

Toronto

Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland

OUR COMMON FUTURE - A CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Minister, ladies and gentlemen,

As we near the end of the twentieth century, humanity faces a crucial question: Will we devote our abilities, our energy, and our efforts to further short-term material well-being, or will we commit ourselves to enhancing life on planet Earth? Many of us are convinced what should be our choice. Millions more will have to follow.

"Our Common Future", the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development is the political consensus of commissioners from 21 countries. Through a broad process of experience, learning and debate we arrived at a common analysis of the global issues we all face.

Canada was one of the Commission's midwives, one of its strongest political supporters. Few other countries have contributed so greatly to the report as Canada; Commissioner Maurice Strong and the Commission's Secretary General Jim MacNeill brought all their vast experience, dedication and knowledge and helped decisively to forge "Our Common Future", its analysis and its call for action. And Canada reacted most strongly and positively to our report, not least by establishing the Task Force on Environment and Economy, a unique body in modern policy-making.

It is therefore with a sense of profound gratitude that I have come to Canada to address this conference, which could prove to be one of the most important conferences of the 1980s. I thank the Canadian people and institutions who supported us. I thank the Canadian Government, in particular Prime Minister Mulroney and Minister of the Environment McMillan for their commitment and for the example they have been setting for other industrialized countries.

Our Common Future has analyzed the threats to environment and to development. And our analysis is clear. Present trends and policies can not continue. They will destroy the resource base on which we all depend.

Poverty continues to tie hundreds of millions of people to an existence which cannot be reconciled with human dignity and the need for solidarity. And in a world where poverty is endemic, the environment and the natural resources will always be prone to overuse and degradation.

Many of the threats to the environment 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.

Our Commission found that there is no contradiction between environment and development. Environmental degradation and the unequal distribution of wealth and power are different aspects of the same set of problems.

Changes must be made if disastrous mistakes are to be avoided, but we also believe that it is possible to make these changes. Human resources, knowledge and capabilities have never been greater. We have the power to create a future which is more prosperous, more just and more secure for all.

Time has come to start the process of change. We in the North have a special responsibility. For too long have we neglected that we are playing lethal games with vital life-support systems.

-For too long we have used the atmosphere, soil and water 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 agricultural and settlement patterns.

-For too long we have overlooked the devastating effects of acidification, of overuse of chemical products and pesticides,

-For too long we have exported our first generation of environmental problems to the Third World and maintained an economic system which leads to environmental decline in developing countries.

It is time that we realize that we all share a common future. Maybe it is the notions, North, South, East and West that lure many into believing that we may chose to separate ourselves in a world that has become so interconnected. The need to take a holistic view of the world is becoming more and more obvious day by day.

Take the drought in Africa. Is it a separate climatic phenomenon? Is it due to agricultural practices? What are the impacts of the world economic system? How much is man-made, and who and where are the people who make it?

We need new concepts, and new values to mobilize change. What we call for is a new global ethic

We need a new political approach to environment and development, where 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.

We need to create more awareness and to mobilize people in all corners of this globe and in all walks of life. We need a sense of mission and to offer a common framework and a vision for a better future.

The Commission defines the overriding political concept of sustainable development as such a common framework, as a broad concept for social and economic progress and change.

Sustainable development as defined by the Commission requires a fairer distribution of wealth within and among nations. It requires political reforms, fair access to knowledge and resources, and real, popular participation in decision-making.

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. And only economic growth can create the capacity to solve environmental problems.

But the contents of growth must be changed. Growth cannot 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 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.

Less than a week ago here in Toronto, the economic summit for the first time endorsed the concept of sustainable development. That decision brings new hope and belief in international cooperation, not least for the Third World. I wish to thank Prime Minister Mulroney for his efforts and his success.

In the 1980s, however, the developing countries have witnessed a reversal of the earlier 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 the 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 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 now 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.

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 have totalled over a hundred billion dollars? Isn't it appalling that while close to a billion people are living in poverty and squalor, the per capita income of about 50 developing countries declined last year?

There is a need for a fresh impetus in international cooperation. Development aid and lending must be increased, and the debt crisis must be resolved. The ultimate goal must be to forge an economic partnership based on equitable trade and to achieve a new era of growth, one which enhances the resource base rather than degrades it. The mission must be to make nations return to negotiations on the global issues after years of decline in real multilateralism. The decisions at the Toronto summit bring new hope that this may soon happen.

The theme of this conference may have a mission far beyond its stated topic. It may be the awareness-creator. It may erect a pillar of wisdom in the much needed global educational campaign on environment and development. It may finally open our eyes to the fundamental fact that the earth is one even if the world of man is still divided. The atmosphere knows no boundaries. We cannot act as if nature does.

For too long we have thought of the atmosphere as a limitless good. We have been burning fuel and emitting pollutants, pressing aerosol buttons, and blowing foam to our heart's content.

But 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 NOx. 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 the life of the human race.

While theories about the physical effect of CO2 on the climate were presented more than a hundred years ago, what is new is the certainty that it will happen unless we take decisive corrective action now!

As far back as 1969 we in Scandinavia discovered that the acidification of our lakes and rivers was related to growing sulphur emissions in central Europe. Today acid rain has become a major environmental issue in Europe and Northern America, and a rapidly growing threat in other parts of the world. Canada, we all know, has been on the receiving end for years.

When the Convention on transboundary air pollution was adopted in 1979 after long years of struggle for necessary support, and then followed in 1985 by the protocol on 30% reduction of sulphur emissions, the problems seemed to be manageable. The control technologies were known and widely available.

With nitrogen oxides, however, the problem has proved to be far more complex. The number of sources is greater. Abatement

measures, although known and tested for a number of years, have, in the case of mobile sources, severe drawbacks.

Even so, a NOx protocol for the ECE region will be signed later this year. The first step includes a commitment to freeze total NOx emissions in ECE countries before the end of 1994. The second step contains an obligation to renegotiate the first step 6 months after the protocol enters into force, using nature's own absorptive capacity, or critical load concept, as a basis for negotiations.

The regional acidification problem has proved to be more and more complicated as scientific knowledge has matured. The lesson we are learning in the ECE region should sound an alarm in other parts of the world. It is essential that such air pollution problems be dealt with in all regions. They cannot wait until the damage is as widespread as in the ECE regions. By then it may be too late.

In 1974, when scientists put forward the theory that chlorofluorocarbons could destroy our globe's protective ozone layer, they could not point to actual damage. On the contrary, they thought that any damage which might appear would not occur before the next century. Research showed that once released there was no way for the atmosphere to brake them down into harmless substances. And it would take many years from the time of release until the actual damage appeared.

The news of the ozone hole 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!

We need general adherence to the Montreal-protocol. The European Community in particular has a special responsibility. I am pleased to announce that today, in New York, Norway is ratifying this milestone in international cooperation.

Yet there are indications that the situation is more serious than ever. Recent scientific findings show that the ozone layer has been depleted also over the northern hemisphere. We cannot ignore this evidence. Stronger measures are clearly called for. Steps must be taken now to secure a new commitment when we revise the protocol in 1990!

We know from our Norwegian action plan that around 90% of our national CFC consumption can be eliminated before 1995 without disrupting the economy. In fact the cost in Norway of such reductions is estimated at around 8 dollars pr. person pr. year. We in the developed countries: how can we even discuss if we can afford it? We have no choice!

The awareness of the threat of climatic change has increased significantly since international work on the ozone layer started. It is popular to talk about the "greenhouse effect", but shouldn't we talk about the "heat trap" instead?

We know now that not only CO₂, but a number of other gases as well contribute to global heating. Presently these other trace gases cause one third of the total global warming. And unless something is done, their contribution in the next 50 years will double the effect of CO₂.

Scientists still have no unanimous view on the magnitude of the climate change problem, but it is established beyond any doubt that we will experience a global change in climate. An average global temperature increase over the next 50 years of 1.5 to 4.5 degrees is enormous. It took between 10 and 20 000 years for the world's temperature to increase about 5 degrees. The impact of climatic change may be greater and more drastic than any other challenges that mankind has faced with the exception of the threat of nuclear war.

The effects on the whole ecological balance will be drastic. The time span needed for plants to adjust to a new climate is normally hundreds of years. The deserts will expand. The crops in today's marginal areas will be lost. Extremes of weather - storms, rainfalls, frost or heat - may become more common. The sea level may rise 1 meter or more, and with 1/3 of the world's population living in low-lying coastal areas, such a development will have dramatic consequences. Political stability may be threatened in many parts of the world, and the number of ecological refugees may increase. In sum, climatic change will affect us all profoundly, regardless of where we live. And as always, the poorest countries will be the ones most severely affected.

All of this may not happen, or not that severely. But the potential risks are so high, that we can not sit back hoping that problems will disappear. We are the ones who must take the initiatives. We must set the limits and we must prevent the potential disasters for future generations, from whom we have borrowed this earth.

Time has come to develop an action plan for protecting the atmosphere. Acid rain, depletion of the ozone layer and climatic change are not separate problems. They are heavily interlinked with each other. We have come to a threshold. If we cross this threshold, we may not be able to return.

To secure our common future, drastic action has to be taken. My question is; will the improved relations between East and West release the human and financial potential that will be needed to address these common challenges? Will internationalist endeavours prevail over narrow-mindedness? Will hostile attitudes to internationally negotiated arrangements and institutions yield to a coalition of reason? In 1988, when it was decided to dismantle the INF-missiles, when President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev walked the red square together, will we be able to deal with vital issues of environment and development, in a real climate for change?

As one step towards reaching that goal together - I propose an international action plan for protecting the atmosphere and, in particular, for preventing climatic change.

1. Firstly, we should launch immediate international discussions on the feasibility of adopting regional strategies for stabilizing and reducing energy consumption and use, before the end of the century.

If we are serious in our attempts, we must be prepared to tackle the myth that energy consumption must be allowed to grow unchecked. In Norway we have considered our options very carefully. We are now aiming at a stabilization in energy consumption by the year 2000.

A second step should aim at altering the composition of energy use and a reduction in energy consumption to reduce environmental costs. Important means would be correct energy pricing, including environmental costs, and to tap the potential of energy efficient technologies and conservation measures.

A change in Norwegian production and consumption patterns will only contribute marginally to solving the global problem. Presently, developing countries must be allowed time for adaption and the chance to increase their consumption. However, industrialized countries have a special obligation. We must be the first to change our production and consumption patterns.

Our readiness to do so will be the acid test in the eyes of the developing countries that industrialized countries are serious about their responsibilities.

2. Secondly, we should establish a comprehensive international research, development and information program on renewable energy.

The Commission recommended that renewable energy should form the foundation of the global energy structure during the 21 century.

An international research development and information programme should be set up. It should provide information about availability, regularity, efficiency and the costs involved.

3. Thirdly, we should establish an extensive technology transfer programme with particular emphasis on the needs of the developing countries.

Funds must be forthcoming to help developing countries choose a safe and sustainable energy pathway. Easy access to modern and low polluting technologies is vital to all countries, and especially to the developing countries.

Unless those countries are given access to clean technologies, we will all have to deal with the consequences.

4. Fourthly, we must increase scientific research.

Several international scientific programmes have already been established, including those under the framework of WMO and UNEP. It is vital that such scientific programmes are open for

participation from all countries, and that countries are urged to join international scientific programmes.

The effects of climatic change on a global and regional scale should be a priority topic for a scientific programme.

5. Fifthly, we should consider establishing a global convention on protection of the climate to coordinate scientific activity, technology research and transfer, information exchange and concrete measures to reduce emissions of harmful substances.

Mr. Chairman,

The themes I have addressed are critical for Our Common Future. To secure that future we must take action, even before we have full knowledge of the problems we are faced with. The task is huge. The action I have outlined is the minimum response required. The setting is urgent. The threats are real.

We have come to a point in the history when we can no longer act primarily as citizens of any single nation state. We are irreversibly entangled in the same destiny, but together we also have enormous possibilities.

We stand at a cross-roads in the evolution of the political culture of humankind. 40- 70 000 years ago humankind took up its struggle with the biosphere. 200 years ago we seemingly gained the upper hand in that struggle. Now it is time to take a giant leap forward in the upgrading of civilization.