

Tokyo, 28 January 1992.

Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland

Address at Norwegian shipping presentation

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for your introduction, and for providing me with this opportunity to emphasize the wish of the Norwegian Government to further strengthening economic ties and cooperation between Japan and Norway.

For the benefit of the Japanese guests here this evening I would like to point out that our hosts, the Norwegian Shipowners' Association, Nordic American Shipping and the Maritime Group, represent perhaps the most Norwegian of all industries, the maritime industries. Norwegian shipping companies control the world's third largest fleet. And no other industry in our country is more international. This fleet carries the imports and exports of important trading countries such as Japan. In fact, shipping is the most important area in the economic relations between Japan and Norway.

Norwegian shipping companies and ship equipment producers operate almost exclusively on the international markets, and rely on their own competitiveness for success. The kind of position which Norwegian owners have secured in Japan can only be achieved by complying with the customers' requirements, day in and day out. This is the ambitious standard which our shipping companies have set for themselves.

These companies are the back-bone of a broad-based maritime sector, which encompasses nearly every facet of the maritime world. We like to say that only two countries really have such a complete, vibrant maritime sector - Japan and Norway. As for Norway, let me highlight two examples of this wider community: The production of ship equipment, an area in which the Maritime Group, one of our hosts today, enjoys a leading national and international position within specialized fields. And the financing of shipping: Den norske Bank, Norway's largest bank and also represented at this meeting, has as far as I am told, a larger shipping portfolio than any other bank in the world.

Another aspect of the close cooperation between Norway and Japan in the maritime sector is the fact that Japanese yards are the principal suppliers of new vessels to our fleet. The Norwegian owners tell me that they are very satisfied with their Japanese-built vessels.

Norwegian producers of ship equipment are small. But their

strength resides in their advanced technological products and their long-term commitment to the industry. They have also become increasingly competitive. A combination of the best which Norway and Japan have to offer should therefore give the world the high-quality shipping industry it deserves - and needs.

We know that the world fleet is ageing, and that too many vessels are not in satisfactory condition. The number of accidents is unacceptably high, including in our own waters. Too often, sub-standard vessels pose a threat to human life and the marine environment.

Dealing with this situation is a major challenge. There is an urgent need to upgrade and renew the world fleet, and to raise standards. The leading maritime nations, like Japan and Norway, have a particular responsibility in this context. I welcome, therefore, and support any move, any new project, which can help us to achieve a safer, more reliable international shipping industry. The project which will be introduced to us in a few minutes will be interesting also in this respect, and I look forward to hearing more about it. It is my hope that it will contribute to finding new ways of combining the best of maritime know-how and competence in our two countries, in the interest of all.

I wish you a successful and fruitful cooperation.