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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE PLIGHT OF REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND
DISPLACED PERSONS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, OSLO 22-24 AUGUST, 1988.

Opening address by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of
Norway.

Mr. President,
President Traoré,
President Mugabe,
Mr. Secretary-General of the OAU,
Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives

It is a great honour and privilege for us that the International
Conference on the Plight of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced
Persons in Southern Africa is taking place here in Norway.

I can promise you the strong and persistent support of the
Norwegian Government and the Norwegian People. An illustration of
this support is The Norwegian Refugee Council's fundraising
campaign this fall, - the biggest of its kind ever in this
country.

25 years ago, the founders of the Organization of African Unity
set out with great ambitions and drew up lofty objectives which
are enshrined in the Charter of the OAU. They laid the groundwork
for safeguarding and advancing African Unity and for securing for
the African People the mastery of their own destiny.

During these 25 years of struggle for the total independence of
Africa, the membership of the OAU has increased from 32 to 50
states.

However, we are still missing representatives of independent and majority-ruled South Africa and Namibia. Ten years after the adoption of Security Council Resolution 435, South Africa is illegally occupying Namibia, in flagrant defiance of the international community and the inherent rights of the people of Namibia.

The people of Namibia have waited long enough for their independence. We appeal to South Africa to withdraw its troops and we urge South Africa to cease obstructing the immediate implementation of the UN plan for the independence of Namibia.

For years, Southern Africa has been haunted by oppression and wars, by acts of aggression and destabilization by the racist regime of South Africa. The Frontline States have made tremendous sacrifices in their struggle to eradicate Apartheid and colonialism.

We have seen how the nine countries now constituting the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) achieved independence, and we joined in the celebration of their freedom. But we have also seen how most of these countries have been affected by South Africa's destabilizing policy, undermining their ability to harvest the fruits of their independence.

South Africa's war in Angola and support of armed bandits in Mozambique have resulted in social and economic disaster.

More than five million people have been forced to flee their homes in the Southern African region, Angola and Mozambique accounting for more than four million displaced persons.

We are faced with a vicious circle in which political upheaval and natural disasters have caused the flight of millions. - A tragedy that gives rise to political and economic instability and threatens international peace and security.

It is frustrating and unacceptable that the international community has been unable and unwilling to address effectively the root cause of these problems. Sanctions against South Africa have been all too leniently imposed. Last year Norway adopted a comprehensive trade boycott against South Africa, and we have increased our cooperation with the Frontline States. The international community - and in particular the countries which have the means to do so - must now fulfill their moral obligation towards the oppressed people of Southern Africa.

The Apartheid system is an evil system, a system of brutal domination. It must and will come to an end. The crimes committed in its name are horrendous. History is likely to portray Apartheid as example of civilizations gravest moral degeneration on the eve of this century.

The system of Apartheid, wars and natural catastrophes have produced millions refugees. They have been forced to leave their homes and flee. This is a personal disaster for each and every one of those who have been uprooted. We cannot remain inactive when faced with this appalling situation. The time has come for concerted action.

At the 25th anniversary of the OAU in Addis Ababa earlier this year, the Heads of State and Government of the OAU committed themselves to making their best efforts to bring about a lasting and durable solution to the root causes of the refugee problem. In this challenging process, you have our firm support.

The plight of refugees, returnees and displaced persons is not only a humanitarian and political problem. It is an obstacle to economic development as well. This is a deadlock we must break. In Southern Africa the work towards sustainable economic and social development is being seriously jeopardized. This threatens the very future of the region, and represents a challenge for us at this conference.

Economic growth is called for to produce the resources necessary to deal with the problems of refugees and displaced persons. And

conversely, as pointed out in the Karthoum Declaration adopted in March this year, the rehabilitation of refugees and displaced persons is an important element in reversing production losses. Presently, economic indicators continue to work against the interests of Africa and its people.

In 1980 the OAU adopted The Lagos Plan of Action, an ambitious, plan outlining a better future which has been far too neglected outside Africa. When adopting Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery, the OAU took pains to identify the causes of the economic crisis and the countries of Africa solemnly committed themselves to applying strict measures to lay the foundation for a lasting economic recovery. Nevertheless, the external context confronting Africa continues to deteriorate.

The unsustainable, crushing burden of debt, acutely depressed commodity prices, steeply declining financial flows, protectionism, and abnormally high interest rates have suffocated Africa's aspirations for social and economic development in this decade.

The United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development has received neither the new concessional transfer support nor the debt burden relief it projects. This view is not simply an African view. It has been repeated by the World Bank and underlined by the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Group on Financial Flows for Africa, the majority of whom are bankers. The coming mid-term review of the UN-PAAERD should be followed by a broad supportive commitment on the part of the International Community. Africa has been waiting for a long time. Africa has waited long enough.

We need a new commitment to the principle of multilateralism. The Toronto Summit statement on the debt issue has been seen as a token of increased sensitivity among creditor countries. Broad action must now follow words.

When the Secretary General of the United Nations and the Heads of 22 UN agencies visited Oslo this July, for the Oslo Conference on

Sustainable Development, we focussed on the standstill in global economic cooperation. That conference emphasized that global issues require global solutions based on global consultations. We found that the time has now come to restore the process which stopped half way in Cancun.

It is imperative that all countries in the North fully recognize our common interest with the South. Hunger, poverty and general underdevelopment severely threaten the political and economic stability of many developing countries. These are problems that concern and affect the security of us all - North and South.

Monsieur le Président,

Quatre objectifs principaux ont été fixés pour cette conférence:

- sensibiliser la communauté internationale à la situation des réfugiés, des rapatriés et des personnes déplacées en Afrique australe;

- assurer une plus grande adhésion de la communauté internationale au principe du partage des fardeaux;

- mobiliser et canaliser une aide matérielle accrue aux pays d'asile ainsi qu'aux autres pays de la région qui se trouvent touchés;

- formuler un plan d'action à long terme, de caractère plus systématiquement collectif, destiné à faire face aux défis humanitaires incessants de l'Afrique australe.

Afin de réaliser ces objectifs, nous aurons besoin de moyens. Depuis plusieurs années, le Gouvernement norvégien a considéré l'Afrique australe comme étant une des zones principales pour la coopération norvégienne au développement. En 1988, l'allocation aux projets de développement dans les pays de la CCDAA s'est montée à environ 175 millions de dollars. La Norvège a accordé aux réfugiés de cette région en particulier, un supplément de 30

millions de dollars. De plus, nous accordons annuellement une contribution de 20 millions de dollars à l'HCNUR.

Nous ne sommes pas à cette conférence pour prendre des engagements, je n'en prendrai donc pas. Toutefois, je prendrai l'initiative pour que, sur le plan politique, il y ait un accroissement de la solidarité politique entre la Norvège et l'Afrique et pour que la coopération pour le développement se maintienne à un haut niveau, représentant à l'heure actuelle 1,1 pour cent du produit national brut elle est couramment la plus élevée du monde.

Monsieur le Président,

Les problèmes de l'Afrique australe, représentent une menace pour l'existence même de certains pays de la région. Ils vont jusqu'à menacer la paix internationale et la sécurité. Dans une telle situation, nous avons besoin d'un développement qui puisse être à la base d'une protection à long terme de cette région si vulnérable; nous avons besoin de soulagement afin de sauver des vies et d'éviter les souffrances actuelles; mais nous avons aussi besoin d'être préparés pour l'avenir.

Etre préparés à faire face aux désastres, c'est la tâche des équipes de pompiers - lutte efficace contre l'incendie qui empêchera un petit incendie de dévaster une grande forêt.

Les efforts pour le développement des pays indépendants de l'Afrique australe ont été compromis par la répétition de désastres et par l'évacuation forcée des populations. Les années 1990 ne doivent pas devenir la décennie d'une gérance ad hoc des crises. Au contraire, il nous faut reconnaître l'importance de la planification préalable et de la préparation aux désastres.

Dans une région en proie aux conflits, aux insurrections et aux calamités naturelles, il est nécessaire de planifier l'imprévu, de faire montre de flexibilité et de mettre au point une stratégie afin de contrer la stratégie déstabilisatrice de l'Afrique du Sud.

Je suis convaincue que cette conférence saura sensibiliser la communauté internationale à la gravité de la situation en Afrique australe. Nous croyons que le résultat en sera une aide matérielle accrue aux pays d'asile et autres pays de la région qui se trouvent touchés. Afin de rendre cette aide plus efficace, il est nécessaire de renforcer le degré de préparation à la maîtrise des désastres dans les pays d'Afrique australe. Nous devons être capables, et avoir la capacité, de prévoir les désastres. Nous avons besoin d'un mécanisme qui nous permette d'intervenir très tôt afin d'éviter une évolution grave et de contrer efficacement le désastre.

Such a mechanism could be established under the authority of the Secretary General of the United Nations. In this context, the co-ordination of the activities of existing agencies has to be looked into so that internally displaced persons also become the responsibility of the world community.

It is important that the appropriate agencies such as UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDRO, FAO, WFP, WHO and the World Bank be deeply involved.

I know that the Secretary-General himself is already charged with enormous responsibilities. It is natural, however, that we look to a Secretary-General who has recently been so successful in restoring the authority of the United Nations and so instrumental in bringing about the long-awaited cease-fire negotiations between Iran and Iraq. Mr. Secretary General, we greatly admire and appreciate all that you have done, and we congratulate you on this great achievement.

Mr. President,

We are assembled here out of genuine concern for the most precious resource of the African continent - the people of Africa. We all have a common responsibility to develop and to realize the full potential of the millions of people living as refugees or displaced persons.

Governments, people all over the world, we should put our ears to the ground and listen to the singing of the oppressed millions.

It is a song of freedom

There is a shout for freedom

There is a whistling of banners in the wind as a tide of people marches to take their share of what is rightfully theirs. If you have heard that song, your commitment will never fade, and you will work for what you believe in even if, at times, it may be lonely. - We have heard such a song.