face. This is why we need to focus our attention and exchange our views and our experiences to address these issues.

I suggest the following for discussion:

1. Can sustainable development be adopted as the common objective of the whole UN system?
2. How are we going to secure a permanent adaption of the institutional capacities that are available.
3. Can the whole UN system get access to the identical, most recent information on sustainable development indicators?
4. How can real effective coordination of activities be achieved?
5. How can we best stimulate governments to revert to multilateralism and to use the international institutions that we have created and which we need more than ever?

If governments are not convinced that their interests are effectively served by the UN system, the UN will lose its power and dynamics. Therefore there is a need for setting priorities and for coordination of the efforts to achieve the goals we set.

The Report of the World Commission provides a tool for setting priorities and a lever for political action. The threats to environment and development are real. Time for corrective action is running out. The world's highest civil servants have a great responsibility and a great opportunity to revive a new era of multilateralism.

ANNEX

Norway's national follow up of the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development.

In the national budget proposals for 1988 all ministries have been asked to:

-Describe the environmental and resource problems within their area of responsibility and how the situation is likely to develop up to the year 2000 if new action is not taken.

-Describe the action, both immediate and long-term, which is necessary to solve existing and to prevent new environmental and resource problems.

-The consequences of the budget proposal must be described and how it contributes to the solving of environmental and resource management problems.

All our national research institutions have produced a joint report on research policies for sustainable development making the Commissions report a basic premise for research in Norway.

The Norwegian Government will aim towards stabilizing our energy consumption by the year 2000. We are the first country to explicitly establish this goal.

We have ratified the Montreal Protocol on protection of the ozone layer and presented a national action plan which aims to reduce chlorofluorocarbons by 90% by 1997.

Over the past decade, sulphur-dioxide concentrations in our major cities dropped by 50%.

We will use the best available technology to reduce NO_x emissions.

We are increasing investments in municipal sewage systems by 100% within one year, after the recent experience in parts of the North Sea, with a massive algae invasion around our southern coast. Regional and global concerns are clearly involved, and will call for additional efforts for the management of water and ocean resources in the coming years.