



## PRIME MINISTER GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

### **Key Note Address to the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5 September 1994**

Let us turn from the dramatizing of this Conference which has been going on in the media, and focus on the main issues. We are gathered here to answer a moral call to action. Solidarity with present and future generations has its price. But if we do not pay it in full, we will be faced with global bankruptcy.

This conference is really about the future of democracy, how we widen and deepen its forces and scope. Unless we empower our people, educate them, care for their health, allow them to enter economic life, - on an equal basis and rich in opportunity, poverty will persist, ignorance will be pandemic and people's needs will suffocate under their numbers. The items and issues of this conference are therefore not merely items and issues, but building blocks in our global democracy.

It is entirely proper to address the future of civilization here in a cradle of civilization. We owe a great debt to President Mubarak and the people of Egypt for inviting us to the banks of the Nile, where the relationship between people and resources is so visible and where the contrast between permanence and change is so evident.

We are also indebted to Mrs. Nafis Sadik and her devoted staff, who have provided the conference preparations with intensive care and inspiration.

Ten years of experience as a physician and 20 as a politician have convinced me that improved life conditions, a greater range of choice, access to unbiased information and true international solidarity are the sources of human progress.

We now possess a rich library of analysis of the relationship between population growth, poverty, the status of women, wasteful lifestyles, consumption patterns, - of policies that work and policies that don't and of the environmental degradation that is accelerating at this very moment.

We are not here to repeat it all, but to make a pledge. We make a pledge to change policies. When we adopt the Plan of Action, we sign a promise - a promise to allocate more resources next year than we did this year to health care systems, to education, family planning, and the struggle against AIDS. We promise to make men and women equal before the law, but also to rectify disparities, and to promote women's needs more actively than men's until we can safely say that equality is reached.

We need to use our combined resources more efficiently through a reformed and better coordinated UN system. This is essential to counteract the crisis threatening international cooperation today.

In many countries where population growth is higher than economic growth, the problems are exacerbated each year. The costs of future social needs will be soaring. The punity in inaction will be severe, a nightmare for ministers of finance and a legacy which future generations do not deserve.

But the benefits of policy change are so great that we can not afford not to make them. We must measure the benefits of successful population policies in savings - on public expenditure on infrastructure, social services, housing, sewage treatment, health services and education.

Egyptian calculations show that every pound invested in family planning saves 30 pounds in future expenditures on food subsidies, education, water, sewage, housing and health.

Experience has taught us what works and what does not.

With 95 per cent of population increase taking place in developing countries the communities that bear the burden of rising numbers are those least equipped to do so. They are the ecologically fragile areas where current numbers already reflect an appalling disequilibrium between people and earth.

The preponderance of young people in many of our societies means that there will be an absolute increase in the population figures for many years ahead, whatever strategy we adopt here in Cairo. But the Cairo Conference may significantly determine, by its outcome, whether global population can be stabilized early enough and at a level that humankind and the global environment can survive.

It is encouraging that there is already so much common ground between us. The final programme of action must embody irreversible commitments towards strengthening the role and status of women. We must all be prepared to be held accountable. That is how democracy works.

It must promise access to education and basic reproductive health services, including family planning as a universal human right for all.

Women will not become more empowered merely because we want them to be, but through change of legislation, increased information and by redirecting resources. It would be fatal to overlook the urgency of this issue.

For too long women have had difficult access to democracy. It cannot be repeated often enough that there are few investments that bring greater rewards than investment in women. But still they are being patronized and discriminated against in terms of access to education, productive assets, credit, income and services, decision-making, working conditions and pay. For too many women in too many countries, real development has only been an illusion.

Women's education is the single most important path to higher productivity, lower infant mortality and lower fertility. The economic

returns on investment in women's education are generally comparable to those for men, but the social returns in terms of health and fertility by far exceed what we gain from men's education. So let us pledge to watch over the numbers of school-enrollment for girls. Let us watch also the numbers of girls that complete their education and ask why if the numbers differ, also because the girl who receives her diploma will have fewer babies than her sister who does not.

I am pleased by the emerging consensus that everyone should have access to the whole range of family planning services at an affordable price. Sometimes religion is a major obstacle. This happens when family planning is made the moral issue. But morality cannot only be a question of controlling sexuality and protecting unborn life. Morality is also a question of giving individuals the opportunity of choice, of suppressing coercion of all kinds and abolish incrimination of individual tragedy. 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.

None of us can disregard that abortions occur, and that where they are illegal, or heavily restricted, the life and health of the woman is often at risk. Decriminalizing abortions should therefore be a minimal response to this reality, and a necessary means of protecting the life and health of women.

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.

It is encouraging that ICPD will contribute to expanding the focus of family planning programmes to include concern for sexually transmitted diseases, and caring for pregnant, delivering and aborting women. But it is tragic that it had to take a disaster like the HIV/AIDS pandemic to open our eyes to the importance of combating sexually transmitted diseases. It is also tragic that so many women have had to die from pregnancies before we have realized that the traditional Mother-and-Child health programmes, effective in saving the life of so many children, have done too little to save lives of women.

In a forward looking plan of action it therefore seems sensible to combine health concerns that deal with human sexuality under the heading "sexual and reproductive health care". I have tried, in vain, to understand how that term can possibly be read as promoting abortions or qualifying abortion as a means of family planning. Rarely, - if ever, - have so many misrepresentations been used to imply a meaning that was never there in the first place.

I am pleased to say that the total number of abortions in Norway stayed the same after abortion was legalized, while illegal abortions sank to zero.

Our experience is similar to that of other countries, namely that the law has an impact on the decision making process and with the safety of abortion - but not on the numbers. Our abortion rate is one of the lowest in the world.

Unsafe abortion is a major public health problem, in most corners of the globe. We know full well, all of us, that wealthy people often manage to pay their way to safe abortion regardless of the law.

A conference of this status and importance should not accept attempts to distort facts or neglect the agony of millions of women who are risking their lives and health. I simply refuse to believe that the stalemate reached over this crucial question will be allowed to block a serious and forward-looking outcome of the Cairo conference - hopefully based on full consensus and adopted in good faith.

Reproductive health services not only deal with problems that have been neglected, they also cater to clients who have previously been overlooked. Young people and single persons have received too little help, and continue to do so, as family planning clinics seldom meet their needs. Fear of promoting promiscuity is often said to be the reason for restricting family planning services to married couples. But we know that lack of education and services does not deter adolescents and unmarried persons from sexual activity. On the contrary, there is increasing evidence from many countries, including my own, that sex education promotes responsible sexual behaviour, and even abstinence. Lack of reproductive health services makes sexual activity more risky for both sexes, but particularly for women.

As young people stand at the threshold of adulthood, their emerging sexuality is too often met with suspicion or plainly ignored. At this vulnerable time in life adolescents need both guidance and independence, they need education as well as opportunity to explore life for themselves. This requires tact and a delicately balanced approach from the parents and from society. It is my sincere hope that the ICPD will contribute to increased understanding and greater commitment to the reproductive health needs of young people, including the provision of confidential health services for them.

Visions are needed to bring about change. But we must also let our vision and commitment materialize through allocation of resources. The price tag for the program that we are here to adopt has been estimated at somewhere between 17 and 20 billion dollars per year.

The really hard work begins when ICPD is over. It is a major challenge to translate the new approach and objectives into implementable programmes. Norway will continue to participate in a dialogue with our bilateral and multilateral partners. We are pleased to see that important donors such as the US and Japan are now increasing their support to population issues. Other countries should follow suit. Hopefully, Norway

will soon be joined by other donor countries fulfilling the target of allocating at least 4% of ODA to population programs.

It is also important that governments devote 20 per cent of their expenditures to the social sector and that 20 per cent of ODA is allocated towards eradication of poverty.

In order to meet the cost requirements of this programme of action, however, another long-standing target needs to be fulfilled, the 0.7 per cent of GDP for ODA. The so-called "donor fatigue", again attributed to the general budgetary problems of the industrialized world, will certainly not facilitate this challenge. Budgetary priorities and allocations are being fought for by national Governments every year. And the 1 per cent-and-above allocation to ODA which Norway has been able to defend over the last 15 years or so, does not materialize without serious political work. Our work would be greatly facilitated by two factors: 1) that other donor countries begin approaching the target of 0.7 per cent, and 2) important both to Norway and, maybe to the whole donor community, that this conference like other world conferences proves by its outcome that we are truly committed to a new and more real solidarity with the world's poor and underprivileged - they who are without a voice, and without a choice.

Population growth is one of the most serious obstacles to world prosperity and sustainable development. We may soon be facing new famine, mass migration, destabilization and even armed struggle as peoples compete for ever more scarce land and water resources.

In the more developed countries the fortunate children of new generations may delay their confrontation with the imminent environmental crisis, but today's new-borns will be facing the ultimate collapse of vital resources bases.

In order to achieve a sustainable balance between the number of people and the amount of natural resources that can be consumed, both the peoples of the industrialized countries and the rich in the South have a special obligation to reduce their ecological impact.

Changes are needed, both in the North and the South, but these changes will not happen unless they stand the test of democracy. Only when people have the right to take part in the shaping of society by participating in democratic political processes will changes be politically sustainable. Only then can we fulfill the hopes and aspirations of generations yet unborn

I take this privileged opportunity to summon and challenge this Conference to answer its responsibility towards coming generations. We did not succeed in Rio with regard to population. Cairo must be successful - for earth's sake and humanity's sake.