



PRIME MINISTER GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

Democracy and Human Rights

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It is impressive that future leaders from more than 100 countries are here at this international student's conference ISFiT. We in Norway are honoured to have you as guests in our country. I hope that when you return to your own countries, you will be taking with you new experience, you will have made new friends and established new contacts - and that you will remain committed to serving your country and the global community.

When I see so much talent from so many countries, I am reminded of what John Kennedy once said when hosting a dinner for Nobel laureates at the White House. He said that never had so much talent been gathered there since Thomas Jefferson, an author of the Declaration of Independence, dined in the White House alone. I doubt if so much talent from so many countries has ever dined here as you will be doing in an hour.

It will make a difference how each and every one of you choose to use the talents with which you have been endowed. Because our solidarity must now be extended beyond national borders and even beyond generations. My appeal to you today is to become involved in public life. We need young people who maintain a strong social conscience so that you do not become indifferent to the plight of your fellow citizens, but serve as stalwart defenders of democracy and human rights. In an increasingly interdependent world, we are all neighbours.

We are approaching the end of a century marked by the building of democracy and human rights all over the world. Not all the buildings were founded on equally solid ground, some fell apart, some have been considerably delayed.

This century saw the rise and fall of communism, Millions of people suffered under its oppression. Many people in the West were harassed and prosecuted for their sympathies with the other side.

We have been witness to the process of decolonization which raised such high hopes in so many troubled corners of the world, and resulted in so many much disappointment because life conditions improved so slowly in the former colonies.

We built the United Nations and vested it with new responsibilities for peace, freedom and human rights, only to see it paralyzed for many decades and unable to agree on a course forward for all of humanity.

We have developed international rules and standards, but we had to watch them become double standards in many regions as dictators maneuvered between East and West seeking support.

Two world wars tore the old world asunder. But out of the ashes of Europe arose a new commitment - never again. Europeans and Americans were the draftsmen of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in Europe, Winston Churchill and others laid the groundwork for the Council of Europe and its Convention on Human Rights, which was adopted in 1950.

The overriding objective of this Convention, with its effective system of control and enforcement, was primarily to prevent new dictators from ever again seducing the people of European countries. In this regard it has succeeded - together with the efforts towards more economic and political cooperation within the EEC and now the European Union.

The European efforts in the field of human rights served as a model for the United Nations, and in 1966 its Conventions on civil and political and on economic social and cultural rights were adopted. However, these conventions are still not adhered to by all, and they lack effective control and enforcement measures.

Today the prospects for peace, democracy and human rights have never been better. But all regions face serious challenges.

Here in Europe, the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe have turned to the European institutions for cooperation and membership in order to accelerate their own process of democratization.

The crisis in former Yugoslavia is the most serious conflict in Europe since the Second World War and is a tragedy for its victims. I venture to say: All of Europe has been victimized by these events. We are faced with armed conflict, widespread human suffering and destruction on our own doorstep.

We have witnessed the intolerable practice of ethnic cleansing, indiscriminate artillery bombardment of besieged cities, torture and killing of prisoners in detention camps, and the outrage of mass rape, particularly of Muslim women.

At the UN I have advocated the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute all those responsible for the war crimes now being committed.

While we must be consistent in condemning all forms of atrocity, we must continue to give the highest priority to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the civilian population, and in particular to refugees and displaced persons. The lack of respect shown for the UNHCR's humanitarian relief convoys is a matter of grave concern.

Norway has placed great emphasis on humanitarian assistance to former Yugoslavia, and we are the third largest contributor to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' programme in former Yugoslavia after the USA and the EC Commission.

The crisis in Former Yugoslavia is the gravest we are facing in Europe today, and the risk that ethnic strife and nationalism may trigger other conflicts must be taken seriously. The international community must act with extreme caution. The task of consolidating democracy and ensuring economic reform and economic and social development in the former East bloc countries is probably far more demanding than we first thought. And these challenges are arising at a time when Western Europe is also confronted by serious economic problems of its own.

There is a risk that countries will turn inwards, and that each country or even each region will try to seek its own solutions. This is a destructive approach. I would like to stress as strongly as I can: The problems of today's and tomorrow's Europe can only be met through cooperative efforts. The only realistic path for a Europe heading towards the third millennium is strengthened European cooperation.

This is the overall challenge which we shall have to meet: We must shape a European cooperation tailored to the magnitude of the problems to be solved.

How can we succeed in supporting democracy and the rule of law in other countries if serious doubts can be raised about the situation of minorities and people of different nationalities and origins in our own societies?

How can we provide leadership if we ourselves become part of the problem rather than part of the solution?

How can we speak of equal rights and opportunities, conciliation and the need to act in good faith if in our own countries we are unable to curb animosity, fear and discrimination against people of different ethnic backgrounds?

Unemployment, -lack of knowledge and insecurity about the future are among the root causes of racism, extreme nationalism, xenophobia and the intolerance which we are witnessing in too many countries in Europe today, - regretfully - including my own.

We are disturbed by acts of racism and racially motivated harassment in our societies. We have seen people in large numbers not only advocating but exercising violence against groups or individuals with different physical characteristics, cultures or religions. We have seen the face of hatred, of fear and despair. We have seen the tragic, even fatal consequences, 50 years after Holocaust and the darkest chapters in European history.

We must fight this with the strength of our joint resolve and the best of our common heritage. We must fight it with the universal tolerance which should be the hallmark of our European house. This is a moral imperative. What did Mahatma Gandhi say when asked what he thought about Western civilization? He said it would be a good idea. We cannot allow it to remain so when our own characters are being tested. For those

who turn a blind eye to racism will become accessories to prejudice and violence, and society at large will suffer.

What we need now is a renewed commitment. A commitment to engage in sustained, systematic and long-term efforts, - painful as they may be, - to combat the ugly face of intolerance in all its manifestations. That is why Norway proposed a European Plan of Action against Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance to the Summit of the Council of Europe last fall.

One of the main features of this plan of action is to mobilize the strength, support and imagination of the young people of Europe in building fences against the resurgence of racism, intolerance and xenophobia in all our countries. Let us build a coalition of tolerance and dignity. Let us forge a community of purpose with the great number of non-governmental organizations and individuals who are already working tirelessly in this field.

Forty five years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights the tenets of this declaration remain unfulfilled for millions of human beings. Many societies have been unable to guarantee the four freedoms set out in the Declaration: freedom of speech, freedom of belief, freedom from fear and freedom from want. Grave violations of the rights of women, gender-based discrimination and the abuse and exploitation of children are among the depressing and pressing problems we cannot ignore.

International law has helped us forge an international system of relations between states, but traditionally international law has revolved around the principle of the sovereignty of states and the inviolability of their borders. Now we must establish the supremacy of the sovereignty of the individual human being. The principle of state sovereignty must not be invoked for the purpose of suppressing and violating the rights of the citizens. State sovereignty does not include the right to violate the individual.

By focusing on the inherent and inalienable rights of all human beings we contradict those who claim exclusive rights for a selected number of human beings based on ethnic origin or religious belief. The pursuit of exclusive communities and pure race breed separation, estrangement, hostility, and aggression.

Democracy is a necessary condition for the protection of human rights. Hence our principal task is to build democracy, and to promote the values of the open society designed to preserve pluralism, coherence and equity in the face of diversity.

Conflicts entail not only destruction and violence, but also fractured relationships and separated families. Some victims have become symbols, but the unknown millions who share their suffering must never be forgotten

We have committed ourselves to supporting the building of democracy in South Africa by especially focusing on conflict-preventing structures. The peace process in the Middle East is naturally one of the new targets for our assistance, and we are planning to channel 250 million NOK to that region next year.

We are also supporting the democratization in Guatemala, politically and financially, and this also applies to a number of countries such as Mozambique, El Salvador, Ethiopia and Eritrea, which are all in the difficult process of making the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

As a significant donor country, the policy of the recipient countries with respect to human rights and democracy is of great interest. When I chaired the World Commission on Environment and Development, I sometimes heard the view that there could be no conditionality in aid and lending. But I could not agree with this point of view.

We, the donor countries, have to defend our aid budgets every year as part of the democratic process. Public support for aid policies will of course not be indifferent to the political systems in the recipient countries. Today it is becoming more and more usual to focus on how the recipient countries meet the test of "good governance".

Through dialogue and cooperation, we discuss the connection between our contributions and the recipient countries' levels of defense expenditure, their social, redistributive and educational policies, - how they promote democracy and popular participation.

Our embassies are asked to report on how we can use our aid to strengthen positive trends in the various countries. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is a vital connection between open, democratic and accountable systems of governance, which have low levels of corruption and high respect for human rights - and the ability to achieve sustainable economic and social development.

Our Norwegian development assistance - even if it is high in per capita terms - can never change the world alone. We need partners who share our values if we are to achieve a global democracy.

I believe that a strengthened and cooperating Europe will be the most effective and caring partner for the people in the developing world who are struggling to break out of the poverty trap and out of past and present suppression.

If we unite our forces. If we can coordinate our aid efforts. If we in this part of the world never lose sight of our fundamental values and keep peace with each other, Europe, the cradle of democracy and human rights, can serve as an example of enlightened diversity.

Only by means of forceful persuasion, and not by persuasive force can we provide leadership, support and partnership for those places in the world

where democracy and human rights today are rooted in thinner soil, - but where tomorrow they may flourish and become real for us all.