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THE GLOBAL TRANSITION - OUTLOOK FOR THE 1990s

By the end of this millennium the world population is likely to surpass 6 billion. We do not know where or when world citizen no. 6 billion will be born, but most likely it will be in a developing country. Probably the parents' pride and joy will be mixed with anxiety and fear for the immediate future. Possibly he or she will have many sisters and brothers, but not all of them will still be alive. The parents will worry about how are they going to feed the newcomer. Will he or she die from malnutrition or disease before the age of five? Will education be accessible and affordable? Will there be any hope for the future?

A few hours by air further North, another child will be born at the same time. The parents will make wonderful plans for the newcomer, carefully choose the right baby diet and think about what the future will bring in terms of family, education and career.

These are worlds apart - and yet so close.

Through satellites and cables we receive fragmented images of this world of sharp contrasts. Although electronics and the media are bringing the world closer together, still the economic and social gaps between us are widening. Even though progress has been made in many fields, we continue to live in a world where abundance exists side by side with extreme need, where waste overshadows want, and where our very existence is threatened by mismanagement and overexploitation.

Despite our technological triumphs, there have never been so many poor, illiterate or unemployed people in the world and their numbers are growing. One of every five human beings lives in utter poverty. Every day, 40 000 children die unnecessary deaths.

Our generation is gradually realizing something fundamentally new. The environment and development crisis will eventually affect us all regardless of where we live and how affluent we seem to be. Nobody, not even the richest individual in the richest community can hide from this reality behind private or national borders. Growing awareness and growing self-interest can produce the political momentum for the drastic changes which are needed.

The environmental debate in the North has focussed increasingly on global processes of potentially cataclysmic proportions. There is hard evidence that we are condemned to global warming and adverse climate change. Human settlement, industrial patterns, even food production are at stake.

The prospect of a rising sea-level has been played down in some quarters. One commentator suggested that this is not a disaster, merely a change, since where we have cows today, we will have fish tomorrow. How cynical is it possible to become?

We in the North must continue to struggle with complicated greenhouse models, but the daily environmental threats will seem even more basic and more acute for millions in the Third World where there is a strong circular relationship between poverty and environmental degradation.

Women and children are the most vulnerable. They often contract cholera or other deadly diarrhoea from contaminated drinking water. Hazardous wastes and toxic deposits are most dangerous for people who are unaware of their presence.

In brief, lack of knowledge, lack of opportunity to take part in political processes and lack of public resources for investments constitute the most fundamental public enemy for a majority of the world's population.

On top of all this, a global population which is increasing exponentially threatens to outstrip our ability to change the course of development. How can we sustain a global economy five to ten times as large as the present one?

Poverty is where we must really start, since poverty not only explains the dangerously high birth rates but also the way in which food shortages become famine.

What, then, is needed?

We need growth - vigorous growth - in particular in the developing countries, while we observe ecological constraints. We need a new kind of growth that is not based on overexploitation of natural resources. Sustainable Development as defined by the World Commission is a key concept for a new kind of growth.

Democracy and public participation are essential for sustainable development. This has been stated clearly here in Amsterdam earlier this week. Awareness raising and public participation are key prerequisites for global change.

The environmental disasters disclosed in the former totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe demonstrate clearly what can happen if governments protect themselves from

public criticism. Democracy, accountable government and human rights has to be strengthened in all parts of the world, and in particular where democratic aspirations are rooted in the thinnest soil.

The response to this demand must comprise a new emphasis on the building of pluralistic institutions, promotion of broad popular participation and assurance of full respect for human rights.

The South Commission, led by Julius Nyerere, stated it clearly. The Commission agreed that " Commitment to democratic values, respect for fundamental rights - particularly the right to dissent - fair treatment for minorities, concern for the poor and underprivileged - all these cannot but influence world opinion and increase the South's chances of securing a new world order".

The emerging international consensus that economic growth and human development are closely interlinked makes it imperative to invest in human resources. Few investments are likely to generate such high and stable "interest rates" as investment in our children. Jim Grant is likely to argue convincingly in support of this.

The state of national formal education systems, and access to them on a basis of equality are key indicators for the future prosperity of nations. Where resources are scarce, these fields are ideally suited for international assistance. But alas, few donor countries have given sufficient priority to such aid in their assistance policy, and some have even cut back on their support for population policies and family planning.

Human development will require more equitable distribution, not only among, but also within countries. Policy reform will require redistribution of assets, including land and income, as well as provision of social services. Poverty alleviation must focus on the promotion of labour-intensive production. Human capital is a first order resource that we cannot allow to waste. Neither in the North nor in the South.

There is a considerable "peace dividend " also in the South. There is a great potential in many national budgets for increasing allocations to the social sector. One cannot push aside the fact that there is a social price to be paid for military expenditures which have risen three times faster in developing countries than in the industrialized world over the last three decades. We now need a commitment by governments of the South to substantially reduce their military spending which in many countries amounts to two to three times the spending on education and health.

Many donor agencies will be paying more attention to the priorities of recipient governments, and in particular of those possessing offensive military capabilities.

Still, we shall never fail to reiterate the need for increased development assistance. We need to target this assistance and learn from the mistakes and the achievements of the past. It is appalling that aid flows have - at best - stagnated in the 1980s and are now down to a disgracefully low 0.33 %. I feel I am in a position to be critical. Norway has maintained its high development assistance at more than 1 per cent of our GDP - the highest among OECD countries.

For a number of years, Norway has made considerable efforts to target its aid to the poorest parts of the population in many countries. In recent years, we have also strengthened the environmental dimension of our aid programs. We have taken note that this year's State of the World report depicts Norway as the world leader in development assistance and points to our policy as a model. I have often been asked to be more outspoken about this by spokesmen of the Third World. It is important to make this line of policy far better known, because it will really make a difference only when other, larger, and more influential countries are prepared to act in accordance with internationally agreed policies and targets for development.

Third World countries need a growth-conducive world economy. Industrialized countries have a primary responsibility for providing such an economic environment.

We in the North need to open our markets and invite the Third World to participate fully in the international division of labour. We need a liberal and truly global trading system. Today protectionism in the North is costing the developing countries much more than they receive in aid. Preferential treatment for developing countries will be necessary, in particular for the least developed. A successful and early conclusion of the Uruguay-Round is essential.

There is considerable scope for reducing the suffocating debt overhang. The precarious situation in the poorest, most severely indebted countries - in particular in Africa - calls for international agreement on debt cancellation. There are promising signs of progress, such as the British initiative for special debt relief measures to the poorest countries. Developing countries themselves must contribute by facilitating development of their private sectors, attract foreign investment and curb capital flight.

Equity is essential if we are to find political solutions to the environment/development crisis. The industrialized countries have been developing for decades without paying for the damage done to the environment. Our economies have been built on cheap and abundant fuels as if there were no tomorrow. That is one of the main reasons why we now have to pay extra. We can not say to the developing world: Although we have emptied our refuse free of charge, now we will all have to pay, and pay equally. We have filled the dump, there is no

room left for you.

If we forget about equity, our efforts may prove politically impossible. The industrialized countries are responsible for more than 70 per cent of the emissions of greenhouse gases. They must take the lead in reversing dangerous trends.

Industrialized countries must increase their technological and financial assistance to Third World countries. True additionality is necessary. If this is rejected, the essential global political consensus will be at risk.

As national politicians we experience that the nation state is too small a scene for addressing regional and global environmental challenges. It will become increasingly contradictory to promise to remedy these international challenges through national measures alone. The global transition requires us to lift the decision-making of democratic institutions to the international level.

The present institutional set-up is not able to deal effectively with global issues, to set new rules and enforce them. Nationally we would never dream of an order where consent was needed for justice to be enforced and for political change to be made. In order to stand up to the impact of an internationalized dynamic private sector, we need a strong international public sector based on active participation of all parts of the world. We need global governance - nothing less. Any approach which is less ambitious will not serve us. This would be my reply to the fear expressed at this Conference by Bernard Chidzero that interdependence will often be used as a euphemism for exploitation of the weak by the strong.

Important negotiations are being held in preparation for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil. A climate convention, a convention on biological diversity, and other environmental issues are on the agenda for the twenty-first century as are questions of institutional change. The opportunity that this entails must not be lost. But it might be lost if political leaders stay out of the process.

Peace, environment and development. This is the triade of the comprehensive security concept which should be dealt with at the level of the Security Council. John Kennedy said that until the powerful are just, the weak will be secure only protected by the United Nations. A modernized, more effective United Nations must be given the means. To be able to use his powers, to coordinate the UN system and to take initiatives, the Secretary-General must be able to identify potential crisis and threats to peace, environment and development and to do so independently.

Many global trends can be predicted. Concrete disasters, however, often can not be predicted. We do not know when or

where a particular situation will occur - but we do know that disasters will happen. This is the brutal truth. Today, we see the tragedy of the Kurds, the new famine in Africa and another disastrous cyclone in Bangladesh.

The international community has all too often been slow to react to such catastrophes, as if they were completely unexpected. We have seen too many examples of international relief efforts that are slow in getting off the ground. Too often, we see a lack of clear institutional responsibility and an ensuing lack of coordination. There is an urgent need for a permanent machinery operating on red alert. The UN must be given the resources as well as the political clout to deal with such crises, also when they occur within a single country.

In closing, let me return to my starting point - to the future unknown birthplace of world citizen no 6 billion. What will it really take for all of us who are currently able to exercise some influence in this world to stand up to and act upon the great challenges of our time? We should emphasize and mobilize the influence that children can have on adults. Facts and figures may tell their story, but nothing will be felt more deeply and compellingly than the querying eyes of a young child.

Last year about 100 Heads of State and Government met in New York at the first world summit for children. The fact that it happened, and the fact that no other issue has ever been able to gather so many world leaders hold out some hope for the future, and for future generations. Our foremost responsibility towards future generations is to ensure that there will be a future world worth living in. The future generations are knocking at our door today. The living conditions of our children and grandchildren will be determined now. Since they cannot take care of their own destiny, we must do so on their behalf.

The transition to sustainable development will take true solidarity and true responsibility. The day must come when people will look back to our generation and say: Faced with the challenge they managed to upgrade human civilization.