

**Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland**

The Onassis Prize, Athens, 26 May 1992

It is a great honour for me to be here in Athens, the cradle of European civilization, to receive the Onassis Prize for Man and the Biosphere.

It is with great humility that I have listened to the generous words of Professor Colombo, words of which I personally am hardly deserving. I have been lucky in life to have had the opportunity to work with dedicated people in making changes, both as Minister of Environment of my country, as Prime Minister and as Chairman of the World Commission on Environment and Development, which was established by the United Nations.

My thoughts today go to all those people who inspired my own attitudes and view of the world and who confirmed my conviction that it makes a difference to work for what you believe in. I share this great honour bestowed upon me with all the members of the World Commission and with the thousands of people all over the world who supported us in our work and believed that we would actually be able to adopt a global agenda for change.

Our recommendations were presented in 1987. We named our report "Our Common Future" to capture what we came to realize; regardless of whether we live in affluence in an industrialized country or belong to the 1.2 billion people living in absolute poverty, we are all neighbours in an interlinked world. Our only option is to work together to overcome the dangerous trends threatening the human race and its natural environment.

We coined the concept of "sustainable development" to capture the direction we must pursue if we are to alleviate poverty and inequality, avoid suffocating from pollution and reverse depletions of the earth's forests and its myriads of living species and stop the contamination of water and land resources.

We found the only sane policy to be one of international burden-sharing between rich and poor countries, in which debt relief, development assistance, transfer of environmentally sound technology and a general climate conducive to investment were key components.

An event without parallel will open in Rio de Janeiro one week from now. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, UNCED, which the Commission called for in

1987, will consider the most fundamental issue facing the world community today: how to reconcile human activities with the laws of nature.

Economic policies and production and consumption habits in industrial countries seriously constrain the developing world's ability to achieve sustainable development. The gaps between rich and poor are widening both within and between countries. The Rio Conference is essentially about development and justice.

The World Commission met again for the first time in five years in London one month ago. The statement from that meeting is a clarion call for an end to the era of procrastination and half-measures. We must embark upon a period of firm action. We need new and meaningful decisions, not good intentions and repetitions of what we have already agreed.

Bold decisionmaking will be necessary in the years to ahead. Today more and more people are enjoying democracy within national borders. Our imminent task is to expand democracy between countries and beyond national boundaries, regionally and globally.

There is no other way if we are to regain political control over the profound technological, social and environmental changes of our times. This is the next giant step in the history of democracy which began here in Athens 2500 years ago and developed in Europe, particularly during the last 200 years.

An open, united Europe has a particular responsibility and a unique opportunity to take the lead globally. Today the European Community is the most effective example of binding cooperation between democratic countries. It is my hope that Norway will be an active member of the Community in a few year's time. Europe's future is our future. Europe's responsibility is also our responsibility.

At the beginning of the 1980s, it became obvious to European leaders with vision and foresight that they had to eliminate the remaining trade barriers and encourage cooperation in a unified market. Under the imaginative leadership of President Delors, the EC embarked upon that journey. The path proved to be viable and the goals attainable. Later, the EFTA countries joined in the creation of a wider European economy, a process which culminated in Oporto, Portugal, three weeks ago with the signing of the agreement on the European Economic Area.

A common market, however, is not an end in itself, it is a means to realize ends, a means to realize our democratic ambitions and visions for the well-being of our people and of coming generations. Material growth can never be a goal in itself. It is the quality of growth and development, the sustainability of growth, and the equitable distribution of the benefits which are the yardsticks by which the advances of

modern society should be measured.

At Maastricht sustainable development was adhered to in no uncertain terms as an overriding objective for the future European Union. The decision was forthright. Europe must, and Europe can, take the global leadership in reconciling economic, environmental and social needs. The countries of Europe must now rise to that occasion.

I urge European leaders and the European Community to go to Rio. Show leadership. Make solid decisions. We have given the world democracy. Leadership for sustainable development must now come forward from this old, and yet so young world.