

Gro Harlem Brundtland
Prime Minister of Norway

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POPULATION, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

When Dr. Sadik visited Oslo some years ago, she presented me with UNFPA's population clock. It was programmed to show how the world population increases as time ticks by. Throughout the profound changes since seen by the world, that clock has been on my desk. As the Cold War ended, the war was fought in the Gulf, as Nelson Mandela was released from prison, as many of my own grandchildren were born, and even as we joined in the hope for peace for the Israeli and Palestinian people during the signing ceremony on the South Lawn on 13 September, the clock has ticked on, marching relentlessly towards the 6 billion mark.

Every second baby boys and baby girls, deserving of love and care, future and opportunity, are born into this world of diversity and inequality. Behind the silent display of the population clock, there is a time bomb ticking.

90 per cent of the population increase is taking place in developing countries, many of which are unable to feed their present population. We may soon be facing new famine on a scale dwarfing even Malthus' most pessimistic predictions. We may see masses moving which will make previous historic migrations look like a Sunday picnic. Countries and regions risk destabilization and war as peoples compete for land and water resources.

The brutal facts of science tell us how, already today the natural resources on which people depend, that will feed them and provide them with a livelihood, are being severely depleted. Rainforests are vanishing, top-soil is eroding, the world's oceans have already reached the limit of their protein yield, and global warming seems likely to accelerate erosion and dry up large parts of the world.

In the more developed countries the fortunate children of new generations may delay their confrontation with the imminent environmental crisis, but today's newborns will be facing the ultimate collapse of vital resources bases unless we change our course. They will also face new security threats if the impoverished majority start to migrate.

Unless we accept that the population explosion is the most serious, predictable and intractable crisis facing us we shall not be able to avoid it. Our very successes may cause our failure. Increased life expectancy, immunization programmes, and the eradication of disease were what produced the population explosion in the first place.

This is why I would like to take this opportunity to praise the unrelenting efforts, commitment and compassion of all the dedicated men and women who work day in, day out, in the name of responsible population policies. They are peaceworkers making a contribution as relevant to peace as the negotiators for arms reduction. Dr. Sadik is herself a steadfast beacon of hope together with her dedicated staff and fieldworkers. I would like to pay a special tribute to all those who professionally or voluntarily devote their time and energy to population activities.

It is a great pleasure to be giving this year's Rafael M. Salas memorial lecture at a time when the global tide may be turning in favour of sound population policies after so many difficult years.

The present US administration's policy of resuming funding of organizations such as UNFPA and the IPPF may mark a turning point and a necessary blood transfusion to a vital field of human endeavour. It is a step towards putting people first and a move which needs to be followed up by responsible, long-term, reliable commitments by all countries.

(Today's situation)

Each country will have to assume the bulk of the responsibility itself. But the individual countries will need the assistance of the international community. Support for population policies must be viewed in the wider context of global burden-sharing. Bills for peace-keeping, bills for peace-building, for averting environmental threats, alleviating poverty and famine and curbing the population explosion must be equitably shared, because we all depend on success in every one of these fields.

In our outlook and actions we must look beyond the mere curtailing of numbers. We must deal with levels of consumption, improve the functioning of democracy and recognize that education will be the currency of any successful development plan.

The advances in social development in recent decades are remarkable in a historical perspective. Take the increase in life expectancy. Take health and nutrition, literacy rates and the encouraging improvements in so many countries. Increase and growth are the refrain of most demographic studies.

But increase is also the refrain of the poverty gap, the opportunity gap, the education gap, hallmarking an unequal world. Increasing numbers of fellow human beings are without a voice, and without a choice. Malnutrition and squalor deprive hundreds of millions, in the words of Robert McNamara, of the potential of the very genes with which they were born.

It took a million years for the earth's population to reach the first billion, and it now takes less than a decade for each additional billion. Such numbers may blind us to the fact that we are talking about individuals, individuals with rights, with

inherent dignity, but who in many parts of the world lack the possibility to fully enjoy the gift of life.

Childbearing is in itself a threat to life and health owing to the neglect of primary health care in many countries. Mothers living far from the paved roads of the urban centers will often belatedly receive even the most minimal care. Too short a space between pregnancies leaves too little time for regaining physical strength and this together with inadequate treatment too many mothers are catapulted into convulsion, coma, and death leaving families bereft, with no mother to look after the other children.

Structural adjustment programmes and external debt are among the factors which should no longer prevent countries from increasing their health budgets. There is a case for an international dialogue and solidarity to cushion the negative impact of these external factors. But why is it different with military budgets which are still senselessly high in a number of countries? President Eisenhower has been much quoted for saying that "every gun that is fired, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense a theft from those who are not fed". Today any country which maintains military budgets above a certain level is literally uncreditworthy. The future lies not in arming but in educating a healthy population.

(Priority tasks)

In dealing with the issue of population, the shared but unequal responsibility of states must be recognized. Population is not about numbers alone; it is about the relationship between people and resources, it is about how resources are consumed, it is about how wealth and opportunity are distributed, and how we can provide more hope for the future.

At present the vast majority, which is poor makes only minimal claims on our natural resources, while the more voracious North is consuming in a few decades what it has taken the planet billions of years to accumulate.

This widening gap between the fortunate few and the powerless, impoverished majority is a destabilizing trend. It is both dangerous and morally unacceptable.

To cope with the challenges facing us, three priority tasks must be addressed:

- 1) We in the industrialized countries must change our production and consumption patterns so that we use less natural resources and cause less pollution.
- 2) Development in the poor countries must be harnessed as to eliminate poverty, meet basic human needs and protect the environment.
- 3) Population growth must be slowed so that we can achieve

sustainable development.

(Industrialized countries)

In the quest to achieve a sustainable balance between the number of people and the amount of natural resources that can be consumed, both the people in industrialized countries and the rich in the South have a special obligation to reduce their ecological impact. Even though most people in industrialized countries feel far from rich, striving to pay their mortgages, worrying about their jobs and the security of their pensions, nonetheless they are consuming at a rate which cannot be shared by everybody.

An average person in North America consumes almost 20 times as much as a person in India or China, and 60 - 70 times more than a person in Bangladesh. It is plainly impossible for the world as a whole to sustain a Western level of consumption for all.

But are we in the North willing to reduce our consumption significantly? Faced with such a point blank question it seems unlikely. Consumption has become lifestyle. It seems so easy to want more. Nevertheless, through targeted research and development and the concerted efforts of governments, business science and technology, we may obtain the same benefits with much lower use of finite resources. In addition we must introduce economic measures such as lowering taxes on the "good" things, such as work and investment and raising taxes on the "bad" things such as pollution and depletion of natural resources.

More active use of market forces in the North could support environmental improvements by inspiring companies and households to act innovatively and efficiently, reducing environmental impact and enhancing rather than diminishing the quality of life.

This requires extensive adjustments, which are not easy, particularly in times of economic recession and unemployment. However, we have no choice. A shift must take place as soon as possible to cleaner technologies, energy efficiency and resource conservation.

But if individual governments are to make the necessary decisions, they will require assurance that their national efforts will be part of a global partnership. Thus, everyone must do their share, and all decision-makers should be made accountable for their actions.

I am pleased that consumption patterns feature on the agenda of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development. Changing consumption is far from easy, but we should begin by recognizing that lowering consumption of natural resources does not mean lowering the standard of living. There are enormous economic advantages to be gained from reducing consumption of scarce resources, but there is little reason to reduce consumption of resources that are renewable and abundant.

These are complex tasks. But they must be taken seriously, and as

a contribution to the next meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development, Norway will host a meeting in January to address changing consumption patterns. Politicians, scientists, business and private organizations will be invited, building on the learning process that reached an initial peak in Rio.

(Developing countries) (poverty)

Poverty, overpopulation and underdevelopment are all interlinked. The biggest population increases are happening in the poorest countries which are least equipped to meet the needs of new arrivals and to invest in the future.

The increasing numbers of people in poor countries are in fact eating away at the earth itself, creating permanent damage in the environment.

They do so for survival and cannot afford the luxury of planning for a tomorrow that may never be. An impoverished environment in turn leads to even greater poverty, and a vicious circle is created.

Any nation's main asset should be its population. But when that population grows too fast, it becomes a liability instead. Rapidly expanding population effectively strangles most efforts to provide adequate education, nutrition, health care and shelter. The earning capacity of the labour force suffers, and the problems are compounded if job opportunities fail to keep pace with the number of job-seekers. Wages go down and poverty is exacerbated.

Developing countries face the challenge of alleviating poverty and increasing welfare at the same time as the carrying-capacity of the environment is not exceeded. The international community must support such efforts, and economic conditions for developing countries must be improved through debt relief, better market access and larger, more predictable financial transfers.

The aid fatigue, however, has aggravated the plight of the poor as a mockery is made of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for development aid. At Rio we all supported, finally, the legitimate demand that new and additional resources be transferred to developing countries to address global environment problems. But contributions so far have been small-scale.

The Nordic countries are struggling to maintain our high level of assistance, but it is unhelpful that so few countries are challenging our position at the top of most, if not all, lists of per capita contributions for global equitable purposes.

(Reasons for optimism)

Although the global problems seem daunting, I believe that the situation will change when the realities of the new global political map becomes more widely recognized. Detraining people from thinking in East-West terms and training them to acknowledge new global risks may take longer than we first thought. But

optimism is a force multiplier and I shall share mine with you.

For one thing, do we remember that the first post-cold-war American president identified population as a major challenge to security in his first foreign policy statement?

Population, environment and development are now key items on the international agenda. UNCED has given us both the impetus and the instruments to promote sustainable development, and active follow-up is taking place in many areas. However, the Rio decisions on population as such were too weak, not least due to the unhelpful efforts of some states, even states with no natural population. Such efforts to prevent the international community from making constructive decisions played to fundamental religious tones as well as to cultural fundamentalism.

On the more positive side, we note that while African governments were reluctant to take up this issue only a decade ago, many of them are now moving forward, adopting policies and implementing programmes.

This is good news as we prepare for the international conference on population and development in 1994 where sustainable development, environment and population will be dealt with in a holistic manner. And the Women's conference in 1995 will provide a further opportunity to continue our relentless pursuit of these issues.

There is hope in growing awareness of population, development and environment issues and in people's willingness to act. While many poor countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, experienced the 1980s as a "lost decade" for development, others, mainly in East Asia, have managed to cope with their population growth and improve the quality of life of their citizens.

At a global level, there has been a drop in fertility and birth rates. The average number of children born to every fertile woman during her lifetime has fallen from almost 5 a generation ago to just over 3 now, and in developing countries the drop has been steeper.

27 countries enjoyed falls in their birth rate of 25 percent or more over the last twenty years. Government backing population programmes and activities has also increased markedly, not least in Africa.

From only 9 percent a generation ago contraceptive prevalence in developing countries has risen to an estimated level of 50 percent in 1990, according to the United Nations Population Fund. In addition it is assumed that 300 million women worldwide would now like to use family planning, but lack access to services.

This knowledge revolution among women means nothing less than a market existing for services that will make a difference.

Sometimes religion is a major obstacle. This happens when family

planning is made a moral issue. But morality cannot only be a question of controlling sexuality and protecting unborn life. Morality becomes hypocrisy if it means accepting mothers suffering or dying in connection with unwanted pregnancies and illegal abortions, and unwanted children living in misery.

Traditional religious and cultural obstacles can be overcome by economic and social development, with the focus on enhancement of human resources. For example Buddhist Thailand, Moslem Indonesia and Catholic Italy demonstrate that relatively sharp reductions in fertility can be achieved in an amazingly short time.

(Areas for action)

Countries that have succeeded relatively well in limiting their population growth seem to have several characteristics in common. Many have deliberately tried to combine economic growth with an equitable distribution of income. They have given priority to the development of human resources and focused on health and education and especially on improving the status of women, the employment of women and mother and child care. Above all they have given strong support to information about family planning and to decentralized family planning services closely linked with the local community.

I would like particularly to emphasize three factors of primary importance:

- * developing human resources, that is: improving education and health,
- * extending family planning and
- * empowering women.

When efforts in all these areas are combined, they reinforce each other and enhance the overall effect.

(Developing human resources)

Human development is both an aim in itself and a means of achieving progress. We have come to realize more and more that investing in human resources in developing countries is essential to economic growth which in turn is necessary to maintain social welfare.

Development efforts during recent years have made clear that improvements in health services, water supplies, sanitary conditions, family planning and, not least, education contribute towards improved quality of life and social equality and create the necessary conditions for sustainable development.

Unfortunately, the economic crisis in many developing countries has led to a reduction in revenues and a deterioration in social conditions. It is therefore essential to achieve economic growth and invest in the development of human resources, and especially in primary health care and basic education.

The United Nations Development Programme has suggested that 20 percent of government expenditure in developing countries should be allocated to helping the poor meet their needs for food, water, sanitation, basic health care, family planning and education for

their children. At the same time industrialized countries are being requested to allocate 20 percent of their development aid to meeting these priority needs. These proposals are minimum requirements, and other donors in addition to Norway should in a position to reach the proposed target of 20 percent of their development aid for this purpose.

(Empowering women)

Women are at a disadvantage compared to men in all countries. But the problems of women in developing countries, where they are particularly overburdened and underpowered, are by far the most urgent and pressing. Since the International Women's Year in 1975, there has been progress in some areas, particularly regarding the formal status of women. But this has not been matched by progress with regard to the actual situation of women. Women are still being patronized and discriminated against in terms of access to education, productive assets, credit, income and services, decision-making and conditions of work and remuneration. For too many women in too many countries, real development during recent years has only been an illusion.

At the same time experience shows that investing in women is one of the most cost-effective ways of promoting development. As mothers, as producers or suppliers of food, fuel and water, as traders and manufacturers, as political and community leaders, women are at the centre of the process of change.

Strengthening their position and expanding their opportunities will lead not to greater equality, but to more efficient economic growth, a fact that among others the World Bank has been stressing. Thus, the enhancement of the role of women will lead to increased economic growth, reduced poverty, better child and family welfare, and lower birth rates.

Women's education is the single most important path to a combination of higher productivity, lower infant mortality and lower fertility. The economic returns for investment in female education are generally comparable to those for men, but the social returns, in terms of health and fertility far exceed what we gain from men's education. In addition to education, we must also safeguard the health of women by promoting safe motherhood and avoiding maternal deaths. These capital investments in human resources lay the foundation for long-term progress.

In order to help women and thereby contribute to other development objectives, it is vital to enable women to raise their own productivity and income. Women often play a crucial role in food production and subsistence agriculture. But they generally lack not only education, but also land rights, appropriate technology and access to credit. Thus they cannot invest in improved production, nor can they rationalize their household chores. The result is poverty and depletion of the natural resource base. Enhancing women's economic role is therefore an important development strategy.

(Extending family planning)

If population growth is to be reduced access to family planning services is crucial. Couples must have the right freely to choose the number and spacing of their children. I wish to underline the principle of free choice because couples should not be subject to any coercion, directly or indirectly.

Information must be provided not only on family planning, but also on the health risks for women and children of not practicing family planning. A variety of methods must be made available and the cost must be low. By this I mean not only financial cost, but also the cost in terms of time, transport and social embarrassment. Family planning and related health programs must be made to work together and multiple channels must be set up for distributing family planning information and services.

There is no better insurance policy for developed and developing countries than funding population and family planning programmes. Of course much of the contribution must come from developing countries themselves. But industrialized countries also have a responsibility. Norway has been deplorably alone among developed countries in meeting internationally agreed targets for both family planning aid and overall development assistance. We give 12 US dollars for every Norwegian man, woman and child towards family planning programmes, making us the fourth largest donor country in absolute terms after the United States, Germany and Japan.

Important as it is to focus on women in our development efforts I would nevertheless like to focus on the importance of men especially in relation to family planning.

In many developing countries increased poverty, unemployment and social problems have reduced the role of men as providers and heads of households. Paradoxically, what follows is increased alcohol consumption, migration to look for work and increased number of sexual contacts. All these factors tend to increase the number of child births and the transmission of contagious diseases.

If men do not take responsibility for their sexual habits, fertility and health, if they reject their responsibility as fathers, it will be impossible to cope not only with population growth, but also with sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

The 1990s will decide whether the choices for our children will narrow yet further - or open up. We know more about population, environment and development than ever before. We have the basis for action. Now we must mobilize people in every country and in every walk of life, not least the political leaders and the mass media.

George Bernhard Shaw said that "The worst sin toward our fellow

creatures is not to hate them but to be indifferent to them". Let us fight the indifference which has prevailed in the past and move towards that equilibrium between people, consumption and the carrying capacity of our earth which we call sustainable development. Let us listen to the voice of unborn generations and make the earth the hospitable place that any human being deserves.

Thank you.