

Prime Minister
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IULA World Congress
Oslo 24 June 1991

KEYNOTE SPEECH - THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY

Local authorities across the world are by definition close to local problems. But the fact that those local problems cannot be seen in isolation from the global trends and challenges of our time is clear to all of us. This is why local authorities see their role in a wider global perspective. We must think globally when we act locally.

The preparations of this Conference prove that you have accepted this challenge. Norway is proud to host this Conference, which is an important event in our efforts to strengthen international cooperation for environment and development.

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Seen from outer space, the Earth appears as a small, fragile ball, dominated not by human activity but by a pattern of clouds, oceans, greenery and soils.

This was the opening image of "Our Common Future", the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. And this image was deliberately chosen. We wanted to underline that there is only one Earth. We are all in the same boat. We need a truly global perspective on our efforts to safeguard our common future. Again, this is why we need to think globally and act locally.

There was a time when people could protect themselves from the outside world by walls and fences, by emigrating to new worlds, or by the use of force. Today, this is no longer possible.

Today, we know that human activities often have a deep and disruptive impact on nature and on the basis for future life on Earth. Global warming and the probability of rapid climate change bring home to us the fact that mankind is now influencing nature in ways never before experienced in the history of our planet. We face urgent global problems such as ozone depletion and a massive loss of biological diversity. Deforestation, desertification, and soil erosion have become bywords for a form of development which is undermining the livelihoods of millions of people, particularly in the Third World.

The task of reversing these trends may seem overwhelming. Yet I

am convinced that it is possible to shape a future that is better, more prosperous, and more secure. Never before in human history have our financial and technological resources been greater. We need only the will to act and a strengthening of our capabilities for acting together.

During the 1990s, we must make decisive moves from common perception to common action. We must strengthen international cooperation at all levels, global, regional and local.

We are experiencing a rapid internationalization of our economies. Our medias for communication and information bring home to us every day fragmented images of a reality and a culture which is rapidly becoming global. But decision-makers must not be blinded by the immediate. We must adopt a longer term view and never forget what it takes to promote change; in-depth knowledge, firm commitment and a clear vision of where we are headed.

Political authorities must strengthen networks of international cooperation to regain their ability to deal with these problems.

We need to build a strong international public sector. We must pool our sovereignties and share the responsibility for peace, human rights and sustainable development.

To meet the challenges of environmental degradation, we must develop a new generation of international agreements, based on cost-effectiveness and on equitable burden-sharing.

In our focus on global environmental issues, a key task is to promote sustainable development in the South. This is where the real battle to save our common future will be won - or lost. More than 80 per cent of the world population already lives in the Third World, and this percentage is increasing. Paradoxically, population growth is usually most rapid where poverty is great and where health and education services are weak.

Whereas the rich world is beginning to cope with the first generation of environmental problems, these same problems are still very much on the increase in the Third World. In the countryside, poverty leads to greater pressure on marginal lands, thus increasing the rate of deforestation and desertification. In cities, the explosive rate of urbanization will lead to staggering pressures on local governments to provide basic services for health, education, collective transport and waste management. Urban decay is too often overlooked in our discussions on environmental problems.

The World Commission focused on human resource development as a crucial requirement not only to build up technical knowledge and capabilities, but also to create new values to help individuals and nations cope with rapidly changing social, environmental and development realities.

This perspective has since been supported by important studies by international organizations. The 1991 UNDP Human Development

report argues convincingly that there is a great potential for restructuring public budgets in favour of human development, not least in developing countries. Investments in education and fundamental health services have a strong, positive impact on poverty, population growth, and environmental awareness.

In the industrialized countries, we have made significant progress. A recent OECD report on the state of the environment points to a general reduction in urban air pollution and of reduced pollution of waterways. We are achieving better protection of land and habitats. Forest resources are increasing. Oil spills and discharges of dangerous chemicals have been reduced.

But the same report also stressed that many serious problems remain. Environmental policies are still weak. They are inefficient in many areas. We have not come far enough in integrating ecological concerns into economic decision-making. Environmental policies need to be pursued with renewed determination and innovation.

At the national level, governments must take the lead in setting goals and priorities. To achieve the transition to sustainable development, we must also focus on positive incentives for change. We must combine government regulations and incentives with industry's self-control and corporate strategies. And that means making more use also of economic instruments.

Governments should secure the essential infrastructure by providing economic, organizational and technological possibilities to meet local environmental challenges.

Clearly, we must all intensify our efforts at home, at the local level. We can do so in many ways, not only by political decisions, but also by changing our personal habits as consumers, by acting together to clean up waste and emissions which pollute our land, air and waters. We need to engage local authorities in the efforts to save our common future, as we are doing in Oslo today at this Congress.

We are gaining new experience. Let me take one example. During coffee breaks at this Conference, delegates could walk the few steps to Akerselva, the river that flows right through Oslo from its source in a clear lake in the forests north of the city to its estuary in Oslo Harbour.

Like rivers in many other cities around the world, Akerselva has gone through a period of increasing pollution from urbanization, human waste and industrial activities. At its worst, it was brown, dirty, and unhealthy.

Since then, a major clean-up effort has once more made the river inhabitable for fish and enjoyable for humans. Thanks to an intensive cooperation between national and local authorities, life has returned to the river. Buildings along the riverbank have been restored, preserving an important part of our cultural

and architectural heritage. The effort has not been without setbacks and disappointments. But the result is positive, in the same way as in London, where the smog has nearly been eliminated, and in numerous other communities around the world where dedicated clean-up operations have been initiated. Akerselva is now an environmental park for cultural history and city recreation.

Local authorities have an independent role to play in the initiation of measures necessary for human health and for ecological systems. They are close to the source of ecological decline and have a direct interest in finding the best solutions.

But local authorities must also be involved in implementing measures necessary to win the overall global battle to save our global environment. Already, several international instruments on air or water pollution require action at the local level. As we move closer to a world climate convention - which will require a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions - all sectors of our societies must take part.

My Government has this spring presented a white paper to the Norwegian Parliament on environmental issues and local authorities. As part of the implementation of national policy, we will transfer important environmental tasks to the regional and local authorities.

In this policy document, we underline the need to strengthen the structure and efforts for environmental management in each municipality. There is a particular need to strengthen the capabilities of regional and local authorities to carry out area planning and conservation of natural resources.

For local authorities, this reform implies increased environmental responsibility. Each municipality must make environmental concerns an integrated part of its policies.

Public participation is essential to our efforts to achieve sustainable development. A growing environmental awareness among citizens across the globe is an essential driving force in the battle to save our global environment. Public authorities at all levels must make use of the energy, the vitality and the capacity for innovation in independent groups and organizations.

If we succeed in establishing this partnership between the public and the independent sectors, the efforts to save our environment can also be instrumental in enhancing our democracies. One way of organizing such cooperation would be to establish local councils for sustainable development, where representatives of local authorities, the business community, nongovernmental organisations and concerned citizens could meet to address both local and global issues.

Local communities around the world can play a vital role in the adjustment of priorities and reorientation of resources that is now needed.

In the North, local governments can respond practically to global problems that are largely rooted in local day-to-day activities.

Internationally, communities in the North could transfer some of their experience in dealing with first-generation environmental problems to local authorities in the South. The transfer of technology, which is a key issue in the preparations for the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil, is not only a question of access to technological hardware and clean-up equipment. It is also a question of investing in technological expertise needed to deal with problems cost-effectively. It is often a matter of choosing the most appropriate technology to meet local needs and of stimulating innovation from indigenous sources.

The International Union of Local Authorities can play a vital role in stimulating international cooperation on environmental challenges in communities around the world. I was very encouraged when I read the main document from this Congress -the draft Oslo resolution on Environment, Health and Lifestyle. It contains sound principles, constructive proposals and an important programme for implementation and follow-up. Norwegian local authorities will play an active part in this process.

Local authorities often find themselves in a grey zone in the process of internationalization. They are often faced with the impact of decisions taken elsewhere. All too often, local communities feel too close to the problems but too distant from the decisions.

The answer is not to retreat but to strengthen international cooperation. Faced with a globalization of challenges and a regionalization of responses, we no longer have the option of seeking shelter from outside contact.

The basic problems facing the global community today are cross-sectoral. To deal with these problems and to exploit the new opportunities to shape a better future, we need action at all levels. We need to develop international cooperation not only between governments, but also between and across the different independent sectors, the business community, nongovernmental organizations, scientific groups and others.

We all welcome the International Union of Local Authorities as a committed partner in these efforts.