

The World Summit for Children

New York, 29 - 30 September, 1990.

A message from Prime Minister Jan P. Syse, Norway.

A world not taking care of its children, is jeopardizing its future. The gathering of world leaders at a Summit for Children must send a strong message of our determination to protect the world's most precious and vulnerable resource: our children.

In a global perspective, Norwegian children are privileged. Our living standards are high. The basic needs of children are met. With regard to health and nutrition, the situation is satisfactory, and the equal right to education for all is realized. Nevertheless, we recognize that there still are problems of child abuse, neglect and insufficient consideration of children's interests. Increased efforts are required to strengthen the protection of children, particularly those threatened by problems related to maltreatment and sexual exploitation, alcohol and drug abuse.

Norway has created a special public institution called the Ombudsman or the Commissioner for Children. The Commissioner's role is to bring children's concerns to the awareness of the decision-makers and of the public; to press for action that will improve the situation of children, particularly those most in need. With the support of UNICEF, a study is now underway to evaluate the effects of the Commissioner's work. I hope that the results will be of use to other countries as well, and that they will serve the interests of children in all corners of the world.

A future sound and safe environment is vital, especially to our children. We must therefore find bold, new solutions to the environmental problems facing us. The urgent challenge of the 1990s will be to make the transition from knowledge to action. A process was launched by the UN Commission on Environment and Development. We must now accelerate our efforts. Resolute action is required at national level. Binding international agreements are urgently needed at the global level. The industrialized nations must contribute additional resources to assist the efforts of developing countries. Norway has proposed the establishment of a more efficient decision-making process and the elaboration of a binding environmental "code of conduct" in the European region. Such measures could also contribute to finding solutions at the global level.

The changes to our climate represent the most serious long-term environmental threat to future generations. If we do not reverse the trends now, our children may find them irreversible. Solutions will require more ambitious international cooperation. Negotiations on a Convention on Climate Change should be launched without delay.

The protection of children's interests is linked to economic and social development. A mobilization of resources from the rich and developed parts of our global community is urgently required. Norway allocates more than one per cent of its GDP to development assistance, and is determined to pursue its present policies. I urge all industrialized countries to step up their contributions now and to reach at least the adopted target of 0.7 per cent of GDP. The governments of the developing countries must assume their responsibilities by accelerating economic and political reforms.

The economic crisis in developing countries has primarily hit the most vulnerable groups. Children are almost always among these groups. In many cases, progress in health, nutrition and education has been replaced by deteriorating social conditions as the economic crisis and debt burdens take their toll. It is of vital importance that our aid be structured to protect the most vulnerable. Additional resources must be channeled to the poorest countries, and to the most vulnerable groups within these countries. On their side, the developing countries must give the necessary priority to ensuring basic social services.

Today, more than ten per cent of Norwegian development aid is spent on health, mother and child care and family planning. Norway is the fourth largest contributor to UNICEF. This organization has a very special role to play in meeting the needs of children. It deserves our fervent support.

The success of our Summit will not be measured by our speeches. It can only be measured by our readiness to implement the commitments laid down in the Summit declaration and in the plan of action. Solutions do exist. History will judge us harshly if we fail to act.