



## PRIME MINISTER GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

NGO Forum

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I would like to use this time with you to commend the NGOs who have followed the preparations for Cairo. The next days will show how governments will deal with the issues that could not be agreed in advance. The quality of what has already been agreed, however, the unbracketed text, owes a lot to you. You have rightfully put pressure on governments and delegates. Future generations should thank you for it - as I want to do right here.

I said earlier today that we are gathered here to answer a moral call to action and that the decisions that will come out of Cairo must stand the test of true solidarity with present and future generations.

Reconciling our numbers and needs with the carrying capacity of the planet, with the environment which we all share will require change - profound change, in the north as well as in the south.

An average person in North America consumes almost 20 times as much as a person in India or China, and 60 to 70 times more than a person in Bangladesh. It is simply impossible for the world as a whole to sustain a Western level of consumption for all. In fact, if 7 billion people were to consume as much energy and resources as we do in the West today we would need 10 worlds, not one, to satisfy all our needs.

The vast majority who are poor make only a minimal claim to our natural resources, while the more voracious North is consuming in a few decades what has taken the planet billions of years to accumulate.

Technological and scientific advances have created a world economy of staggering dimensions, but it has left more than half of the world's people in poverty. Through overexploitation of our natural resources, we have brought life on earth ever closer to the brink of disaster.

The predicament is new to present generations, the first ones to face the formidable moral challenge: Not only one of responsibility to the needs and rights of others, but of those not yet born - and of the future life of nature itself.

Can a doubled world population be adequately fed in an environmentally sustainable way? How can they be educated and become our partners when today only 8 per cent, in some very poor countries only 2 per cent have access to higher education?

How can we find the energy to fuel a world economy perhaps five times larger than today's without spoiling the environment and significantly disrupt climate?

Developing countries require environmental space for their development. For them, the future is essentially about development and justice.

They will not accept the unequal burden that seems to be asked of them, - to be the caretakers of our common responsibilities for future generations, while we who have been destroying nature and raised our standard of living, through unsustainable patterns of growth are not ready to take our share - the bill of repair.

We need much greater efforts in shouldering global bills for peace, development, environment and the growing refugee problem.

Environmental improvements have been made in a number of fields. We have after all, made some progress. But as we move forward, the damage we set out to rectify will be less visible to the public opinion which we rely on to support new policies.

That is why we must emphasize the need for information and education. I envisage a virtuous circle whereby information and education lead to support for policies as well as to industrial breakthroughs.

A nation's population is its main asset. But a rapidly growing population can become a liability instead of an asset. When the population growth is higher than the economic growth, it strangles the prospects of providing for basic human needs, such as education, nutrition, health care and shelter. The earning capacity of the labour force suffers, and the problems are compounded when job opportunities fail to keep pace with the number of job-seekers.

When the world met at Rio in 1992, we had an opportunity to rise to the occasion, and to agree on forward looking population policies. This did not happen. In fact, the Rio decisions on population represented a step backwards. Cairo will, I have no doubt at all, be remembered as a major step forward.

Cairo should be remembered for what it will do for women. I cannot emphasize strongly enough that educating women is probably the best of all strategies towards a stabilization of our numbers.

Investing in girl's education yields direct returns in the form of reduced fertility rate through delayed age of marriage. A girl with secondary education typically marries four years later than a girl with no education. The impact on the individual girl is a wider range of choices and opportunities in life. Globally, the impact of such delayed marriages would be 1 billion people less when the global population stability is reached, than what is presently estimated.

International awareness of literacy disparities between the sexes has grown over the last decade. According to the 1993 World Education Report, the disparities are slowly diminishing at the global level and in all major regions.

The difference in the rate of illiteracy in the South and North is still the most salient aspect of the broader "knowledge gap" between the South and the North. UNESCO estimates that 65 per cent of the total number of illiterate adults in 1990, were women. The literacy rate for men in developing countries in 1990 was 77 per cent, as compared to that of women which was only 56 per cent. Increases in female literacy rates are slow and special efforts are still needed to bridge the male-female literacy gap.

Parent's educational role in helping their children make wise reproductive choices deserves increased attention. The parents are the child's first educators. To be able to carry out this role, parents need access to accurate information on human sexuality and family planning. They also need to see the benefits of sending their children to school, thereby increasing their motivation.

Important as it is to focus on women in our development efforts I would nevertheless like to focus on the importance of men, half of all parents, in relation to family planning, but also on how they live up to their duties as fathers.

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 of 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.

Men will probably be more willing to change their habits, - to pay for their children's upbringing and to be available for their children - if they are met with disapproval from other men, if they run away from their obligations.'

A major change in family patterns today is thus the increased number of single female-headed households, and these households are among the poorest in the world.

Poverty is a root cause of population growth just as it is a cause of environmental degradation.

There is no better insurance policy for developed and developing countries than funding population and family planning programmes. Much of the contribution must come from developing countries themselves. But industrialized countries must greatly improve their financial contributions. 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 in the third world.

Larger portions of the development assistance need to be targeted towards meeting the basic needs of the poor, including increased allocation for population programmes. The United Nations Development Programme has suggested that 20 per cent 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 per cent of their development aid to meeting these priority needs. These proposals are minimum requirements, and other donors in addition to Norway should be in a position to reach the proposed target of 20 per cent of their development aid for this purpose.

Cairo will be a test of our ability to shape the future and to fulfill our assignment from coming generations - to leave no less opportunity to them than we inherited ourselves. I trust that the NGO-community will hold us accountable. And I call on you to continue your hard work and efforts, based on human conscience and commitment. The rewards will be high for all of us: A safer, cleaner and more equitable future.