

MEXICO

Med forbehold om endringer
Spærrefrist 22.9.88 kl 1700

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to address this conference here in the Museum of Antropology, known as one of the finest museums in the world - a monument to the immense cultural treasures of pre-hispanic Mexico, a civilization comparable to that of ancient Egypt, Babylon, China, Greece and Rome.

This museum and the impressive surroundings of the City of Mexico illustrate where we stand in the evolution of the human race. 90% of the projected global population growth will take place in developing countries, and 90% of this growth will take place in urban areas. It is quite clear that the future depends on how we manage this trend and the interrelationship between people, resources, environment and development.

It is against this background that I express my deep gratitude to President Miguel de la Madrid and the Government of Mexico for inviting us all to this Conference. My thanks go to the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and The Centre for Our Common Future for their invaluable support, as well as to all of you who have come to share in the discussions and analysis of Our Common Future.

At the turn of the last century there was no risk that humankind could 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. The earth's forests are shrinking, its deserts expanding and its soils eroding, all at unprecedented rates, and the number of people living in poverty continues to increase.

We are becoming increasingly aware that the relationship between development and environment is circular. Development affects the environment, but development itself depends upon the environmental resource base.

In the 1970s environment and development were seen as plainly contradictory. North and South seemed to be fighting different battles. At that time environmental concerns were considered something that only the rich could afford to worry about. Today, they are concerns no one can afford to ignore.

A sense of endemic inadequacy in multilateral cooperation prevailed when 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.

Many of the threats to the environment and human progress are truly global in scale and raise crucial questions of

planetary survival. The complexity, the magnitude and the apparent irreversibility of these trends surpass all previous conceptions.

The Commission's report, "Our Common Future", was welcomed by the United Nations one year ago. It has now been published in the world language Spanish, and is thus available to 300 million Spanish-speaking people of the world.

"Our Common Future", is - surprising to many, who have studied it and seen its clear message - 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.

"Our Common Future" - "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.

- For too long we have used the atmosphere, soil and water as the ultimate sink for our industrial by-products.

- For too long we have overlooked the devastating effects of acidification, overuse of chemicals and pesticides.'

- For too long have industrialized countries exported their first generation of environmental problems to developing countries and maintained an economic system which impoverishes the developing countries and leads to environmental decline.

However, our message is also one of hope and optimism. While the Commission emphatically warns that changes must be made in the management of this planet, we also believe that it is possible to make the changes which are so urgently needed. Our collective resources, human knowledge and ingenuity have never been greater. If these resources are allowed to unfold, then it is possible to create a future that is more prosperous, more just and more secure.

The time has come to start the process of change. Together we must strive for a revival of multilateral cooperation because the problems that we face can only be solved through collective global and regional efforts. We need a new sense of mission and a vision of a better future. We need a common framework and concepts that can unite us.

The Commission presents the overriding political concept of sustainable development as such a common framework, as a broad concept of social and economic progress and change. It is a concept on which the world community should build.

Our call for sustainable development is a call for a new era of economic growth. Only growth can create the capacity to solve environmental problems. And only a healthy environment can enhance our resource base and sustain economic growth.

Sustainable development recognizes that there are thresholds imposed by nature, but not limits to growth itself. Forceful economic growth is the only feasible weapon in the fight against poverty. But the contents of growth must be changed. Growth can not be based on overexploitation of resources. Growth

must be managed to enhance the resource base on which we all depend.

In order to change the contents of growth, fundamental changes in the international economic system are necessary. The industrialized countries will play a critical role. They must take a main responsibility for ensuring that the world economy enhances rather than hinders the potential of developing countries.

We need a new global political approach to environment and development. International economic and finance policies, trade and foreign policies, energy, agriculture, and other sectoral policies must all aim at improving economic performance in developing countries and help them to choose a course of development that is not only economically and socially, but also ecologically sustainable.

In the 1980s the developing countries have witnessed a reversal of the earlier hopeful trends in growth performance. 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, in particular with regard to private lending, and the chronic instability of the international currency market, as well as abnormally high real interest rates.

In this harsh reality, developing countries have had little alternative but to tax their natural resources, often beyond the limits of recovery, to obtain funds to service foreign debt, not to speak of their futile efforts to maintain necessary imports.

These trends will now have to be reversed, not only because the situation in itself is unacceptable, but also because it is in the self-interest of the developed countries.

Isn't it a perverse situation that there is a net transfer of resources from the poor countries to the rich, which over the past few years has totalled over one hundred billion dollars? Isn't it appalling that while close to a billion people in the developing countries are living in poverty and squalor, the per capita income of about 50 of those countries declined last year?

There is a need for fresh impetus in international cooperation. Development aid and lending must be increased. The developing countries will need additional resources, and they need to be able to establish development priorities which are consistent with sustainability.

There is a need for a double track approach: The development crisis and the debt crisis have to be urgently and effectively addresses. They are both equally acute.

Economic growth in Latin America has been far too feeble in the 1980s. Under the present crisis conditions, there is but

limited room for manoeuvre for the Inter-American Development Bank to assist in the promotion of economic welfare, without considerable increase in its resources.

What is needed is a major investment programme formulated by the governments of the region, and financed by the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank and other regional organizations. Such a programme should not be limited to infrastructure projects, but should actively seek to assist the promotion of both agri-business and local manufacturing enterprise within the region. What is needed amounts in practice to a "Marshall Plan" for the region as a whole.

The unsustainable level of debt servicing in many countries in Latin America is a serious obstacle to sustainable development. Urgent action is necessary to alleviate the debt burdens in ways that represent a fairer sharing between debtors and lenders.

What is needed is new lending on concessional terms, debt relief, long-term rescheduling and conversion of existing debt.

Let us be frank about this: It will not make sense to demand that all the debt be repaid. To maintain such an iron code will hit the most vulnerable social groups in many debtor countries. It will increase the pressure on the environment too, as natural resources are cashed in to service debt. It will act as a serious obstacle to investments and innovations, and it will prolong the time until the debtor countries can assume their rightful position in the international economy.

The ultimate goal must be to forge an economic partnership based on equitable trade. To achieve this the mission must be to make nations return to negotiations on global issues after many years of decline in real multilateralism. The decisions at the Toronto summit bring new hope that this may soon happen.

But a wider pattern of cooperation at the highest level is needed. The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Heads of 22 UN agencies, who met in Oslo this summer, examined the follow-up of the Commission's report and the challenges that we face. We found, as the Secretary-General himself proposed before ECOSOC, that it is indeed time to restore the process that stopped half way in Cancún.

In our efforts to achieve sustainable development, we need to open our eyes to the fundamental fact that the earth is one even if the world of man is still divided. The environment knows no boundaries. We can not act as if it does.

Recently we have begun the painful process of discovering our past mistakes. We are struggling with the costs of acidification, and with the complexities of dealing with atmospheric emissions. We are now realizing that we may be on the threshold of changes to our climate, changes which are so extensive and immediate that they will profoundly affect human life.

The news of the hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica changed attitudes in many countries. If we were to protect future generations from ever-increasing amounts of harmful ultraviolet radiation, we had to take corrective action. We had to, and in fact we did, give nature the benefit of the doubt when we adopted the Montreal Protocol exactly one year ago.

Mexico took the lead by being the first country to ratify this milestone in international cooperation. You won acclaim in many circles, and served as a source of inspiration to other countries. My own country was the third to ratify. Now we need general adherence to the Montreal Protocol. In this respect the European Community, in particular, has a special responsibility.

The awareness of the threat of climatic change has increased significantly since international work on the ozone layer started. The effects of a global change in climate will be drastic. They will lead to changes in agricultural and settlement patterns as well as to a general rise in the sea level. The concept of the "greenhouse effect" is widely known, but shouldn't we talk about the "heat trap" instead? And shouldn't we address it in the same responsible manner as we have addressed the ozone problem?

We should consider establishing a global convention on the protection of the atmosphere. We should study further the relationship between climate and the depletion of the tropical rainforests, the "green lungs" of the globe. We should coordinate scientific activity and increase technology research and technology transfer, and adopt further concrete measures to reduce the emissions of harmful substances.

Energy is a field of primary importance to sustainable development. There is an enormous difference in energy consumption between North and South. 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.

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. We in the North must therefore strive to stabilize our energy consumption.

A low energy future is our only real option. However, this need not mean shortages. 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.

Oil prices are crucial to energy efficiency as well. In order to ensure necessary investments in energy conservation and the development of alternative sources of energy, there is a strong need to stabilize oil prices at a reasonable and higher level.

I have endeavoured to highlight some of the priorities described in "Our Common Future". The Commission also examined in

detail the population issue, food security, genetic diversity and management of the oceans as well as the links between security, environment and development. Our conclusion is clear. The environment is not a separate sector, -distinct-from central economic sectors such as industry, agriculture and energy. The real changes will only come about when all key economic players accept a clear responsibility for the environmental effects of their policies.

We are living in an era of rapid change. Today, we see encouraging progress in many areas which are of decisive importance for humankind. Familiar concepts have been reconsidered and new ones are being developed. This calls for courage, awareness and responsibility.

Unless corrective action is taken, however, the future may come to different parts of the world at different speeds. There are still many obstacles to the realization of a more peaceful, just world.

The challenge which confronts us is intellectual, ethical and political. Humankind is exposed to risks, political, economic and indeed ecological risks. We can only safeguard the future if we work together - not at each other's expense. The future will truly be Our Common Future - it will depend upon how successful the people of the world are in adopting common attitudes towards common challenges.

We need a stronger commitment to the international institutions we have created. We need a coalition of reason and real coordination of policies. The Secretary-General of the United Nations must have our firm support in his endeavours to promote sustainable development.

What we need is a new global ethic - an ethic based on equity, accountability and human solidarity - a solidarity with present and future generations, - a responsibility for nature and humankind's place in nature. One hundred years ago, the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen said that "nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come". Sustainable development is such an idea. Together we must make it a reality.