

Prime Minister
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Keynote Speech
Environment Northern Seas

The North Sea - this shallow and narrow part of the world's oceans - is surrounded by some of the most advanced states in the world. These states have a common responsibility to protect the environment of the North Sea. It would be an ominous sign for the world at large if we were to fail in our efforts.

On the contrary, we have a unique opportunity to succeed, and to demonstrate to the world that our collective resources can be applied to protect and restore the environment. As was stated in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development - humankind has such a capacity. Our knowledge and capabilities have never been greater. My appeal to you is to redouble your efforts to develop concrete solutions and to produce concrete results.

Environment Northern Seas is precisely the kind of coalition which is needed and which builds on the spirit of the Bergen Conference last year. Politicians, industrialists, economists, scientists, trade unions and NGOs coming together to pursue a common goal - that is what we need.

The broad attendance at this Conference reflects the broad spectrum of problems and interests that are involved.

And just as leaders from business and industry took on themselves a serious commitment by signing the Business Charter on Sustainable Development at the second World Industry Conference on Environmental Management in Rotterdam in April, I am pleased to see that industry is showing a readiness and ability to assume its share of the responsibility, together with the non-governmental groups and governments, here at Environment Northern Seas.

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The quality of the marine environment of the North Sea is essentially a matter of polluting substances, but far from only that. It is a matter of conducting highly advanced industrial activities and maritime transport alongside with fishing and recreational interests. It is a matter of controlling emissions from air, sea and landbased sources without damage to the biological and physical state of these "Narrow Seas", as they were called by ancient navigators, on which densely populated areas depend.

That is essentially why we need to apply state of the art skills from a wide range of disciplines to really come to grips with the

problems. That is why each and every skill which is represented here is so important for our record as responsible caretakers of common goods and common interests.

The environmental cooperation which has been developed between the North Sea States has been a pilot project for international cooperation on environmental management. The common goal has been defined. Now, all key players must take their share. An important part of the job will be to develop environmentally sound technologies to meet environmental challenges

Political leadership has been essential in establishing this cooperation. The North Sea Conferences have been a driving force in setting goals and priorities for the protection of the North Sea. Not only are the Oslo and Paris Conventions on the protection of the marine environment in the North-East Atlantic region important landmarks in the region itself; they also serve as a model for similar regional cooperation on environmental issues in other parts of the world.

The North Sea cooperation on environmental issues is also a product of our democracies. An active and committed public which demands effective measures is required to truly reverse the threats to our marine and coastal environment. Today, no democratic government can ignore the demand for effective environmental action if it wants to retain political support. And those governments who can rely on an environmentally conscious public opinion and on the key sectors represented here today will be most effective in producing concrete environmental results.

Today the North Sea States are taking steps nationally to ensure that they achieve the goals agreed upon internationally. There is every reason to believe that the goal of reducing discharges of hazardous substances by half from 1985 to 1995 is within reach. In Norway, we believe it is realistic to speak of reductions of between 50 and 90 per cent for the different substances. This will be obtained through stringent discharge criteria for industry, product control activities, and better control of the handling and treatment of hazardous waste.

When it comes to nutrients extensive work is now being carried out to reduce the discharges from municipal sewage networks, from agriculture and from industry, and a reduction of about 50 per cent by 1995 seems possible.

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The key role of technology in Norwegian off-shore industry since the late 1960s is evident. The limits of what was considered humanly and technologically possible have been widely expanded, and I have no doubt that this trend will continue. The speed of this will largely be determined by all of you present here today. You must give new meaning to the slogan that nothing is impossible, but the impossible may take somewhat longer time to achieve.

Safety concerns have been, and are, of prime importance. Safety concerns require close cooperation between governments, industry and trade unions, through a mix of governments legislation, industrial compliance, human innovation and a highly skilled, dedicated workforce.

The primacy of human safety and environmental security are essential in offshore development. The structural safety of platforms, to take one important example, is crucial both for personnel and for preventing environmental accidents. So are safe working conditions for the personnel operating such installations.

We must never pause in our efforts to prevent accidents. All those who followed the Bravo blowout in April 1977 know how serious the consequences can be. I was Minister of Environment in Norway at the time, and I can assure you of the lasting impression it left on all of us - that oil pollution might endanger the marine environment of the North Sea region. In the end, we managed to avoid the worst scenarios, thanks to a major effort from all parties concerned.

We came out of these dramatic days with a firm conviction that we had to do everything in our power to avoid a repetition. This commitment was further strengthened after the Alexander Kielland flotell capsized in 1980, which was a national tragedy for Norway.

Since 1980, more than 1 billion Norwegian kroner have been spent on oil spill response strategies. Extensive safety courses for all people working offshore have been made compulsory. In the process, we have gained experience and developed expertise that have also proved highly useful in tackling oil spills in other parts of the world's oceans.

Even if no guarantee against new accidents can be provided, major environmental disasters have been avoided since 1980. Here again, cooperation between government and industry has been essential and will continue to be essential. We have established agreements and procedures which define the environmental responsibilities of all the parties concerned, including the obligations to continually assess the environmental impact of petroleum activities. Technology and procedures have been upgraded to meet new and more stringent environmental standards.

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During the 25 years of offshore activities and environmental cooperation in the North Sea, there have been major changes in the way we approach environmental issues generally. In the early stages, we were primarily concerned with discharges, oil spills and "end-of-pipe" problems, and precisely this "end-of-pipe"-approach was for a long time prevalent in industrialized countries dealing with most environmental problems. These are still necessary concerns, but we realize today that we must take a more all-embracing approach - a cradle to grave approach - and that we are facing problems of a more global nature which require

profound changes in the way our societies and economies function. We need a new generation of environmental solutions.

The threat of global warming is one of the most difficult issues we have ever faced. It is not merely a pollution problem. It is part of the very essence of lifestyle and consumption patterns on a global scale. It goes to the core of the North-South gap. It is a fundamental part of the economic life and industrial level of states.

We cannot avoid or postpone dealing with global warming. We have enough scientific evidence about causes and probable effects to know that the costs of not acting will be very high, and that a further delay of action will increase these costs even more.

Because of the costs involved, we must start asking the question: where can we get most environmental value for our money? In order to get maximum environmental benefit at a minimum cost, we need to develop environmental agreements based on cost-effectiveness, equitable burden-sharing and a recognition of shared, but differentiated responsibility.

Norway has submitted a set of proposals on a global climate regime to the negotiating process on a new world climate convention. In our opinion, it is possible to negotiate a convention containing ambitious global targets while ensuring a sustainable development of the world economy.

In order to achieve cost-effectiveness, countries should be permitted to achieve their commitments nationally or partly in cooperation with other countries. Arrangements could be made on a bilateral, regional or multilateral basis.

We have proposed the establishment of an international clearing house as the most promising option for joint implementation. A clearing house would appraise and select projects for reducing emissions according to their cost-effectiveness and coordinate the funding for the projects. In the long run, a system of tradeable emission permits could also be considered.

A world climate convention should aim at global targets for the reduction of emission of greenhouse gases through a comprehensive approach. Before we reach agreement on such a global target, the national commitments made by individual countries or group of countries will continue to underpin the negotiations and efforts now under way.

A new international regime to combat global warming must have as its first and overriding objective the reduction of the total load of climate gases on the world's atmosphere. We must take great care to avoid erecting unintended barriers to the use of more environmentally benign energy forms, such as natural gas. A system of tradeable emission permits could promote significant global reductions and would clearly be a step in the right direction.

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While the prospects of global warming are important, other issues also threaten the global environment. In the developing world, poverty and overpopulation often intensify other ecological threats, such as desertification, deforestation, soil erosion and the degradation of freshwater resources.

To meet these challenges, we need a global programme for sustainable development. This is the basic aim underlying the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Brazil next June.

An intensive negotiating process is under way to prepare the documents to be adopted in Brazil, - conventions on climate and biodiversity, the Agenda (21) for the next century, and the Earth Charter.

In these negotiations, the questions of technology transfer and the need for additional financial resources to developing countries remain crucial. But these issues are also the most difficult to deal with. One of our main challenges will be to change the present trend where there are few signs that significant sources of additional resources for international environmental problems will be available by next June.

It is therefore important that also the ENS takes up this development dimension by focussing on technology for sustainable development in Sub-Sahara, thus capturing the linkage between environment and development.

With respect to financial transfers, the Norwegian Government has, for its part, established a national climate fund which is separate from and additional to the ordinary budget for international development cooperation.

However, in order to achieve sustainable development worldwide, we need to do more than increase our contributions to development budgets. We need to shift the overall direction of the world economy, nothing less.

There is now an increased understanding that this requires better interaction between governments and markets. A market-friendly approach is necessary to enhance the efficiency of the production and distribution of goods and services. But markets cannot function in a vacuum. They require a legal and regulatory framework that only governments can provide.

We need to accelerate our efforts to establish international mechanisms that would adjust the direction of economic activities when the market fails. Today, we see clear examples of such market failure in the pricing of environmental resources. Present energy policies in effect subsidize environmental degradation. The price of tropical timber in no way reflects the full environmental costs of the destruction of tropical rain forests.

We must make more use of economic instruments, both internationally and nationally to arrive at a more accurate environmental pricing of goods and services. Incentives and disincentives should be used to help us reach our common goals

quickly and effectively. We must coordinate environmental taxes and fees to avoid trade disruptions or unintended shifts in competitiveness. We need nothing less than a strong international public sector, We need effective international institutions and coordinated international action based on coordinated participation by national governments.

Governments need industry that is actively and positively involved in developing and implementing new and durable solutions. Such solutions must be environmentally sustainable, economically feasible and commercially attractive.

We need interdisciplinary approaches and cross-sectoral solutions, such as those promoted here at the Environment Northern Seas.

This conference here in Stavanger should be an important contribution to the regional and global efforts now under way to protect and restore our global environment. Let us make the North Sea a laboratory for environmental excellence. I wish the organizers and participants all the best in the important meetings that will take place during the next days.

The challenge is defined. The potential is great. We expect all participants to share their competence and innovative capacity so that the ENS can provide a basis for that kind of progress which the world will need so dearly in the 1990s and beyond.