

**Prime Minister  
Gro Harlem Brundtland**

**Opening Speech at the Norway/UNEP Expert Conference on  
Biodiversity in Trondheim 24 May 1993.**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The library of life is on fire. We must extinguish this fire before even more treasures, yet to be discovered, are lost beyond recovery. How we go about this formidable and complex salvages operation depends on sound scientific advice, on dialogue and on sharing and learning from each other. Ultimately, democratic political decisions will determine our ability to safeguard nature's riches, and the chapter after chapter of new learning still before us.

It is therefore a pleasure for me to wish you all welcome to the Expert Conference on Biodiversity here in Trondheim. This Conference is a fruit of the close collaboration between UNEP and Norway and of contributions from experts from all over the world.

We are gathered here today because we made a commitment at Rio last year. An equity bond was issued there for the benefit of future generations. The concept of sustainable development was elevated to a norm for intragenerational behaviour and good conduct among and across generations.

While few of the solutions agreed upon at Rio came anywhere near to being final, the conference set many trains in motion. Each journey will include turns and straights, stops and starts, but the destinations are defined.

One will by the help of knowledge and responsible people lead to a greater safety net for the biological diversity of this planet, the discovery of which is only in its infancy.

Thus, the Convention on Biological Diversity is as much a commitment to a process as a treaty between States - nearly all States, I might add, since the new American administration seems eager to play to the same tune as most other countries in this regard, offering hope that the Convention will be truly universal.

Not since the dinosaurs became extinct some 65 million years ago has the earth witnessed a loss of biological diversity of such a scale as today. Although mass-extinction of species is not a new phenomenon, never before has it been caused by a single species, as it is today by man. But we have the



capacity to save nature as well as to destroy it. And we have the knowledge to choose which of these powers we should harness.

The World Commission on Environment and Development recommended that governments should agree on a "Species Convention". Now, only five years later, we have agreed on, adopted and signed a Convention on Biological Diversity. This Convention goes beyond the scope of conserving species diversity and includes ecosystems and genetic diversity as well, from the wilderness to the crops on a farmer's field. It focuses on conservation not only through protection but also through sustainable use. Moreover, it focuses on the fair and equitable sharing of burdens and benefits arising from protection and use.

The comprehensive scope of the Convention is both its weakness and its strength. Although it focuses on national and local action for conservation and sustainable use, the acid test of its further development will be the extent to which its implementation will be guided by solidarity over borders and across generations.

Norway will ratify the Convention very shortly and contribute to its entry into force. We urge other countries to do the same. Although the interim follow-up work has been initiated, it is essential that the Convention enter into force as soon as possible to give the implementation efforts the necessary clout. This is a clear responsibility for both developed and developing countries alike.

Until the Biodiversity Convention has entered into force, it is important to sustain the momentum and the spirit of cooperation that characterized the negotiations. UNEP has been asked by the governments to play a central role in this interim period. I would like to express our gratitude to the new Executive Director of UNEP, Ms Dowdeswell who is here with us, and her staff for their contribution in this regard.

Among several UNEP initiatives, I would specifically like to mention the work of the five UNEP Expert Panels finished earlier this year. These efforts will facilitate an early implementation of the Convention, and have contributed to the discussions on several issues that could have posed an obstacle to ratification for some countries.

Important challenges ahead include the development of a financial mechanism. Here developed countries should honour their commitment to burden-sharing transfers of financial resources to developing countries.

We also need to develop criteria and mechanisms for sustainable use of biological diversity and integration of this concept into all relevant sectors, such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries. This work is clearly related to the follow-up of several issues from Agenda 21, the Forest Principles and FAO's Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources. The Convention represents a platform for mutual agreement that



can serve as a basis for the follow up of several such issues, for example by the development of specific protocols under the Convention. The Norwegian Government will support the efforts to define the priorities for further agreements.

Several industrialized countries, among them Norway, have now, partly through cooperation within the OECD region, worked out regulations on environmentally safe handling of genetically modified organisms. The experience gained should be shared with countries in other regions of the world. There is a need to establish a global consensus on principles and provisions regarding ways to tackling these issues. I therefore welcome the initiative taken by UNEP to prepare for the development of a protocol on safe transfer and handling of these organisms under the Convention.

The international follow-up efforts not only require cooperation between Governments but also between international organizations, especially UN-organizations such as UNEP, FAO, UNDP and UNESCO. We need better coordination among the various UN agencies.

Equally important is an aspect which is infrequently mentioned as a problem in international cooperation. What I have in mind is the need for greater coordination by national governments of their own conduct in various international organizations. We must ensure that representatives act consistently within various international agencies and institutions. Such consistency is necessary if we are to use the international institutions we have created with maximum efficiency.

At the national level it is important to start preparations for the implementation of the Convention as soon as possible. In Norway, we have chosen to draw up a National Action Plan to be completed by the end of 1994. The plan will be based on sectoral strategies and will involve the role of regional and local authorities.

The plan will coordinate our efforts on the implementation of the Convention and serve as a basis for our report on this work to the Conference of Parties to the Convention. I would like to stress that Norway's approach is one of several possible strategies for national follow-up. The important point is that the follow-up work should be designed to fit the specific social, political, economical and ecological conditions of each country.

The conservation of conifer forests has played a central role in the biodiversity debate in Norway. The Norwegian Government recognizes that this issue will be important for the national follow-up to the Convention. We will of course constantly assess our obligations under the Convention in this respect.

Lack of knowledge should not lead to lack of action where action is required. We have to develop methods and principles regarding how to handle lack of information, - and we must learn how to use limited existing information in the best possible way.



Far too often necessary environmental action has been postponed citing lack of information and the need for more research. We experienced such attitudes when we worked on the Climate Conventions even after the international scientific community had removed any reasonable doubt about the need for action.

But knowledge is not enough. In order to instill a sense of community purpose and social responsibility, and assert the larger vision of a just and sustainable future, countries are dependent on better educated, more healthy populations that will support difficult decisions which in the short run may appear costly.

In many countries there is a growing awareness of the importance of sustainable development. Mobilization of this awareness in favour of certain environmental issues should, however, not be based on an oversimplification of these often complex questions.

A lasting commitment to sustainable development can only be based on sound factual arguments. It is therefore of fundamental importance that everyone involved in activities to enhance environmental awareness respect and base their argumentation on the full biological and cultural complexity concerned.

A main challenge for national and international conservation measures is to strike the right balance between conservation and sustainable use. All cultures depend on use of natural resources. Countries are free to decide not to use specific resources.

When deciding which resources should be used or not used, the international community must recognize that decisions have to be based on knowledge. In other words, we must base our decisions on scientific material. We should apply the precautionary principle pending further knowledge and be sure to leave coming generations a range of choices no more narrow than our own.

The basis of international cooperation will be threatened if knowledge and science are expelled from the decision-making bodies. International cooperation regarding resource policy and management of natural resources will be undermined if countries patronize each other and venture to strike politically "correct" environmental poses.

We need environmental agreements if we are to move forward. This requires that we must act in good faith when we negotiate and implement agreements. We all have to honour our obligations. We cannot accept that resource management agreements are used for other purposes than those agreed to by the contracting parties.

In many fields, our knowledge of biological diversity and its importance for human survival and well-being, is insufficient.

At the present time 1.4 million species have been identified. Still we do not know, - not even within the nearest 20 million, how many species there are in the world. The estimates range from 10 to 50 million. It is therefore an important task to increase our knowledge by means of research and scientific cooperation between nations. The establishment of a scientific body under the Convention, and the interim work in this regard, will provide an excellent framework for this cooperation. The success of this kind of cooperation will, however, depend on research priorities and activities of each country. Norway is now in the process of establishing a national focal point for biodiversity research.

This Expert Conference will highlight this complexity and contribute to the development of the knowledge base necessary to strengthen environmental awareness and action.

It is my hope that the lectures, working groups and discussions during the next few days will contribute substantive input to the follow-up work on the Convention on Biological Diversity. I am especially pleased to note experts from so many countries have the opportunity to be here, making it the most comprehensive biodiversity event since the final negotiating session. I wish you all a rewarding stay in Norway and a successful conference.