

Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland

Acceptance speech - University of Aveiro, 4 December 1991

Minister Borrego,
Rector Araújo
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to be here in Aveiro to receive the first international honorary doctorate of the University. It is also a distinct pleasure to visit a university which is so determined to establish the links between economy and ecology in its educational program.

I am honored by the kind word extended to me here today. I feel that I share this honour with all the members of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Commissioners from 21 countries worked together for three years to produce the consensus report "Our Common Future". And still it proved decisive for our success that thousands of people all over the world supported us in our work and believed that we would actually be able to adopt a global agenda for change.

One of the reasons why the World Commission on Environment and Development was established in 1983 was a sense of frustration and inadequacy in the international community. It was widely felt that we had not defined long-term strategies to deal with the interrelationship between people, resources, environment and development. We had established a set of international institutions to deal with problems sector by sector.

The world economy had become global, but the management of economic and ecological interdependence had not.

What we needed was cross-cutting approaches, we needed substantive responses to interlinked issues and we needed to organize international cooperation in a way which would effectively respond to future needs.

Clearly, the evidence that nature cannot indefinitely sustain accelerating human demands is too compelling to ignore. The relationship between human activity and the earth's resource base has reached a turning-point.

What the Commission called for was a collective dedication by nations of differing political systems and cultural heritages to a new common goal: sustainable development.

The climate of popular interest in shared global challenges has never been more favorable. Public attention is focussing as never before on global warming, ozone depletion, pollution of the oceans, destruction of tropical forests, and other environmental threats.

Simultaneously, we have become more aware of the impact of externally controlled development policies and practices, and the burdens imposed by massive foreign debt, on the natural resources and ecological systems of the Third World.

The profound political changes over the last few years have created an unprecedented chance to rethink our approaches to environmental and development issues. For a brief period of time, we have the chance to create new policies, practices, and institutions for a more sustainable national and global future.

Development cannot subsist on a deteriorating environmental resource base. The environment cannot be protected when growth plans consistently fail to consider the costs of environmental destruction.

Today, many economic development plans erode the environmental resources upon which they depend. They undermine the long-term health of both developing and industrial countries through failure to take account of these facts:

- Environmental stresses are interconnected. For example, deforestation not only destroys natural habitats, but increases runoff and accelerates soil erosion and siltation of rivers and lakes.
- Ecological and economic concerns are interdependent. Therefore, environment and economics must be integrated from the start in decision-making.
- Environmental and economic problems are linked to many social and political factors. For example, the rapid population growth that has such a profound effect on the environment and development in many nations is driven in part by the inferior status of women in these societies. New approaches must improve the status of women, protect vulnerable groups, and promote local participation in decision-making.
- Ecological impacts do not respect political boundaries. Water pollution moves through shared rivers, lakes, and seas. The atmosphere carries pollutants over vast distances. Chemical runoff from farms, hazardous emissions from factories, and warmed water released from power plants transgress national frontiers. These harmful conditions must be dealt with in a political context, through well-enforced laws and agreements. At every level, effective citizen participation is essential.

Sustainable development recognizes that if we are to continue to have access to the resources that make life possible, and if

we are to expand the benefits of industrial progress, we must be more cognizant of the implications and limits of that path.

The problems of poverty and underdevelopment cannot be solved unless we have a new era of growth in which developing countries play a stronger role and reap greater benefits.

Progress in both developed and developing countries cannot continue without regard for the ecological foundations of development. If natural resources are damaged or destroyed, economic social, and political development will stall and, ultimately, they will decline.

Each nation will have to work out its own policies. But it is fundamental that the transition to sustainable development must be managed jointly by all nations.

Sustainable development includes two key components:

- the concept of **needs**, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor; and
- the idea of **limitations** on the ability of the environment to meet those needs.

It also implies acceptance of consumption standards that are within the bounds of ecological possibility.

The goal of sustainability requires that **all countries rethink their policies and actions with respect to their impact on world ecology and economic development**. Critical objectives in this process include:

- Reviving growth. Poverty reduces people's capacity to use resources wisely and intensifies pressures on the environment. The stagnant or declining economic growth trends of this decade must be reversed, especially in developing countries, where the links between economic growth, alleviation of poverty, and improvement of environmental conditions are most apparent.
- Economic growth must become less energy-intensive and more equitable in its social impact.
- We must meet the essential needs of an expanding population in the developing world. The greatest single challenge is to create employment opportunities that will assure minimum consumption standards. Other essentials are production of more protein-rich foods to fight undernourishment; satisfaction of energy needs, and guarantees of the basics of housing, water supply, sanitation, and health care.
- We must ensure a sustainable and stabilized population level. This is important to all nations but would have great impact on Third World cities where shortages of housing, water, sanitation, and mass-transit are most acute.

By the end of the 1980s, the concept of sustainable development as defined by the World Commission had become firmly anchored on the international agenda. It had been endorsed by the UN and other international organizations, by national governments - including the leaders of the Group of 7, and by a wide range of non-governmental organizations both from the economic and

Where do we stand now, in 1991. There is now less than nine months left before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil. Our ambitions for the Rio Conference must match the nature and magnitude of the problems facing us. While we still have the time to make necessary changes, that time is soon running out.

For the Rio Conference to be truly successful, it is essential that governments become involved at the highest level in the preparations and not wait until the Conference itself.

Industrialized countries are still the biggest polluters. But we need a climate of cooperation between the North and the South if we are to conclude the international agreements that we need.

Additionality, equity and efficiency are the only principles that will work.

Unless we will be able to provide additional money and technological cooperation to developing countries in order to tackle their existential environmental and development problems, chances are less that they will see their best interests served by global agreements.

Equity means that all people must have a real chance to acquire the means whereby they can make their own choices and take responsibility for their own future. We must create a world economy where all countries can participate on an equal footing.

Efficiency means that we must search for cost-effective solutions to environmental problems. If we fail to do so, then we risk stagnation of the whole process. Our goal must be to achieve maximum environmental benefit for the minimum cost. We will all benefit if we reduce emissions where reductions cost the least. This must be the primary objective of a new generation of environmental agreements.

In the ongoing negotiations on a climate convention, Norway has proposed a cost-effective implementation of targets set to limit global emissions of greenhouse gases. Targets can be reached by states acting individually or in cooperation with other states.

Through a clearing house we could make concrete projects known which can attract potential partners in the North and the South, projects that are economically profitable and which will lead to reduced total emission of the countries involved. Then we can truly pursue the common good by pursuing common interests.

To achieve our goals, we need to improve the international institutions we have created. We need a more dynamic United Nations with clearer aims and which bases its priorities on present needs. Peace, environment and development must be our agenda for the 21st century.

In some regions - particularly in Europe - there is a new willingness to establish new and stronger international authority to regain political control of the management of a more interdependent reality. Nations are learning that they must cede some parts of their formal sovereignty to regain more sovereignty over processes that transcend national frontiers.

We now see a increasing opportunity, indeed a historical opportunity, to change the way the increasing interdependence is met. This opportunity must not be lost. Nations must seize it. They must live up to their common responsibility to determine the future of humankind.