

STATSMINISTER KÅRE WILLOCHS HILSNINGSTALE VED ÅPNINGEN AV  
MØTE I OSLO I VERDENSKOMMISSJONEN FOR MILJØ OG UTVIKLING,  
24. JUNI 1985.

Madame Chairman,

Distinguished Guests,

members of the Commission, and Guests,

Today marks a very important event: the opening of the third meeting of the World Commission on Environment and Development in Oslo. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to welcome to our country this distinguished group of policy makers and experts in an area of vital importance to the global community.

The Norwegian Government feels honoured that your group has chosen to visit a number of projects in various parts of Norway that are of relevance to the Commission's work. As you may have realized, Norway is a large country compared with its small population. This has led someone to say that we may have "more environment per capita" than most countries: At all events, we feel that we have been endowed with a great deal that we must take care of, - and, in addition, I think we are justified in saying that we have long tradition in Norway of caring

about nature, of living in close contact with and, as far as possible, in harmony with, the natural environment around us.

However, we fully realize that in order to be able to meet the environmental challenges facing us today, we also need a degree of political harmony within the international community. If we are unable to live up to these challenges, I envisage a future in which a struggle to gain environmental advantages might well lead to severe international confrontations. On the other hand, today we have the scientific insight and the technical means to reduce, and to partly solve, the most pressing environmental problems, provided that we join together in an honest international effort. And if we look to our common interests, we certainly have every reason to do so. I can assure you that the Norwegian Government will continue to give these efforts its full political backing. We consider hosting your conference to be a part of this effort.

13 years ago, the World Community came together in Stockholm to discuss shared environmental problems. During the first years following that important conference, the industrial nations took a rather national and sectorial approach to analyzing environmental problems. Action was taken within our own countries - to combat

damage already inflicted on the environment. However, we tended to concentrate on effects rather than on causes. Still, this approach has led to considerable results in the industrial nations, where we have managed to rectify a great deal of environmental damage, but where, unquestionably, much still remains undone.

However, we have also recognized the need for more efficient and, in reality, less costly ways of solving our environmental problems: Rather than the traditional "react and cure"-approach, we have realized the necessity of adopting an "anticipate and prevent"-strategy. This implies that we must integrate environmental concerns and practices of sound resource management into our economic policy, in the public as well as in the private sector.

The dramatic developments which we are now witnessing on the African continent have effectively demonstrated to all of us the tragic consequences of an interplay of natural catastrophes and lack of foresight in economic and environmental matters. We cannot predict or prevent all natural catastrophes. But we can place much more emphasis on developing mechanisms for sound management of the environment and the economy. We must also reassess the way in which we use existing management structures, keeping in mind their potential contribution to the problems at hand.

We have begun to understand that some of the global environmental problems are directly related to the development patterns of the industrial world. The acid rain which drifts across oceans and international borders, polluting soil and water - sometimes to a degree approaching an ecological catastrophe - are but one example, though a very important one, of the challenges with which we are confronted. The Norwegian Government is pressing for further international action to combat acid rain, and we have decided to concentrate in the next phase on reducing the level of nitrogen - which emanates mainly from fuel used for transport - in addition to further lowering the norms for sulphur.

The severe impact of trans-boundary air pollution in Europe induced the Nordic countries to launch an initiative within the UN Economic Commission for Europe, which in 1978 led to the adoption of a Convention on the reduction of air pollution. That convention established a political framework to which countries of Eastern and Western Europe alike were able to adhere. Acid rain represents, in my opinion, a very striking example of the kind of common problem in which East-West cooperation in Europe is an immediate and practical necessity.

In 1983 the Nordic governments again initiated concrete proposals to reduce emissions of sulphur by 30%

from the 1980 level before 1993. To our regret, not all countries have as yet indicated a willingness to undertake such a definite commitment. In my opinion, the time has now come for even more resolute action directed against acid rain. We are not dependent upon any further scientific investigations to establish the extent of damage - we can see with our own eyes how important fishing-lakes "are dying out", - there are no longer any trout - and we can observe how the forests are dying as well, at an increasing rate and in large regions of Europe. Waiting for further evidence would mean allowing the pollution and the damage to grow to unacceptable proportions. We have reached a point at which governments should contemplate drastic measures against those polluting the air and the mandatory introduction of more efficient - even if more costly purification methods in order to drastically reduce the pollution which is being released into the atmosphere, producing the "acid rain". If we make use of the Convention on air pollution which I just mentioned, we can also insure that governments take measures simultaneously - thus minimizing changes in the competitive position of industries in various countries.

Looking back over the past ten years I would also like to stress that European states have, after all, managed to agree on important measures aimed at

alleviating problems in our part of the world, and that other regional arrangements ought to play an equally important role in the global effort to reduce environmental problems.

The negotiators at the UN Third Conference for the Law of the Sea also recognized the need for regional or bilateral arrangements, as did those United Nations negotiators who have been involved in working out rules for the non-navigational use of international watercourses. Industrial countries have, for better or worse, considerable experience in the special problems presented by waterways and should be in a position to share their experiences with other countries.

The technical and economic resources commanded by industrial countries and the ability of these countries to absorb innovations and changes, place upon them a special responsibility for limiting damage to other states. To take one small example: Norway has recognized that her merchant fleet, which sails all over the world, implies a risk of damage to coastal states and to the living resources of the sea. We have therefore adopted very stringent technical standards for our merchant fleet, thus contributing to the ecologically sound conduct of world trade. As a coastal state which to a large extent lives with the sea and from the sea and the

continental shelf, we fully recognize the need for "prevention rather than cure". And we are pleased to note that our industries themselves - employers and employees alike - realize the obligation to participate in these efforts.

The only way we can solve environmental problems of the scale and nature now confronting us, is to recognize the growing interdependence between nations and between policy areas within nations. The Commission has rightly made this feature one of the central concerns of its deliberations.

The main responsibility for concrete results rests with the governments. It is up to us to implement the advice given by a number of bodies, including the World Commission, and to apply the necessary resources and skills in order to protect our future and our common heritage, thus supporting the basis for a better and richer life on our planet.

With these words I wish to express again the strong support of the Norwegian Government for the Commission's work. We feel confident that you will have a productive session this week, and wish you all the best of luck in your efforts, and a pleasant stay in Norway.