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THE WORLD COMMISSION  
ON  
ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

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MINUTES OF THE INAUGURAL MEETING

1 - 3 OCTOBER 1984

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

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THE WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT  
Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting  
1-3 October 1984  
in Geneva, Switzerland

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I. Introduction

1. The Inaugural Meeting of the World Commission on Environment and Development was held at the International Conference Center, Rue Varembe, in Geneva, Switzerland, from 1 October to 3 October, 1984.

2. The Inaugural Meeting was attended by 18 Members of the Commission. The list of participants is attached to these Minutes as Annex 1.

II. Opening Session of the Inaugural Meeting

3. The Opening Session of the Inaugural Meeting was held on the morning of Monday, 1 October 1984, before a public audience of invited guests, including representatives from the diplomatic community, U.N. agencies, NGO's and the press. The Opening Session was opened by Mr Jim MacNeill, the Secretary General of the Commission and during this Session statements were delivered by:

H.E. Ambassador Franz Muheim, on behalf of  
the President of Switzerland;

The Right Honourable Bumbei Hara, the  
former Japanese Minister of Environment;

Mr. Waked Tarzi, on behalf of the  
Secretary General of the United Nations; and

The Chairman of the Commission,  
Mrs Gro Harlem Brundtland.

4. The statements delivered at the Opening Session are attached as Annex 2 to these Minutes.

III. Adoption of the Agenda

5. The Agenda for the Inaugural Meeting was adopted as set out in Annex 3 to these Minutes.

IV. Discussions with Heads of International Organizations

6. To provide the Commission with the opportunity to receive the views and advice of leading international agencies and NGO's on the key issues to be addressed by the Commission in the course of its work, seven representatives were invited to attend the Inaugural Meeting and to submit papers to the Commission for its prior review. These invitees were:

Dr. M.K. Tolba, Executive Director - UNEP  
Mr. E. Saouma, Director General - FAO  
Mr. A.M. M'Bow, Director General - UNESCO  
Mr. H. Mahler, Director General - WHO  
Dr. G.O.P. Obasi, Secretary General - WMO  
Sir John Kendrew, President - ICSU  
Professor M. Kassas, President - IUCN

7. All of these invitees submitted papers to the Commission and these are found in Annex 4 to these Minutes. Dr. Mostafa Tolba, Dr. G.O.P. Obasi and Dr. Kenton Miller (representing Professor Mohammad Kassas) also appeared in person before the Commission to discuss their papers. In addition, Dr. Arcot Ramachandran, Executive Director of U.N. Habitat, Nairobi delivered a telexed message to the Commission (attached as Annex 5 to these Minutes) in which he emphasized the clear linkages between environment and human settlements and the critical role, both pro-active and reactive, which human beings play in

environment and human settlement processes, particularly the poor whose poverty is both a major cause and effect of environment and settlement problems.

Discussion with Dr. Mostafa Tolba  
Executive Director, UNEP

8. The Chairman welcomed Dr. Tolba and expressed the Commissioners' pleasure at his being able to personally attend the Inaugural Meeting. After extending congratulations to the Chairman on her Statement to the Opening Session and to the Chairman and Secretary General on their appointments, Dr. Tolba read a statement briefly summarizing the views expressed in his written statement to the Commission, noting in particular that the major tasks facing the Commission are:

- (i) to conceptualize sustainable development in operational terms; and
- (ii) to develop long term strategies for sustainable development which will bring hope to the millions of people living in poverty and which will appeal, and have meaning, to people who have little understanding of environment but play key decision-making roles in the formulation of development policies.

9. He also cautioned the Commission that, in developing such strategies, it would need to confront some very difficult issues, including, among others, land tenure policies, population pressures, the impact of neo-classical economics on environmental management, the energy crisis, the regenerative capacity of the environment, the Third World debt crisis and Antarctica.

10. In the discussion which followed his summary remarks, Dr. Tolba elaborated on the relationship between the Commission, UNEP's Governing Council and the IIPC, emphasizing how important it was that the Commission's independence be ensured. He stated that in his view there were two reports to be prepared:

- (i) the Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 - to be prepared by UNEP's Governing Council and the IIPC, and
- (ii) the report of the Commission which was broader in its scope and would help frame the recommendations which UNEP would include in its report.

11. He stated that while the Commission's report would be submitted to UNEP's Governing Council for comment before its submission by UNEP to the General Assembly, neither UNEP's Governing Council nor the IIPC have the right to change it. Dr. Tolba noted that UNEP's Governing Council would use the output of the Commission as an input to UNEP's separate report.

Discussion with Dr. G.O.P. Obasi  
Secretary General of WMO

12. Dr. Obasi was welcomed by the Chairman during the afternoon session on Tuesday, October 2, 1984 and delivered a statement to the Commission (attached as Annex 6 to these Minutes) in which he commended to the Commission the conclusions of the "Global Possible Conference" held in Washington in May 1984, noting that those conclusions "reflected a correct recognition of the most important environmental issues related to atmosphere and climate". Dr. Obasi also drew the attention of the Commission to several key climatic and atmospheric issues for their consideration, notably:

- (i) the greenhouse effect: man-induced climatic change;
- (ii) stratospheric ozone depletion;
- (iii) acid rain and other forms of transboundary pollution;
- (iv) possible environmental side effects of weather modification activities;
- (v) the interactions between climate, desertification, deforestation and soil erosion, and
- (vi) the climatic consequences of nuclear warfare.

Dr. Obasi concluded his presentation by assuring the Commission of the readiness of WMO to provide it with any available scientific and technical material which it might wish to study more closely at a later stage in its work.

Discussion with Dr. Kenton Miller  
Director General, IUCN

13. Mr. Miller was welcomed by the Chairman during the Commission's afternoon session on Wednesday, October 3, 1984. Dr. Miller gave a brief summary of the paper submitted by IUCN to the Commission (see Annex 4) during which he stressed the necessity of promoting the sustainable utilization of living natural resources and suggested that the Commission consider this as one of the key issues it will address in the course of its work. In his remarks, Dr. Miller observed that the benefits of preserving natural living resources are fundamental to human welfare but noted that depletion of natural resources was proceeding at unprecedented rates due to a lack of understanding and awareness of the problem, the non-dissemination of relevant information to decision-makers and the inadequacy of funding and training for resource management. Dr. Miller expressed the view that with

political will and courage positive steps in respect of the preservation of living natural resources could be taken; and he cited a recent IUCN report which included case studies of successful resource management projects.

V. Future Work of the Commission

14. Key Issues - At the Chairman's request, the Secretary General introduced the paper prepared by the Secretariat on the key issues (WCED/84/10-1) (Annex 7) noting that in considering the key issues the Commission should keep in mind the strategy, workplan, timetable and budget papers submitted to the Commission and be cognizant of the two options contained in the key issue paper (i.e. the conventional formulation of critical environment and development issues and the alternative formulation of those issues). In his remarks, the Secretary General stressed the importance of the Commission adopting common perspectives on population and economic, scientific and technological developments as a framework for addressing key environment and development issues, and reviewed the horizontal themes against which the Commission will need to examine the key issues i.e., interdependence, sustainability, equity and security and environmental risks. He also commented upon the complex geo-political nature of environment and development issues and the resultant necessity for the Commission to address the issue of new forms of international cooperation in the course of its deliberations. Finally, the Secretary General briefly elaborated on the limitation of addressing the key environment and development issues under the standard formulation of those issues and the advantages of adopting the alternative formulation.

15. In the discussion which followed, the Commission clearly indicated its preference for adoption of the alternative formulation as a framework for addressing



the key issues. Nevertheless, that discussion identified a number of issues, perspectives, concerns and interests which the Commission believed needed to be incorporated into the final version of the paper on key issues.

16. Because of the transnational nature of environment and development problems it was noted that the issue of international cooperation will be one of great importance to the Commission. It was observed that in considering the accomplishment of its objectives the Commission should take note that while ten years ago there seemed to be a consensus of opinion and interest on the part of governments in respect of environment and development issues, today that may not necessarily be true and indeed it can be argued that the Commission will be working in a climate which is unpropitious for international cooperation with unilateralism, nationalism and the exercise of power on the rise. It was noted that the primary motivations for international cooperation of the post-war era, i.e., morality, collective security and full employment, no longer appear as compelling as they once did but that the unifying effect of environment in today's world of complex conflict and weakening cooperation provides the Commission with the opportunity of rebuilding the ethic and the logic of multilateralism. Rebuilding that ethic is a task the Commission must embrace. In that regard, the Commission will need to address issues related to the "global commons" (including Antarctica, the oceans and outer-space) and to consider the creation of international legal mechanisms for the regulation and implementation of its proposals.

17. It was also stressed that, in the process of addressing its work and with a view to the preparation of its final report, the Commission will seriously need

to consider and take into account the effects and ramifications of recent economic, scientific and technological changes when conducting its analysis of the key issues. Special attention will need to be given to scientific and technological research and to the developments they forestage not only in scientific and technological terms but also in economic terms.

18. It was strongly recommended that in its consideration of the key issues and the structuring of its strategy and approach to them, the Commission should take cognizance of certain relevant conditions and perspectives. First, the Commission must recognize that one of its overall goals is to design and present proposals that best harmonise human development with a respect for the environment and a realisation of its potential for contributing to human development. This requires analysis of the conceptual differences which exist between countries in respect of the meaning of development, i.e., both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of human and economic development. Secondly, the Commission must recognise that environmental policies cannot be predicated on poverty and that environmental protection and poverty cannot exist together, i.e. relief from poverty is environmental protection and poverty is environmental degradation. Thirdly, the Commission will need to take account of the limitations of existing political and economic theories.

19. Education, Information and Communications were other relevant areas which it was strongly felt the Commission should specifically address. There was widespread comment about the "target audiences" which the Commission should address in its work, in particular, those within the political power structure, i.e., political decision makers, industry, trade unions, social movements, young people and educators.

In this respect, due regard needs to be given to cultural values and spiritual differences of people as motivations for human action and behaviour; and attention must be given to structural obstacles to change, both political and economic.

20. Another development aspect which needs to be included for consideration under the key issues is transportation and its resultant environmental impacts.

21. In summing up the discussions on the key issue paper, the Chairman remarked that in addressing its mandate and the key issues the Commission must be sincere, scientific and outspoken and its approach must be concrete and action-oriented. While retaining a sense of realism, it must be willing to change reality, to "sing a song or say a poem which can reach the ears of people and touch their hearts". Finally, the Commission must be willing and able to stir people's imagination, to move their thoughts, feelings and sense of public responsibility.

#### Strategy, Workplan and Timetable

22. The Secretary General introduced the papers prepared by the Secretariat on the Commission's Strategy (WCED/84/10-2) (Annex 8), and its Workplan and Timetable (WCED/84/10-3) (Annex 9). In his introductory remarks, the Secretary General briefly introduced each of the principal elements of the proposed strategy, workplan and timetable including:

- (i) the state-of-the-art assessment reports - which he noted were designed to obtain an authoritative, up-to-date and reasonable consensus of a representative cross-section of the international scientific community on

specific environment and development issues (as conventionally defined). These, he noted would form an essential basis for the Commission's work and deliberations;

- (ii) the policy reports on key issues framed in accordance with the alternative formulation - work in respect of which could begin simultaneously with the compilation of the state-of-the-art assessment reports;
- (iii) Advisory panels - which the Secretary General noted could be made up of senior world-scale experts and figures in relevant policy sectors and would have the responsibility of preparing policy reports for submission to the Commission in early to mid 1986. He pointed out that the reports prepared by these advisory panels would be submitted to the Commission under the authority of the advisory panel and that in using advisory panels it would be reasonable to expect that cooperative arrangements could be made with leading scientific institutes whereby such institutes would undertake the work at their cost and present the results in the form of a report to the Commission;
- (iv) Cooperation with International Organizations, including those within the U.N. system, in particular UNEP and the IIPC;
- (v) Commission meetings in national capitals - which the Secretary General noted would provide the Commission with the opportunity to dialogue with regional organizations (both governmental and non-governmental), national legislative bodies, departments and agencies directly concerned with environment and development issues;

- (vi) visits by Commissioners to government leaders - when travelling to and from Commission meetings;
- (vii) the organization and conduct of regional activities related to the work of the Commission - which the Secretary General noted could provide useful feed-back on reports earlier released by the Commission; and
- (viii) the involvement of the Commission, through the Chairman, other Commission members or the Secretariat, at major environment and development events scheduled over the next two years, e.g., special international conferences and meetings as well as regular meetings of relevant inter-governmental bodies.

23. In concluding his introductory remarks, the Secretary General referred the Commission to the draft workplan and timetable which set out in chronological order the various components of the Commission's strategy previously mentioned.

24. The discussion which followed the Secretary General's introductory remarks highlighted three major components of the Commission's strategy, workplan and timetable, i.e. its general process, the drafting process and the structure of the Secretariat. As regards the general process, it was stressed that the Commission's work must be as open and participatory as possible with direct input being sought from all streams of advice, including the public at large, the media and NGO's. In addition, concerted effort must be made to obtain the input of regional centers of excellence and special research institutes, e.g., IASSA, RFF, IFPRI, Fondation Bariloche, etc.; and it must be recognized that the Commission needs to be exposed to environmental specialists and thinkers at

its regular meetings. There was broad support within the Commission for the necessity and appropriateness of the Commission organizing and obtaining regional input to its activities; and it was noted, in this regard, that the holding of Commission meetings in various capitals around the world would greatly facilitate this process. It was also emphasized that the Commission in the course of its work should maintain an on-going interaction with the IIPC; and it was suggested that the Chairman of the IIPC be invited to address a future meeting of the Commission. Finally, in considering its general process, the Commission acknowledged the importance of maintaining flexibility in its consideration of the key issues and the conduct of its work, agreeing that in the course of its future deliberations its workplan would be regularly and constantly revised and updated in the light of additional advice and insights gained from its work.

25. In considering the process of drafting the Commission's final report, it was agreed that while work should not commence on the actual writing of the report too early in the Commission's process, nevertheless, it will be necessary for the Commission to consider a preliminary outline of the final report early in the course of its deliberations. It was also suggested that final discussion papers in draft form should precede the submission of the draft report to the Commissioners; and it was stressed that all Commissioners should be involved in the preparation of the final report and toward the end of its process be expected to make inputs to it.

26. The Commission took note of the fact that its adoption of the alternative formulation of the key issues would have a necessary consequential effect on the Secretariat's staff and directed the Secretary General, when selecting senior staff for the

Secretariat, to give due regard to the requisite skills required to consider environment and development issues under the alternative formulation. In this regard, it was suggested that the Secretary General try to identify a development economist to work with the senior staff of the Secretariat.

27. In looking ahead to the issuance of its final report, all Commissioners agreed that it was very important that the results of the Commission's work be communicated in a way that would permit it to reach as large an audience as possible and therefore directed the Secretariat to convene an Ad Hoc Committee on communications and to immediately explore the feasibility of presenting the Commission's findings in audio-visual form through film(s) and special television and radio programmes.

28. To reflect the Commission's discussions on the papers submitted to it on the key issues, strategy, workplan and timetable and the decisions taken during those discussions, it was agreed that those papers be revised by the Secretariat and issued as soon as possible following the Inaugural Meeting as a decision paper setting out the Commission's mandate, key issues, strategy and workplan. It was also agreed that the workplan for the Commission would be revised and up-dated in light of further advice and the results of the Commission's initial work and that it would again be placed on the agenda for discussion and revision at the Commission's next meeting.

## VI. Terms of Reference

29. The Chairman introduced the Draft Terms of Reference (WCED/84/11) (Annex 10 to the report) observing that this paper had been prepared from the original terms of reference presented to the

Organizational Meeting in May and took account of the discussions held during that meeting. In the brief discussion which followed, it was agreed that instead of "Terms of Reference", this paper should be titled "The Mandate of the Commission" and that paragraph 4(2) should be revised to include reference to the strengthening of international cooperation on environment and development.

VII. Financial Matters

30. Budget - The Chairman requested the Secretary General to introduce the Amended Budget (WCED/84/RD1) (Annex 11 to these Minutes). The Secretary General pointed out to the Commission that until now, there had been no real basis for establishing a budget for the Secretariat because there had been no detailed workplan, timetable nor Secretariat structure. He also advised the Commission that the expenditure figures contained in the amended budget in respect of Commission meetings and the programme of work related to key issues were based on the assumption that the Commission paid all of the costs related to those items. He called their attention to the other funding options appended to the amended budget paper, observing that if those options were utilized they could result in a maximum potential "savings" in expenditure of up to U.S.\$ 2.1 million. He noted, however, that the actual savings would probably be less.

31. After a brief discussion of the amended budget it was adopted as presented to the Commission.

Resources and Fund-Raising

32. In introducing the Amended Paper on Resources and Fundraising (WCED/84/RD2) (Annex 12 to these Minutes) the Secretary General observed that to-date no



governments had been solicited for funds to support the Commission's work, nor had any governments as yet refused to pledge funds for the Commission's work. In addition, he pointed out that certain governments had even inquired as to why they had not been approached for funds.

33. He also noted that some governments may be prepared to consider the pledges that they have already made as an "initial pledge" to launch the Commission and that it was reasonable to assume that various governments would be prepared to make contributions in kind to the work of the Commission, for example, the funding of cooperative research arrangements with institutes within their territory.

34. In opening the discussion on this item, the Chairman expressed on behalf of the Commission its gratitude for the generous support and assistance which the government of Japan has already given to the Commission, noting that Japan's support had been instrumental in the launching of the Commission's activities. The Chairman also expressed her gratitude to the other members of the co-sponsoring group whose contributions had greatly helped in the organizational stage of the Commission, but in doing so stressed the need for new efforts to be made to raise additional funds and recommended that a finance committee of the Commission be established under the leadership of the Vice Chairman with the responsibility of taking the leading role in raising funds for the Commission's work.

35. In the discussion which followed it was noted that every effort must be made by the Commission to obtain the funds needed to enable it to accomplish its tasks and that all Commissioners should feel responsible for contributing to the fundraising efforts on behalf of the Commission. It was also pointed out that, when

current exchange rates and inflation are taken into account, the amended budget as approved by the Commission was approximately of the same scale as that of the "Brandt Commission".

36. It was decided that a finance committee be established under the leadership of the Vice-Chairman. Other commissioners appointed to the Committee were Dr. Okita and M.F. Strong and subject to her agreement, Mrs. Agnelli. It was agreed that the Committee would have the possibility to co-opt other commissioners to assist it in the fulfilment of its tasks.

#### VIII. Other business

37. The Chairman advised the members that, subject to reconfirmation of its invitation being obtained from the Indian Government, the next meeting of the Commission would be held in New Delhi in March, 1985; and it was agreed that the Commission should express to the Indian Government its wish to accept their invitation and to hold its meeting in New Delhi between the 15th and 30th of March. In that regard, Judge Singh agreed to take immediate contact with the Indian Government in New Delhi.

38. In response to an inquiry as to the remaining two Commissioners, the Chairman advised the Commission that she is still awaiting an answer from the Soviet Union on their candidate and was hoping that that response would be shortly forthcoming. As regards the candidate from French speaking West Africa, the Chairman advised the Commission that she and the Vice Chairman had been considering several candidates but that as yet a decision had not been taken although, it could be expected shortly.