



STATEMENTS OPENING SESSION

Address by Ambassador Franz Muheim  
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs  
to the inaugural session of the  
World Commission on Environment and Development  
Geneva  
1st October 1984

Madam President,

Minister,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful, Madam President, for the opportunity to say a few words on this auspicious occasion, the inaugural session of the World Commission on Environment and Development. It is a great honour for me to have been asked to do so in the name of the Swiss Federal Council, and to address the distinguished members of your Commission on whom are focused today considerable hopes and expectations from all parts of the world.

There has been an upsurge of public concern over the state of our environment in recent years, at the same time as the nature and the dimensions of the environmental issues and our perception of them have been undergoing notable change.

In the 'sixties and 'seventies our main preoccupations were pollution control and preservation of nature, we reacted to obvious damage and attempted to cure it. Now, our concern is also with the long term, with more anticipatory and preventive strategies. Of course, the pollution problems are still very much with us, but we have realized that the control of pollution is closely linked with the way we manage our natural resources. In the industrialized regions of the world, over-exploitation of natural resources might be due in part to a certain lack of imagination as to the consequences. In large areas of the developing world, it will be due to sheer poverty, hunger and to the population explosion. The effects are similar in both cases: desertification, deforestation, soil degradation, the pollution of soil, water, air, threats to fauna and flora, to our buildings and monuments and finally to our health and well-being, to the very quality of our life. In the industrialized world these problems have become major political issues, as we have seen recently again in Switzerland, and the call is being heard for the exploration of alternative life styles as one of the approaches to a more reasonable management of the environment. For the developing part of the

world, the problem is to achieve economic growth without destroying the environmental base for such growth. At any rate, the interdependence of economic activities and the environment has been generally recognized, as has the transboundary, even global nature of many environmental problems such as, to mention but one close to our own present preoccupations, acid rain and the state of our forests, and the consequent need for concerted action on international and multidisciplinary levels.

In the meantime, an even newer generation of environmental issues has emerged. Better methods of measurement and analysis have led to the discovery of larger numbers of organic chemical and metal pollutants in air, soil and water, requiring new ways of prevention and control. There is growing awareness that the pollution of air, water and soil are interconnected and need to be treated comprehensively. Vital underground water sources have been found to be threatened by abandoned hazardous waste sites and by nitrates from the excessive use of fertilizers. Due to rising levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere, there might be climatic changes in the next century with consequences that we cannot even imagine today.

Madam President, Minister, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 was itself and through the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) an important and influential expression of our changing preoccupations and perceptions. Towards the end of the first decade after Stockholm it came to be felt that for UNEP to continue in the vanguard of environmental development and thought, the input of new ideas and impulses might be desirable.

The Swiss Government was favourable from the beginning to the proposal to assign this task of assessing the environmental perspectives up to and beyond the year 2000 and of formulating new directions for dealing with environmental issues on a global level to an ad hoc Commission composed of a limited number of independent personalities

chosen chiefly on their scientific merit and their familiarity with the general problems of the environment.

The Commission would, in the view expressed by the Swiss authorities in late 1981, base its work on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the principles contained in the Stockholm (1972) and the Nairobi (1982) Declarations. It would identify the major environmental issues to be faced by the international community in the coming decades, taking into account the growing interdependence of the international community and of the issues themselves on the one hand and the scientific developments since the nineteen sixties on the other. The Commission would formulate the objectives to be achieved by international action in the field of the environment, it would establish priorities and it would present concrete proposals as to the ways and means to achieve such objectives, always keeping in mind the resources and capacities of the existent international institutions.

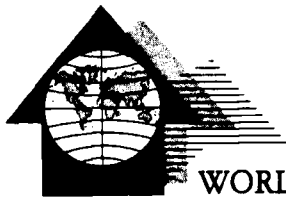
As for UNEP, the United Nations General Assembly, in Resolution 38/161 of the 19th December 1983, has entrusted to the Governing Council of the UN Environment Programme the mandate to prepare, with the assistance of its Intergovernmental Intersessional Preparatory Committee (IIPC), a new Environmental Perspective to the year 2000 and beyond to be transmitted to the General Assembly for adoption. It goes without saying that your Commission's deliberations and your report will be indispensable to the IIPC if it is to discharge its mission with lasting effect. Indeed, in the resolution that I have just referred to, the General Assembly drew special attention to the need for close co-operation between the IIPC and your Commission.

Madam President, Minister, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. The Swiss federal authorities have noted with deep satisfaction that the World Commission on Environment and Development is now a reality and is about to take up its most important work.

I am sure that I am also expressing the sentiments of the Genevan authorities, both cantonal and communal, when I say how pleased we

are that you chose Geneva as the seat of your Commission - a choice that was no doubt in part motivated by the fact that so many specialized agencies also dealing with environmental issues in their own fields have been established in Geneva already, and by Geneva's long tradition of hosting international bodies.

Permit me, Madam President, to conclude by wishing you in the name of the Swiss federal authorities the very best of success in your great task.



WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

ADDRESS BY MR BUNBEI HARA, MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF COUNCILLORS,  
TO THE WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT  
GENEVA, 1 OCTOBER 1984

Madame Chairman, Mr Vice-Chairman, distinguished  
Commission members, ladies and gentlemen,

I should first of all like to extend to you, Madame Chairman and the eminent members of the Commission drawn from all corners of the world, my most sincere congratulations on your appointment to the World Commission on Environment and Development. I am convinced that, under Madame Chairman's able leadership combined with the wisdom of the distinguished members, this Commission will succeed in identifying and making a set of concrete proposals for a global environmental strategy for the forthcoming twenty-first century. I should also express my sincere gratitude to Mr Jim MacNeill, Secretary General of the Commission and his staff who have spared no effort in organizing this first meeting of the Commission, and to the Government and people of Switzerland who have generously offered to host this meeting.

During my term of office as Minister of State for Environment in my country, I had the pleasure of heading the Japanese Delegation to the Session of a Special Character of the Governing Council of UNEP in 1982. At the meeting I stressed the vital importance of efforts to halt and reverse the deterioration of the global environment, and hence proposed the establishment of a



special commission, which would be expected to study and propose comprehensive measures for the protection of the global environment from a longterm point of view. I am gratified to note that our proposal was unanimously accepted by UNEP and the United Nations General Assembly and that, today, the first meeting of that Commission is being held here in Geneva.

I should like to express my sincere gratitude to you, Madame Chairman, for inviting me to address the Commission on this important day of its launching on a new course of world endeavour for the "common future" of mankind.

Madame Chairman, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972 under the slogan of "Only One Earth" was truly a turning point and efforts have since been made at both national and international levels to protect the environment: laws and institutions aimed at the protection of the environment have been developed. As a result, considerable progress has been made to date in certain areas including control of industrial pollution and international cooperation in the field of nature conservation. But, at the same time, it is to be noted that the state of the world's environment has worsened with respect to tropical forests, wild species of fauna, flora and soils, water and sanitation, particularly in developing countries experiencing rapid population increases. The tendency toward further deterioration of the environment is seen in some of the developed countries as well. Furthermore, growing attention is being paid to the climatic consequences of rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. These observations lead us to think that the problems have now come to acquire global dimensions, having serious implications on our environment, the common property of the entire human race, regardless of the stage of social and economic development.

Madame Chairman and Commissioners, I would like to stress that we should not overlook the fact that environmental degradation continues on a global scale, with the rapid growth of population and the expansion of human activities. Let me briefly touch on the work of the Ad Hoc Group on Global Environmental Problems established in my country. An advisory body to the Director-General of the Environment Agency, the Ad Hoc Group, chaired by Dr Saburo Okita, who is himself present here as a member of this Commission, published its reports in December 1980 and April 1982. In these reports the Group emphasized that there is a strong possibility of continued environmental disruption on a global scale, and gave warning that once the deterioration of the environment reached a certain point, it might be extremely difficult to reverse such a trend, and that consequently the earth's capacity to sustain life might be substantially reduced. The Group therefore urged prompt and appropriate measures to prevent such irreversible destruction of the environment.

It is my belief that the protection of the global environment is the common task before mankind, confronting us all today, of the present-day generations. Needless to say, maintenance of world peace is a prerequisite if such a task is to be accomplished. It is essential for both developed and developing countries to strive, through worldwide cooperation, for a constructive solution of global environmental problems.

Therefore, when I advocated the establishment of a special commission, it was my considered view that the Commission should be entrusted with the task of exploring the ideals of a global environment for the twenty-first century, and of formulating strategies to attain those ideals. In order to achieve the expected objectives, it was thought indispensable to invite as its members the world's leading experts possessed with the knowledge and deep insight required for this very demanding task and, at the same time, capable of exerting influence on the policy-making processes of the nations of the world.

Madame Chairman, in view of the magnitude, urgency and political implications of the global environmental problems facing the world community today, it is important that the Commission conduct its business from a high, broadly-based perspective and in an impartial and objective manner, free from the pressures of direct national interests.

Some pioneering labours have already been carried out in this respect and no doubt they have been highly appreciated. But these labours have not as yet borne fruit in telling us exactly what kind of changes in our policies and attitudes are needed and more specifically as to which actions should be taken in order to protect the global environment and improve the lot of humans living in it. It is in this context that I expect this Commission to formulate a concrete strategy, taking account of the complex inter-relationships existing between people, natural resources, environment and development, based on the perspectives of a better environment for the world of the twenty-first century to live in. Those new perspectives would emerge by making use of the best scientific knowledge available to us today.

In my view, the Commission should as a matter of high priority tackle those environmental issues that are seen to be eroding the very basis of our life and continued existence on this small planet Earth, and particularly those environmental risks that are slowly emerging, but demand immediate action on our part now lest it should become too late by the time those risks turn into full-fledged irreversible damages inflicted on the well-being of the global environment. The world now watches eagerly what strategy this Commission will present to us after two years of deliberation.

Madame Chairman, distinguished members of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, as one of the advocates for this Commission, I am convinced that, representing the wisdom of the world today you will successfully accomplish your important mission and will thereby help us to overcome the unprecedented crisis of the global environment which we are now facing.

Madame Chairman, I am deeply honoured to be here with you today to celebrate this happy occasion, which might be likened to a ship setting out on a new and adventurous voyage to chart our "common future."

Madame Chairman, Mr Vice-Chairman, distinguished members, ladies and gentlemen, let us join in wishing that the voyage of this ship will result in great success by bringing about a world-wide recognition of the significance and urgency of global environmental issues.

Finally, again as one of the advocates of this Commission, I pledge myself to doing as much as I can to cooperate with this Commission and to continue to support the great cause for which this Commission was created.

Thank you

Message of the Secretary-General of the United Nations  
to the inaugural meeting of the World Commission on  
Environment and Development, delivered by Mr. Wahid H. Tarzi,  
Deputy Director-General, United Nations Office at Geneva

1 October 1984

The realities of the prevailing economic environment reinforce the imperative need to give greater attention to the environmental dimension in the formulation of national policies and in the international dialogue towards achieving a more stable and equitable world economy. The rapid advancement of science and technology unaccompanied by adequate measures to deal with its adverse consequences and the wasteful use of natural resources is leading to an increasing deterioration of the environment which must be arrested and reversed to ensure better living conditions for the future of humankind.

In order to combat this destructive process, it is essential to secure a full and better understanding of the interrelationships between resources, environment and development. In this context, the United Nations attaches special importance to the development of the environmental perspective to the year 2000 and beyond. I trust that your Commission, composed as it is of highly eminent and qualified experts, will make an important contribution towards developing long-term environmental strategies for development through co-operation among nations.

Through your work, you will also be helping to increase and widen public awareness of environmental issues and to mobilise public opinion in support of further efforts in a field of vital importance.

I wish you every success in your work for a better and more secure future for all the peoples of our planet.



WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

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STATEMENT OF MRS BRUNDTLAND  
AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE INAUGURAL MEETING  
OF THE WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENT  
AND DEVELOPMENT, GENEVA,  
1-3 OCTOBER 1984

Statement of Mrs Brundtland  
at the Opening Session of the Inaugural Meeting  
of the World Commission on Environment  
and Development. Geneva.  
1-3 October 1984

M. Ministre. Messieurs les Conseillers d'Etat. Your Excellencies. Ladies and Gentlemen. I am very encouraged to see so many of you here to attend the launch of our enterprise and I hope, in the next few minutes, to convey something of the spirit of the World Commission on Environment and Development to you - so that you have a better idea of what kind of ship you have seen take to the water.

As in launching real, rather than metaphorical ships, some words of thanks to the constructors and creators are essential.

Let me first thank Switzerland our host country for providing us with a place to be, entirely appropriate to our objectives. Switzerland has long played a unique role in helping the world community negotiate and settle its differences in peace. As a neutral calm and orderly country which never had colonies, Switzerland has been a living demonstration that it is possible for peoples of different languages and religions to work and live in peaceful co-operation. Switzerland is a co-sponsor of the Commission and has already given us much encouragement. It is said that in Switzerland today the most vital issue is in fact the environment, so we shall be pleased to have a receptive local audience for our work.

Geneva has been host to people with ideas for the creation of a better world for at least 120 years when the International Committee of the Red Cross was founded here by Henri Dunant. In fact there was an initiative 30 years before that called The League of Peace. So international co-operation has, by now, entered the very stonework of the city. Our small Secretariat will soon move into the Palais Wilson where the League of Nations began. May I convey to you, M. Segonde, our warm appreciation of the welcome that Geneva has given us.

I must thank too the representative of the United Nations for relaying the kind words of the Secretary General. The World Commission was formally created by Resolution 161 of the last session of the General Assembly and it is to the General Assembly that we shall deliver our final recommendations. Nevertheless, our Commission is organizationally independent of the UN system with each Commissioner serving in an individual capacity. It will be able to address any issues, to formulate and present any views and recommendations, and to present any proposals it considers relevant and pertinent.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to UNEP in whose Governing Council the groundwork for Resolution 161 was prepared and I extend a special welcome to Dr Tolba, Executive Director of UNEP who was able to be present today.

With most diplomatic initiatives, it falls to one country to play a strong leading role. In our case, we owe special appreciation to Japan for taking and sustaining the initiative that gave substance to the widespread desire for the development of a new approach to environment and development. It is most appropriate that Mr Hara who worked so hard at the early meetings in Nairobi in UNEP's Governing Council should be here today for this Inaugural Session.

Japan's generosity will also take the Commissioners to a meeting in Tokyo in 1986 at a time when final shape will be given to our recommendations.

The Vice-Chairman of the Commission, Mr Mansour Khalid, and I were chosen by the Secretary General of the United Nations. Together, we, in turn, have appointed the Commissioners seated behind me.

You will, I know, recognize many of them. You will find their names and their biographies in the literature available to you. They have been chosen for their political eminence and leadership experience in science, industry, environment and development affairs. You will also find quotations and excerpts from some of the things they have said or written. I hope this documentation will help you to form a deeper impression of the Commissioners than can be transmitted by my brief introductory remarks. I should add that we have followed other international precedents in seeking an acceptable geographical balance for the Commission - when complete it will number 22, with 5 from Asia, 5 from Africa, 4 from Latin America, 2 from North America and 3 from Western Europe, and 3 from Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia.

I would also like to say how pleased we are to have been able to persuade Mr Jim MacNeill to become the Secretary General of the Commission. His experience and competence will be of great importance to our work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be able to introduce the World Commission on Environment and Development to you and to tell you what we have achieved so far, what our plans are for the near future and the crucial role that your governments, your agencies, institutions and non-governmental organizations have to play in these plans. Indeed, one of the many things I believe that distinguishes this Commission is its need for your active support, and our determination to facilitate your participation.

As I have already mentioned, the Commission was established as a result of a resolution adopted by the General Assembly in December of last year. It was formally established at a meeting in Geneva last May. Today, with the appointment of the Commissioners almost completed, with a small Secretariat being put in place under the Secretary General, we are about to start our first regular session. It will be a crucial one. The Commission will be determining many of the key issues that it should address and the perspectives from which it should address them. We will consider the strategy that we should employ to marshal the information that we will need. We will ascertain the intellectual, political and organizational resources that need to be tapped, in order to achieve our objectives. And we will endeavour to translate the answers to these questions into a practical workplan and timetable that will enable the Commission to achieve its objectives within a relatively short period of time.

#### *Commission's Objectives*

What are those objectives?

If I were to put them into three short points I would say they were:

First, to re-examine the critical issues of environment and development and to formulate innovative, concrete and realistic action-proposals to deal with them:

Second, to assess and propose new forms of international co-operation on environment and development that can break out of existing patterns and influence policies and events in the direction of needed changes: and

Third, to raise the level of understanding and commitment to action on the part of individuals, voluntary organizations, businesses, institutes and governments.

## *Pressures on Environment and Development Unprecedented*

The Commission has been established at a time of unprecedented pressures on the global environment and a growing recognition that much of today's development is not sustainable. Rather it is based upon a squandering of our "biological" capital: our soils, forests, animal and plant species, even our water and air. It consumes its own ecological foundations.

Many of today's economic, monetary and trade policies and policies in sectors such as energy, agriculture, forestry and human settlements, induce and reinforce non-sustainable development patterns and practices. Many current approaches to environment and development are not working. Widespread poverty and concentrated affluence conspire to increase environmental degradation, to increase pressures on resources and to increase inequities that lead to global instability and political tension.

During the last decade and a half of growing environmental awareness, most developing countries have seen a steady and, in some cases, rapid increase in environmental degradation added to historic pressure on resources. Many newly industrializing countries have experienced a massive deterioration of their environment, with environmental problems associated with sudden industrialization and explosive urbanization being added to those associated with underdevelopment and poverty.

It is true that many advanced industrial countries have seen significant improvements in environmental quality over the past decade and a half. This has stemmed from new institutions, legislation, policies and programmes designed largely to clean up the massive backlog of environmental degradation from the rapid growth of the fifties and sixties, and to react to and cure new situations as they arise. It must be added, however, that in these countries the battle against conventional pollution is far from won. Resource deterioration accelerates and the economic and social costs of the "react and retrofit" approach to development continue to grow.

At the same time, a new generation of increasingly complex environment and development issues has emerged, of concern to developed and developing countries alike. Some of these, although global or regional in nature, are largely a consequence of the production patterns of the heavily industrialized parts of the world. Climatic changes induced by rising levels of carbon dioxide, for example, which could have massive economic and social consequences. Transboundary air pollution in the form of acid rain now probably affects all continents, as do the use and misuse of chemicals and the unwise management of hazardous wastes.

Some problems reflect the incidental effects of certain economic, trade, agricultural, forestry, energy and other policies as applied at both the national and international level. Soil erosion and desertification, surface and ground water pollution, deforestation (especially of tropical forests) and the loss of genetic resources, are all examples - examples of how man is eroding the very basis for his own survival. Some of these problems, of course, are reinforced by the voracious material demands of the industrial societies.

Some of the most threatening environment and development problems today are caused to a considerable extent by the widespread poverty and the inequitable distribution of resources within individual nations and among nations and regions. Many of the most serious effects in the Third World are rooted in economic and social injustice and in a worsening imbalance in the relationship between man and his capacity to manage nature.

## *Current Approaches Not Working*

Hindsight demonstrates clearly that many current approaches to environment and development are not working. They are clearly not sustainable as we move into the next century, building another world on top of the one we have, and doubling, at least, our demands on the planet's ecosystems. In the crudest sense, they are not even affordable. If we continue to undertake development without regard to the environmental consequences of that development in the expectation that later - "when we are richer" - we can "react and retrofit", it is doubtful that even the rich countries will be able to afford to keep up, let alone catch up. It is certain that the developing countries will not.

## *New Approaches to Development Are Possible*

Hindsight also demonstrates forcibly that different approaches are possible.

It is possible to harness science and technology to development in ways that are environmentally favourable.

It is possible to expand food production enormously and in ways that are not only sustainable but which even expand the ecological basis for agriculture: and we must do it if the good earth is to feed all of our children's children.

It is similarly possible to develop energy, industrial processes, transportation and human settlements in ways that are environmentally sound.

It is possible, generally, to build environmental considerations into development. Our experience to date demonstrates that when this is done well, the result is not only more socially effective but also more resource efficient, and indeed, much more economic.

## *Changes Are Needed*

We must recognize that the developing countries face enormous difficulties in mobilizing resources for development. Their plight is often such that they are forced to give priority to short term effects. Choosing environmentally sound paths to development would be better economy in the medium and long term. Ways must be found to assist the developing countries so that they can choose to invest in the future. Sound environmental policies are also an international responsibility. The members of the Commission have been chosen as eminent leaders in the political life of their countries, in science and industry and in environment and development. They come from all corners of the globe and they serve in a personal capacity. But they have one thing in common. They are confident that it is possible to build a future that is more prosperous, more just, and more secure because it rests on policies and practices that serve both and to sustain and to expand the ecological basis of development.

The Commission however, is equally convinced that this will not happen without significant changes in current approaches: changes in certain critical policies and the ways in which they are formulated and applied; changes in the nature of co-operation between government, business, science and people; changes in certain forms of international co-operation which have proved incapable of tackling many environment and development issues; changes, above all, in the level of understanding and commitment by people themselves, by organizations and by governments.



## *Perspectives On Development*

But what changes? And how?

Frankly, here is where we most need your support and assistance. To answer that question, the Commission intends to develop strategies that will enable it to tap the vast intellectual and political resources of the communities concerned with environment and development issues: scientific institutes and non-governmental organizations, as well as governmental and intergovernmental bodies. During the past months I have experienced widespread interest and support for the Commission, even before we had been established. This bodes well for the future of our work. The Commission will take steps to facilitate the fullest possible participation.

The Commission discussed these questions briefly at its Organizational Session in May and will be returning to them this week. But it is clear now that as the Commission conducts its enquiries and sifts the evidence on what changes are needed, it will be guided by certain perspectives.

### *Sustainability*

I have already mentioned sustainability. Policy paths to sustainable development are a central concern that will preoccupy the Commission as it addresses the critical issues. This will compel examination of a range of policies in many directly relevant sectors such as agriculture, energy, forestry, industry, investment, trade and development assistance. In any such examination a major purpose will be to identify those policies that can serve to promote development that is sustainable not only in the short-term but also in the medium and long term.

### *Security And Environmental Risks*

Security and the need to widen the definition of national security beyond military security to embrace economic and ecological interdependence and global environmental risks is a further concern that the Commission will need to consider in assessing the key issues.

In various parts of the world ecological degradation and environmental risks are becoming a significant causal factor in economic, social and political unrest. They are manifest in the growing migrations of "ecological refugees", the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters and the social collapse of exploding settlements. While these threats are fundamentally non-military, continued failure to address them adequately could lead to crisis situations in which military force is seen as a way out, at least in the short term. With environmental crises deepening in many parts of the world, environmental degradation could become a serious threat to peace in the future with military means employed to deal with non-military challenges to security.

Warfare, of course, constitutes an ever present threat to the environment. Historically, the scale and intensity of the threat has been increased considerably by technological developments. In 1977 a convention was signed outlawing military or any other hostile use of environmental modification techniques having "widespread, long-lasting or severe effects as the means of destruction, damage or injury to any other state party". The first review conference of the parties to the convention took place in this city just the week before last. Unfortunately, at present only 43 states are parties to the convention.

The ultimate threat is nuclear war and recently deep concern has been raised over the short and long term consequences of the dust, smoke, radioactivity, and toxic vapour which would result from a nuclear war. The possible creation of a "Nuclear Winter" as a result of multiple nuclear explosions would be a clear violation of the convention outlawing military environmental modification techniques. The "Nuclear Winter" has added an environmental imperative to the prevention of nuclear war. The existence of large stockpiles of nuclear weapons cannot serve any rational purpose but their own negation. A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. We must find a way to build down the arsenals rather than succumb to the pressures to expand them. Warfare presents a clear and present danger to the very survival of man.

World military expenditures have now reached unprecedented levels, and are estimated to exceed one trillion dollars next year. They continue to grow at an annual rate of 3-4 percent in real terms. This constitutes a gross misallocation of resources and it forecloses opportunities to improve the human condition, including the environment on which we all remain ultimately dependent.

### *Interdependence*

The growing interdependence of the international economic and political system is another central concern for the Commission. It has become a dominant characteristic of many issues involving the environment and the ecological basis of development: embracing demography, migration, agriculture, communications, energy, industry, minerals, technology and financial transfers.

Interdependence is maybe not an inspiring word as such. It is not a strong old word like axe, wind, fire, wood, river, sky, - in most languages, as in English, it has the air of a constructed intellectual word, coined to describe something newly perceived. What we have newly perceived in fact, is the complexity of the linkages and feedbacks. We now know that the most important feature of interdependence is not its isolated components, be they separate issues or separate nations, or regions or polarities like North-South. The important thing about interdependence is the connections between and among the components. The limiting factor in working out policies that will permit us to live and develop in a sustainable way is not the capacity to analyse the elements of our interdependence with each other and with nature. The limiting factor is our incapacity to put it all together as a guide to future action.

The inter-related issues of tropical forests and biological diversity illustrate our apparent incapacity to put it all together. Although the forestry situation in the developed world appears relatively stable, forests in developing countries have declined by one half during this century, and are shrinking at an increasing rate, largely because of expanding agricultural pressures. The actual and potential socio-economic consequences of this are serious, primarily for the countries concerned, involving increased flooding, sedimentation of reservoirs, disruption of irrigation systems and losses of land and food production and ultimately touching on their trade and their overall capacity to develop.

Overcutting and inadequate investment in forest management and new plantations have seen 23 developing countries change from net exporters to net importers of forest products in recent years, putting additional pressure on their balance of payments. An additional 14 countries are similarly threatened.

Action to deal with the problem can be provoked by an analysis of certain trends. But such action (e.g. plant more trees faster) may not be too meaningful in terms of problem interdependence or of promoting sustainable development if it serves only to ameliorate certain effects in the short run. In order to be meaningful it would need to deal with the other sources of the interlocking syndromes of poverty-driven settlement, and policies favouring destructive colonization, agricultural harvesting practices, not to mention problem interdependence with genetic resources and watershed management.

Soil erosion and desertification is another classic example of an issue recognized and discussed at the international level. A conference was held, a programme of action, or rather reaction, was defined - and - so slight was the response of the international community that the Executive Director of UNEP publicly threw up his hands in despair.

And yet the world community did the accepted thing - recognized an environmental disaster and reacted after the event.

Why were the measures unsuccessful? Could it be that governments instinctively sense that the "react and retrofit" approach is flawed? Do they feel that in reality desertification is connected to, or rather interdependent with, policies in other fields, such as agriculture and settlement?

The web of interdependence stretches across the most apparently remote of our economic and social activities. The activities of the IMF as it lays down its conditions for a new line of credit can lead to environmentally destructive practices. A decision taken at GATT restricting the market for goods in which developing countries have an advantage can slow down their development generally, thus extending poverty induced pressures on the environment and leading to something as apparently remote as, say, increased fuel wood cutting as kerosene imports are restricted. Even more remote, but still connected by that chain of interdependence, is a decision in GATT that might lead to the production of alternative goods involving non-sustainable uses of land or other resources.

We must therefore increasingly question whether our consideration of environment as a sort of late stage add-on to our conduct of affairs, as a kind of political afterthought, is sufficient. I personally suspect that, on the contrary, our consideration of environment will have to become the essence of political forethought.

#### *A Broader View*

From these remarks, you will understand that the Commission is going to take a very broad view of environmental policy, linking it clearly to economic and social development. This is essential - and it is overdue. Whatever the intentions of a decade ago, it is unfortunately true that, with few exceptions, environmental policy has to date been treated as a limited policy field, essentially an "add-on" to other policy fields, whose mission is to react to damage done and to cure it after the fact. Its focus has been largely on the environmental effects of development, on ways and means to ameliorate those effects and on the costs and benefits of doing so.

There is clearly a need now to shift the focus from the effects of environmental problems to their sources in macro-economic, trade and sectoral policies. Environmental policy needs to become in fact a horizontal policy field, an integral component of economic, social and development policy. Its mission needs to be seen as at least that of anticipating damage and reducing the negative external effects of human activity. At best, its mission needs to include the active promotion of economic and social policies that expand the basis for sustainable development.

This will not be easy. I know. I have worked on it sitting in the chair of an Environment Minister and of a Prime Minister.

In my view, a part of the problem stems from the fact that while industry and the sectoral agencies of government are sometimes seen as "targets" by environmental agencies, they are seldom seen as "participants" in the development of environmental policies. "Environmental" policy is seen as something separate and distinct related to the protection or conservation of water, land, and species; perhaps as an "add-on" to economic and sectoral policy, but seldom as economic and sectoral policy itself. As a result, few environmental agencies have developed the institutional capacity needed to undertake the analysis required to attract seriously the attention of these agencies; nor have they acquired the professional resources and expertise needed to argue their case effectively in the interagency committees where advice on macro-economic, trade, agriculture and energy policy is formulated; and in the corridors where decisions are effectively taken.

Sadly, the same is true of most NGO's. They usually see their audience as the environment agency or the development assistance agency with whom they share common goals and can seek mutual support. They seldom see their audience as the central and sectoral agencies whose policies and decisions have such a critical impact on the environmental bases of sustainable development.

#### *International Co-operation*

However we do it, we must seek more effective ways to reach the key individuals in those agencies that have a significant impact on environment and development. This includes a whole range of agencies in government and industry, from the central economic and financial institutions, to those engaged in agriculture, energy, transport, trade and other activities. These are the agencies whose policies and investments have a significant impact on the environment. They, and the policies they pursue, are indeed the source of many of the critical problems.

We must also find ways to involve these agencies more effectively in international co-operation on these issues. When the critical environment and development issues are considered against a background dominated by themes of sustainability, equity, security and interdependence, they emerge subtly changed. They appear as complex geo-political syndromes that challenge existing forms of international discussion and co-operation. Part of the challenge that they present stems from the way in which environment issues have been defined - conventionally defined - that is, as purely environment issues, without full consideration of the development imperatives and economic and sectoral policies underlying them. Another part of the challenge stems from the consequent fact that many of the key actors are missing from the discussions. While respecting the complex realities of international co-operation, the Commission will wish to look at possible new forms of international co-operation, forms that can break out of existing patterns and influence policies and events in the direction of needed change.

### *Invitation To Participate*

Many organizations and institutions have been re-examining the framework for environment and development and I know that many of you have given a lot of thought to these questions. During the next three days, the Commission will be working out practical ways of tapping the world's best minds wherever they are - in governments, in the UN system, in the scientific community, in the development banks and institutions, in industry, in the non-governmental organizations or other walks of life. Whenever practical, we shall seek to involve the media in provoking and gathering new ideas and in sounding out public opinion.

And we must open our doors wider still. We want to hear, for example, from people who were still at school in 1972 at the time of the Stockholm Conference. Young people not only have a special contribution to make with their natural zest and fresh enthusiasm, but they are also vividly aware that they will inherit and will have to repair the mistakes and omissions of the older generation in the stewardship of our planet.

The Commission will endeavour to gather its basic material from all over the world. Our first regular session is here in Geneva, and we have seized this opportunity to open a dialogue with heads of certain UN Specialized Agencies and others. Future meetings will be held in other parts of the world, at the invitation of other co-sponsor countries. I hope we visit each continent and that such meetings provide other opportunities for dialogue.

The Commission will be considering many other more direct means to obtain the participation of scientific institutes, NGO's and others, and I would hope to be able to tell you more about that and the issues that we will be addressing at our Press Conference on Wednesday.

### *Conclusion*

Earlier on, I suggested the title of our final report which will be submitted to the General Assembly for consideration in the fall of 1987, "Common Future". That is really what we have to consider. We share a world economy; a world environment, which is the basis for the present and future world economy; and a stake in world development and a decent and dignified human condition of life. We must learn to think globally and in a long-term perspective. The world is shrinking rapidly. No single region or nation can isolate itself from the rest of the world. They share the responsibility for a common future.

We need to dig deep into our political consciousness and make environment and sustainable development a prefit not a retro-fit. We must change our perceptions so that sustainable development and the conservation of our planetary heritage come to the forefront. We must come to see that many of our current approaches add up to a sort of piracy against our children that a truly civilized world can no longer afford or tolerate.

Environment is not a concern which is confined to the rich countries, those who can "afford" to pay attention. We cannot afford for anyone to neglect it. The penalty of neglect is to undermine the very growth we strive to accomplish. Growth which does not include environmental considerations is like a house which is built on sand. It cannot be sustained.

Our world is an interdependent world. Decisions made by the authorities in one society will affect conditions of life in other societies which have no access to the process of decisions. While the benefits of a free flow of goods, services, people and ideas will contribute to human welfare, the free flow of and waste have exactly the opposite effect. We need international co-operation and regulation to promote and preserve equity. We can only create a common future if we can cope with the common crisis which the Brandt Commission addressed and build peace on the basis of the concept of common security as the Palme Commission pointed out.

We have to learn to think and act as citizens of one world. We have one common future. That, ladies and gentlemen, must be the perspective which inspires and gives direction to our work. Humility, dedication, competence and hard work are needed for us to succeed. We are eager to start.