

Strasbourg, 26. October 1988

Prime Minister

Gro Harlem Brundtland

Chairman of the World Commission on
Environment and Development.

OUR COMMON FUTURE.

It is a privilege for me to address members of the European Parliament on the vital issues related to environment and development. I have been asked to address these questions both in a global and in a European perspective and on the background of my experience as chairman of the World Commission on Environment and Development, The report, Our Common Future, was issued in April 1987.

The initiative of the United Nations to establish our commission was a clear demonstration of a wide-spread feeling in the international community that we were not yet able to address the vital global issues and deal to effectively with them.

When we released the report we pointed to the many disasters that had happened during the life-time of the Commission and that had raised the awareness of people all over the world to many of these global threats; Chernobyl. Bhopal, Basle and, overshadowing them all in scale and impact, the drought and famine in Africa.

In the course of the last year and a half we have received new scientific evidence that should compell us all to take responsible action. The development crisis is acute. Poverty is still endemic. The number of absolute poor people continues to increase.

Present economic trends are clearly inadequate to restore growth in the developing countries. Industrial trends are aggravating the threat to the ozone layer. No effective measures have been

taken to counter the accelerating greenhouse effect, or "the heat trap". Forests are still shrinking. Deserts are still expanding. Safe water is becoming more scarce, and soils are eroding at unprecedented rates. Many of the industrialized world's first generation of environmental problems are being exported to the Third World.

The Report, "Our Common Future" sounds an urgent warning. Present trends and policies can not continue. They will destroy the resource base on which we all depend.

However, the Commission also believes that it is possible to make the changes which are needed. Our collective resources, human knowledge and ingenuity have never been greater. If these resources are used then it is possible to change the disastrous course that we are pursuing.

The Commission has presented the overriding political concept of sustainable development as a common framework for a real change and coordination of policies. It is a broad concept of social and economic progress and change.

The Commission's call for sustainable development is a call for a new era of economic growth. This has surprised many who remember the Global 2000 report and the zero growth philosophy of the seventies. The Commission's thinking was based on the assessment that only growth can create the capacity to solve environmental problems. And only a healthy environment can enhance our resource base and sustain economic growth.

But the contents of growth must clearly be changed. Growth can not be based on overexploitation of resources. Growth must be managed to enhance the environment and the resource base.

In order to change the contents of growth, 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 to pursue policies leading to sustainable development.

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 promoting a development that is not only economically and socially, but also ecologically sustainable.

In Europe, we have been able to solve some of the environmental problems that peaked two decades ago. The sky is blue again over the Ruhr-gebiet. There are fish in the Thames. However, we must be aware: The present environmental challenges in Europe cannot be solved by unilateral policies. They clearly require international solutions.

Our cultural heritage, the specific values of political life in Europe place upon us an opportunity to take a lead also in a global transition towards sustainable development. Our aid and trade policies, energy, industry and agricultural policies, - and the budgets which give expression to these policies - determine whether development will be environmentally, economically and socially sustainable. This is true not only in Europe, but given the reach of European policies, on a global scale.

In the UN General Assembly this fall, more speakers than ever before dealt with these issues. The debate in the General Assembly shows that the issue of sustainable development has now become one of the items at the top of the global political agenda.

A new trend also came clearly forward at this years World Bank meeting in Berlin. I will particularly mention the opening statement of Chacellor Kohl who announced strong and new measures for debt alleviation linked to the preservation of tropical forests, a completetely new angle in the context of the World Bank, even if the Bank itself presently is changing its structure and sensitizing itself to the link between environment and development.

There is a new climate for change in international co-operation. Yet, in relation to the crisis afflicting the Third World, it remains a paradox that the per capita development aid of many large industrialized countries have declined. The OECD average was 0.34% last year as against the internationally agreed target of 0.7 % and the figures at around 1% of the Scandinavian countries and of the Netherlands.

Clearly, both development aid and lending must be increased. The developing countries will need additional resources to be able to establish development priorities which are consistent with sustainability. In many developing countries the level of debt servicing is a serious obstacle to sustainable development. There is a need for a double track approach: The development crisis and the debt crisis have to be urgently and effectively addressed. They are both equally acute.

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 this summer bring new hope that this indeed could happen.

A more effective co-operation 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 Cancun.

But effective global cooperation must be supplemented by stronger regional efforts. It is in the Western industrialized countries that many of the world's environmental problems arise. We use more energy, consume more raw materials, cause more pollution than any other region. We must therefore redouble our commitment to sustainable development, nationally, in regional organizations as well as globally.

The adoption one year ago of the Montreal Protocol on the ozone layer was a major achievement. Norway was the third country to ratify this Protocol. Now we need ratification by a sufficient number of states in order to allow it to enter into force. The ratification by the EC - which I understand was decided by the Council two weeks ago - is very helpful in this respect. We need to move further and secure general adherence to the Protocol. But new and alarming scientific evidence clearly show that we must have higher ambitions. We must aim at an early revision with a view to accelerating the implementation of effective measure and widen the number of substances which it covers.

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 problem of climatic change - the "greenhouse effect", or let us rather call it the "heat trap" - must now be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

We should therefore as soon as possible adopt an international action plan on the protection of the atmosphere which should contain at least the following elements:

1. Firstly we should launch immediately international discussions on the feasibility of adopting regional strategies for stabilizing and reducing energy consumption and use, before the end of the century.
2. Secondly we should establish a comprehensive international research, development and information programme on renewable energy.
3. Thirdly we should establish an extensive technology transfer programme with particular emphasis on the needs of the developing countries.

4. Fourthly, we must increase scientific research, and
5. Fifthly, we should consider establishing a global convention on the protection of the climate.

Another increasingly urgent environment problem of a global nature is the problem of dealing with hazardous and nuclear wastes. It is our hope that the ongoing negotiations on a global convention on the transport of hazardous wastes will lead to the adoption of a strong and effective instrument early next year.

We also support the proposal to hold a global follow-up UN conference in 1992, which should focus on all the broad issues of sustainable development.

In our own region, the work of the ECE stands out as example of an area where regional co-operation has led to far-reaching positive results benefitting all countries in the region. The adoption in 1979 of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, was a milestone in this regard. Another important event in our region was the entering into force earlier this year of the Helsinki Protocol on 30 per cent reduction of sulphur emissions, which is a instrument within the framework of the air pollution convention.

Transboundary air pollution problems have been, and still are an extremely important environmental issue in Norway. We have severe damage due to acid deposition caused by emissions in other countries. The implementation of the Helsinki Protocol will be a first important step towards an improvement of the situation in this field. A 30 per cent reduction is, however, far from enough to solve the problem. We therefore welcome the recent EC Directive on emissions from large combustion plants implying major, stepwise reductions of emissions of SO^2 and NO_x during the next 15 years.

We are also pleased that a protocol will be signed later this year with respect to the other major component of acid deposition

contributing to air pollution in the European region, nitrogen oxides.

This protocol, as a first step, implies a freeze in NO_x emissions. More importantly, the Protocol contains an obligation to renegotiate the first step 6 months after it enters into force, using nature's tolerance as its main basis for negotiations.

The Ministerial Conference of EFTA and EC on the environment in the Netherlands last November also represented an important step forward. The ministers confirmed their support for a reorientation of national and international policies towards sustainable development patterns. They also called upon all policy sectors to become fully responsible for the environmental consequences of their activities, and agreed on the need for follow-up of the Report by all Governments of EC and EFTA and by the EC. We must build further on this important landmark between EC and EFTA.

The Norwegian government will arrange, in co-operation with the Economic Commission for Europe, a regional conference at ministerial level in Bergen, Norway, in May 1990 to review progress in follow-up of selected aspects of the World Commission's Report in our region, and to propose further follow-up measures. This conference will concentrate on economy and ecology, and key factors influencing the environment. The topics of the conference will lay strong emphasis on the theme of integration of environmental concerns in national decision-making and in selected economic sectors.

We have received positive support for this conference from many EC countries and anticipate important contributions from the Community as a whole.

It has been encouraging to note that many governments have embarked upon the process of reviewing their programmes and policies on the basis of the recommendations of the World

Commission's Report with a view to integrating environmental concerns into planning and policies in all sectors.

In Norway, we launched a broad national hearing on the Report shortly after it had been published. We also established a Cabinet Committee to co-ordinate the Government's follow-up action. A report on national follow-up and our policy aimed at contributing to global sustainable development will be presented to Parliament before the end of this year. Let me also mention that all government Ministries in their budget proposals for 1989 have been required to describe how their proposals will contribute to solving environment and resource management problems.

The challenges that we face are inter-sectoral, multidisciplinary and truly international in character. Regional and global problems require regional and global solutions. Already Aristotle noted that "property-getting in accordance with nature, is not without limits". Europe has a global responsibility but also great opportunities.

We know that earlier in history, Europe was all but unified. Europe was a land of envy hatred and strife, of devastating wars and of great human suffering. It was more of a jig-saw of barriers, and at each barrier a body of officials whose business it was to impose every imaginable obstacle to hinder people's free exchanges.

Let us recall the Abbé de Saint-Pierre who at the time of the Peace of Utrecht pondered on the ill faith of Europe. His vision, ridiculed as incredibly naïve at the time, was a community of peaceful nations having a common legal framework and common institutions. His most daring vision has come true today. We have a situation where for the first time in history, war between Western European nations is inconceivable and impossible.

We should recognize that this Europe can and should take the lead in responsibly addressing the most urgent issues of our time. The World Commission has offered its report a basis for the future.