



PRIME MINISTER GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND

World launch, Human Development Report

Oslo, 17 August 1995,

We are pleased and honoured that the United Nations Development Programme has chosen to launch this year's Human Development Report here in Norway.

Each year, this report has a particular focus. Last year, the focus was on human security, and the report provided valuable information and viewpoints ahead of the Social Summit in Copenhagen.

This year the focus is sharply on the unfinished agenda of equality between men and women. And it will be of great help, and a source of inspiration, as we prepare to go to Beijing.

I want to congratulate the UNDP-team, under the leadership of Mahbub ul Haq, for providing us with the munition in this year's report. What the report tells us is that we need the women's conference in Beijing, because we are not satisfied and we will never be satisfied as long as disparities prevail, as long as discrimination is endemic. There isn't a single country in the world - not one - where men and women enjoy completely equal opportunities. So we must go to Beijing, to change attitudes, values and policies.

I have heard the opinion voiced that we should not go to Beijing. There are many well-intentioned people who believe we should stay away because of the human rights situation in the host country. My view is that we owe it to those girls and women who are less fortunate than we are to go to Beijing. A conference without us would be a conference where our influence is unfelt and unrepresented. We owe it ourselves, to the 500 million girls and women of the host country, and to the hundreds of millions around the world who suffer under the heel of injustice and oppression. We owe it to them to help move the world towards equality and real equal opportunity.

In Beijing we will adopt a Platform for Action - setting out priorities and targets for concrete results. At present, that document is still full of brackets, meaning that there is still no agreement on important proposals, - I would say - on imperatives for development. There are still such brackets meaning that there are unrecognized rights for women which in our view should be inalienable. So we must go to Beijing in order to unbracket the lives of girls and women.

Ensuring equal opportunities for women is not only morally right. It is also the single most important path to higher productivity for society as a whole. This year's report is emphatic in showing how the economic returns on investing in women's education are comparable to those for men. But the social returns from educating women far exceed those of educating men.

It pays to invest in women - not only for their own good, but for the good of society. And this holds true in rich and poor countries alike.

You will note from the report that the Nordic countries lead the world in terms of gender equality and participation by women in both political and economic life. Today, almost half of Norway's workforce is female. But the political slogan - "work for everybody" - "hele folket i arbeid" did not mean that in the thirties, forties and fifties. It meant work for men - not for women, at least not paid work. Only through the trend which started in the seventies has "work for everybody" meant just that, even in the Nordic countries.

Norway spearheaded the use of quota systems in political and public life. When existing power structures discriminate against the weak and vulnerable members of society, affirmative action by the state is no longer an option, it is an imperative. And it is with the same consciousness and conviction that we must work to promote equality of opportunity for women around the world.

Neither Norway, nor the other Nordic countries have come far enough. We must still work on attitudes, on pay schemes, on men's participation and involvement in the family. Being a parent is a privilege and an obligation, to be equally shared by the father as well as the mother. The main barrier to equality in Norway is the lack of equality in the home.

Governments must ensure that their development policies are gender sensitive. In a number of countries there is a need for specific programmes for concrete purposes. I would like to highlight four themes from the Human Development Report - themes which we must move forward in Beijing.

1. Universal female education is essential not only for justice, but as a means by which countries will be able to develop. Women's education and their fertility is inextricably bound together.
2. Women's access to financial credits is essential, not only for justice but also for development. In many countries, women own nothing, they inherit nothing and are unable to offer security, and on top of that the laws often work against them, even when they only want a modest loan to become more independent and productive.
3. The 20/20 initiative, which was adopted on a voluntary basis at the Social Summit in Copenhagen in March, is a concrete step by which countries can guarantee basic social services for all. What it proposes is that developing countries should earmark 20 per cent of their national budgets, and donors 20 per cent of their aid, for high priority human concerns, including basic education, primary health care, safe drinking water, family planning and nutrition. It is not possible to meet the aspirations of our people, nor to fulfil the commitments of the Cairo, Copenhagen and Beijing conferences without allocating at least 20 per

cent of our national budgets to basic social services. In Beijing we must genderize 20/20 in order to rectify the sad disenfranchising of women and children in the past and present.

4. Violence and neglect of women and in particular the girl child - this is what we must fight with our joint resolve. Not only must the physical violence described in the report come to an end. We must also put an end to the neglect of girl children and the unequal distribution of food, health, and stimulation between brother and sister which severely threaten the growth and life of the girl child and her pursuit of happiness.

These are some of the themes we must pursue in Beijing. Equipped with the Human Development Report we will be able to stand up for these imperatives in Beijing knowing that we face a formidable opposition of cultural traditions and special interests.

I thank you all for being here this morning. It is essential that the media going to Beijing knows the issues at stake and that you will do your utmost to share your knowledge with a wider audience. Thank you very much.