

The Grieg Hall  
Bergen, 8 May 1990

Prime Minister Jan P. Syse

**ACTION FOR A COMMON FUTURE - OPENING ADDRESS**

Your Majesty, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The finest eloquence is that which gets things done. For two weeks, Bergen will be the environmental capital of a region stretching from Alaska through Europe and on to Eastern Siberia. There will be many speeches. There will be much eloquence. But let us all see to it that our eloquence is of the kind which gets things done.

Variety would be the appropriate characteristic of the vast area that covers the Northern part of our planet. But we are not here to discuss the variety. We are here to address what we have in common; our environment, the threats facing it and our shared responsibility for the future of our planet.

It is indeed an honour to welcome you all to Bergen and to the Regional Follow-up Conference of the World Commission for Environment and Development. It is an honour to invite you to join forces. The military threat has diminished. The environmental threat must now be forcefully attacked.

This Conference is unique. We are brought together not by any single event, but by a rapidly increasing awareness of the degradation of our common environment. We are brought together as representatives of governments, science, environmental organisations, youth, labour and the business community. It is the first time that a regional conference at ministerial level has included such wide representation at all stages.

For more than two years, a variety of groups from 34 countries have prepared the activities of this conference. The governments of Poland, the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States have hosted the preparatory workshops on its four main topics. My gratitude goes to all of you.

The doors to the closed rooms of international environmental negotiations have been opened. This is indeed a breakthrough. In protecting the environment we are all decision-makers. The future cannot be shaped by government decrees alone. Political decisions must be stimulated and supported by commitments from other forces of our society. Each of the groups represented at this conference has a crucial role to play. That is why we have two interrelated final documents on the table: A Ministerial Declaration and a Common Agenda for Action.

The report from the World Commission gave our common efforts a decisive push forward. Since its publication we have witnessed a shift from awareness and concern to scientific knowledge and calls for action. Environmental issues have reached the top of our common political agenda.

Speeding up the transition from knowledge to action - that is the urgent challenge of the 1990's. Contributing to this process - that is what the Bergen Conference is all about. We have sufficient scientific evidence to state that action is required. And where uncertainty still exists we must give the environment the benefit of the doubt.

Global sustainable development is more than our common objective; it is an absolute imperative. Success will depend on our ability to shape an effective system of international cooperation. We have done so in the past in meeting other common challenges. In an unprecedented process of integration, the countries of the West have replaced centuries of conflicts by peace, prosperity and cooperation. In the field of East/West-security and arms control historic results have been achieved. A tremendous



challenge now awaits us: To develop the means by which the world community can reverse the trends of ecological destruction and secure the planet for future generations.

During the coming days several documents will be finalized. It is my hope that the Bergen commitments will be many and that they will take us important steps in the right direction. Change will not come overnight. But we must agree on binding and ambitious targets that will make the process irreversible.

Some commitments are of a fundamental character. Agreeing to the precautionary principle is a moral and political commitment. It is no longer enough to limit and repair. Environmental measures must anticipate, prevent and attack the causes of ecological degradation.

Other commitments set targets, such as agreeing on the stabilization of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by the year 2000. More than 70% of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions come from our countries. If trends are to be reversed in time we must be ambitious and lead the way, and we must do it now.

Our commitments should reach even further. We must give the developing countries evidence that we are aware of the global character of our environmental challenge. The establishment of a financial mechanism to enable the developing countries to comply with the Montreal protocol would be an important signal of global awareness.

The countries represented in this hall must carry the burden for changing the course. It is only by showing that we, the richest countries in the UN-family, can put our own house in order that we can build a solid foundation for further global commitments.

The process will be complex. It will be costly. Our economists recommend extended use of environmental taxes. Our technologists advise that strict product standards should be applied. No

single country can carry these burdens alone. They must be shared - and shared cost-effectively. The ecological basis for development must be closely linked to and integrated with economic policies. Between now and the 1992 Conference in Brazil, we should elaborate a joint strategy for combatting the ecological degradation of our region. Our ability to succeed in the implementation of such a strategy will ultimately depend on a more efficient system of international decision-making. Our present system is inadequate. It must urgently be strengthened and further developed.

A democratic revolution is taking place in Eastern and Central Europe. A dynamic and inspiring process of political and economic reform is underway. The opening of Europe has revealed a dramatic state of environmental degradation. In large areas there is literally "Darkness at noon" - to quote Arthur Koestler.

We now have a unique opportunity not only to build a new political order on our continent, but to clean up the European environment. It is no longer we and they - it is us. May the Bergen conference mark the beginning of a new era of joint efforts based on this acknowledgement.

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Your Majesty, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish the participants in the Bergen Conference success in the work which is now to begin. The conference will take place in an environmental setting that should inspire us all. The beauty of Bergen and the West Coast of Norway should remind us to what extent the quality of life is linked to the state of the environment. But this quality of life is certainly not given once and for all. It must be protected, cherished and fought for every day.

In two weeks from now, some will say that we should have gone further. I welcome these voices. As Edmund Burke said: The only

thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. People are right to be impatient. We must all be impatient to succeed. May this impatience stimulate us all to go further. And may the Bergen Conference become a milestone in a decade of constant change - a decade of Action for our common future.