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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION: ENVIRONMENT

Report of the World Commission on Environment
and Development

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 38/161 of 19 December 1983, inter alia, welcomed the establishment of a special commission that should make available a report on environment and the global problématique to the year 2000 and beyond, including proposed strategies for sustainable development. The commission later adopted the name World Commission on Environment and Development. In the same resolution, the Assembly decided that, on matters within the mandate and purview of the United Nations Environment Programme, the report of the special commission should in the first instance be considered by the Governing Council of the Programme, for transmission to the Assembly together with its comments, and for use as basic material in the preparation, for adoption by the Assembly, of the Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

2. At its fourteenth session, held at Nairobi from 8 to 19 June 1987, the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme adopted decision 14/14 of 16 June 1987, entitled "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development" and, inter alia, decided to transmit the Commission's report to the General Assembly together with a draft resolution annexed to the decision for consideration and adoption by the Assembly.

3. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, entitled "Our Common Future", is hereby transmitted to the General Assembly. Decision 14/14 of the Governing Council, the proposed draft resolution and the comments of the Governing Council on the report of the Commission can be found in the report of the Governing Council on the work of its fourteenth session. 1/

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1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement
No. 25 (A/42/25).

ANNEX

Report of the World Commission on Environment
and Development

"Our Common Future"

Members of the Commission

Chairman: Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway)

Vice Chairman: Mansour Khalid (Sudan)

Susanna Agnelli (Italy)

Saleh A. Al-Athel (Saudi Arabia)

Bernard Chidzero (Zimbabwe)

Lamine Mohammed Fadika (Côte d'Ivoire)

Volker Hauff (Federal Republic of Germany)

Istvan Lang (Hungary)

Ma Shijun (People's Republic of China)

Margarita Marino de Botero (Colombia)

Nagendra Singh (India)

Paulo Nogueira-Neto (Brazil)

Saburo Okita (Japan)

Shridath S. Ramphal (Guyana)

William D. Ruckelshaus (USA)

Mohamed Sahnoun (Algeria)

Emil Salim (Indonesia)

Bukar Shaib (Nigeria)

Vladimir Sokolov (USSR)

Janez Stanounik (Yugoslavia)

Maurice Strong (Canada)

Ex Officio

Jim MacNeill (Canada)

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Throughout this report, quotes from some of the many people who spoke at WCED public hearings appear in boxes to illustrate the range of opinions the Commission was exposed to during its three years of work. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commission.

ACRONYM LIST AND NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

ATS	Antarctic Treaty System
CCAMLR	Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
CIDIE	Committee of International Development Institutions on the Environment
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
DIESA	United Nations Department for International Economic and Social Affairs
ECB	United Nations Environment Coordination Board
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
EEC	European Economic Community
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
ELC	Environment Liaison Centre
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	gross domestic product
GEMS	Global Environment Monitoring System
GESAMP	Group of Experts on Scientific Aspect of Marine Pollution
GNP	gross national product
GRID	Global Resource Information Database
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICRP	International Commission on Radiological Protection
ICSU	International Council of Scientific Unions
IDA	International Development Association
IGBP	International Geosphere Biosphere Project (of ICSU)
IIASA	International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis

IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
IWC	International Whaling Commission
LDC	London Dumping Convention
MVA	manufacturing value added
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NCS	National Conservation Strategies
NGO	non-governmental organizations
NICs	newly industrialized countries
NUSS	Nuclear Safety Standards
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PPP	Polluter Pays Principle
TNCs	transnational corporations
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT)
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDA	United Nations Disarmament Association
UNDRO	Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization

WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WRI	World Resources Institute
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

The grouping of countries in the presentation of data is indicated in the appropriate places. The term 'industrial countries' generally encompasses the UN categories of developed market economies and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the USSR. Unless otherwise indicated, the term 'developing country' refers to the UN grouping of developing-country market economies and the socialist countries of Asia. The term 'Third World', unless the context implies otherwise, generally refers to the developing-country market economies as defined by the UN.

Unless indicated otherwise, tons are metric (1,000 kilogrammes, or 2,204.6 pounds). Dollars are current U.S. dollars or U.S. dollars for the year specified.

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

"A global agenda for change" - this was what the World Commission on Environment and Development was asked to formulate. It was an urgent call by the General Assembly of the United Nations:

- . to propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond;
- . to recommend ways concern for the environment may be translated into greater co-operation among developing countries and between countries at different stages of economical and social development and lead to the achievement of common and mutually supportive objectives that take account of the interrelationships between people, resources, environment, and development;
- . to consider ways and means by which the international community can deal more effectively with environment concerns; and
- . to help define shared perceptions of long-term environmental issues and the appropriate efforts needed to deal successfully with the problems of protecting and enhancing the environment, a long-term agenda for action during the coming decades, and aspirational goals for the world community.

When I was called upon by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in December 1983 to establish and chair a special, independent commission to address this major challenge to the world community, I was acutely aware that this was no small task and obligation, and that my day-to-day responsibilities as Party leader made it seem plainly prohibitive. What the General Assembly asked for also seemed to be unrealistic and much too ambitious. At the same time, it was a clear demonstration of the widespread feeling of frustration and inadequacy in the international community about our own ability to address the vital global issues and deal effectively with them.

That fact is a compelling reality, and should not easily be dismissed. Since the answers to fundamental and serious concerns are not at hand, there is no alternative but to keep on trying to find them.

All this was on my mind when the Secretary-General presented me with an argument to which there was no convincing rebuttal: No other political leader had become Prime Minister with a background of several years of political struggle, nationally and internationally, as an environment minister. This gave some hope that the environment was not destined to remain a side issue in central, political decision making.

In the final analysis, I decided to accept the challenge. The challenge of facing the future, and of safeguarding the interests of coming generations. For it was abundantly clear: We needed a mandate for change.

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We live in an era in the history of nations when there is greater need than ever for co-ordinated political action and responsibility. The United Nations and its Secretary-General are faced with an enormous task and burden. Responsibly meeting humanity's goals and aspirations will require the active support of us all.

My reflections and perspective were also based on other important parts of my own political experience: the preceding work of the Brandt Commission on North-South issues, and the Palme Commission on security and disarmament issues, on which I served.

I was being asked to help formulate a third and compelling call for political action: After Brandt's Programme for Survival and Common Crisis, and after Palme's Common Security, would come Common Future. This was my message when Vice Chairman Mansour Khalid and I started work on the ambitious task set up by the United Nations. This report, as presented to the UN General Assembly in 1987, is the result of that process.

* * * * *

Perhaps our most urgent task today is to persuade nations of the need to return to multilateralism. The challenge of reconstruction after the Second World War was the real motivating power behind the establishment of our post-war international economic system. The challenge of finding sustainable development paths ought to provide the impetus - indeed the imperative - for a renewed search for multilateral solutions and a restructured international economic system of co-operation. These challenges cut across the divides of national sovereignty, of limited strategies for economic gain, and of separated disciplines of science.

After a decade and a half of a standstill or even deterioration in global co-operation, I believe the time has come for higher expectations, for common goals pursued together, for an increased political will to address our common future.

There was a time of optimism and progress in the 1960s, when there was greater hope for a braver new world, and for progressive international ideas. Colonies blessed with natural resources were becoming nations. The ideals of co-operation and sharing seemed to be seriously pursued. Paradoxically, the 1970s slid slowly into moods of reaction and isolation while at the same time a series of UN conferences offered hope for greater co-operation on major issues. The 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment brought the industrialized and developing nations together to delineate the "rights" of the human family to a healthy and productive environment. A string of such meetings followed: on the rights of people to adequate food, to sound housing, to safe water, to access to means of choosing the size of their families.

The present decade has been marked by a retreat from social concerns. Scientists bring to our attention urgent but complex problems bearing on our very survival: a warming globe, threats to the Earth's ozone layer, deserts consuming agricultural land. We respond by demanding more details, and by assigning the problems to institutions ill equipped to cope with them. Environmental degradation, first seen as mainly a problem of the rich nations and a side effect of industrial wealth, has become a survival issue for developing nations. It is part of the downward spiral of linked ecological and economic decline in which many of the poorest nations are trapped. Despite official hope expressed on all sides, no trends identifiable today, no programmes or policies, offer any real hope of narrowing the growing gap between rich and poor nations. And as part of our "development", we have amassed weapons arsenals capable of diverting the paths that evolution has followed for millions of years and of creating a planet our ancestors would not recognize.

When the terms of reference of our Commission were originally being discussed in 1982, there were those who wanted its considerations to be limited to "environmental issues" only. This would have been a grave mistake. The environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions, ambitions, and needs, and attempts to defend it in isolation from human concerns have given the very word "environment" a connotation of naivety in some political circles. The word "development" has also been narrowed by some into a very limited focus, along the lines of "what poor nations should do to become richer", and thus again is automatically dismissed by many in the international arena as being a concern of specialists, of those involved in questions of "development assistance".

But the "environment" is where we all live; and "development" is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable. Further, development issues must be seen as crucial by the political leaders who feel that their countries have reached a plateau towards which other nations must strive. Many of the development paths of the industrialized nations are clearly unsustainable. And the development decisions of these countries, because of their great economic and political power, will have a profound effect upon the ability of all peoples to sustain human progress for generations to come.

Many critical survival issues are related to uneven development, poverty, and population growth. They all place unprecedented pressures on the planet's lands, waters, forests, and other natural resources, not least in the developing countries. The downward spiral of poverty and environmental degradation is a waste of opportunities and of resources. In particular, it is a waste of human resources. These links between poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation formed a major theme in our analysis and recommendations. What is needed now is a new era of economic growth growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable.

Due to the scope of our work, and to the need to have a wide perspective, I was very much aware of the need to put together a highly qualified and influential political and scientific team, to constitute a truly independent Commission. This was an essential part of a successful process. Together, we should span the globe, and pull together to formulate an interdisciplinary, integrated approach to global concerns and our common future. We needed broad participation and a clear majority of members from developing countries, to reflect world realities. We needed people with wide experience, and from all political fields, not only from environment or development as political disciplines, but from all areas of vital decision making that influence economic and social progress, nationally and internationally.

We therefore come from widely differing backgrounds: foreign ministers, finance and planning officials, policymakers in agriculture, science, and technology. Many of the Commissioners are cabinet ministers and senior economists in their own nations, concerned largely with the affairs of those countries. As Commissioners, however, we were acting not in our national roles but as individuals; and as we worked, nationalism and the artificial divides between "industrialized" and "developing", between East and West, receded. In their place emerged a common concern for the planet and the interlocked ecological and economic threats with which its people, institutions, and governments now grapple.

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During the time we met as a Commission, tragedies such as the African famines, the leak at the pesticides factory at Bhopal, India, and the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, USSR appeared to justify the grave predictions about the human future that were becoming commonplace during the mid-1980s. But at public hearings we held on five continents, we also heard from the individual victims of more chronic, widespread disasters: the debt crisis, stagnating aid to and investment in developing countries, falling commodity prices and falling personal incomes. We became convinced that major changes were needed, both in attitudes and in the way our societies are organized.

The question of population - of population pressure, of population and human rights - and the links between these related issues and poverty, environment, and development proved to be one of the more difficult concerns with which we had to struggle. The differences of perspective seemed at the outset to be unbridgeable, and they required a lot of thought and willingness to communicate across the divides of cultures, religions, and regions.

Another such concern was the whole area of international economic relations. In these and in a number of other important aspects of our analysis and recommendations, we were able to develop broad agreement.

The fact that we all became wiser, learnt to look across cultural and historical barriers, was essential. There were moments of deep concern and potential crisis, moments of gratitude and achievement, moments of success in building a common analysis and perspective. The result is clearly more global, more realistic, more forward looking than any one of us alone could have created. We joined the Commission with different views and perspectives, different values and beliefs, and very different experiences and insights. After these three years of working together, travelling, listening, and discussing, we present a unanimous report.

I am deeply grateful to all the Commissioners for their dedication, their foresight and personal commitment to our common endeavour. It has been a truly wonderful team. The spirit of friendship and open communication, the meeting of minds and the process of learning and sharing, have provided an experience of optimism, something of great value to all of us, and, I believe, to the report and its message. We hope to share with others our learning process, and all that we have experienced together. It is something that many others will have to experience if global sustainable development is to be achieved.

The Commission has taken guidance from people in all walks of life. It is to these people to all the peoples of the world that the Commission now addresses itself.

In so doing we speak to people directly as well as to the institutions that they have established.

The Commission is addressing governments, directly and through their various agencies and ministries. The congregation of governments, gathered in the General Assembly of the United Nations, will be the main recipients of this report.

The Commission is also addressing private enterprise, from the one-person business to the great multinational company with a total economic turnover greater than that of many nations, and with possibilities for bringing about far-reaching changes and improvements.

But first and foremost our message is directed towards people, whose well-being is the ultimate goal of all environment and development policies. In particular, the Commission is addressing the young. The world's teachers will have a crucial role to play in bringing this report to them.

If we do not succeed in putting our message of urgency through to today's parents and decision makers, we risk undermining our children's fundamental right to a healthy, life-enhancing environment. Unless we are able to translate our words into a language that can reach the minds and hearts of people young and old, we shall not be able to undertake the extensive social changes needed to correct the course of development.

The Commission has completed its work. We call for a common endeavour and for new norms of behaviour at all levels and in the interests of all. The changes in attitudes, in social values, and in aspirations that the report urges will depend on vast campaigns of education, debate and public participation.

To this end, we appeal to "citizens" groups, to non-governmental organizations, to educational institutions, and to the scientific community. They have all played indispensable roles in the creation of public awareness and political change in the past. They will play a crucial part in putting the world onto sustainable development paths, in laying the groundwork for Our Common Future.

The process that produced this unanimous report proves that it is possible to join forces, to identify common goals, and to agree on common action. Each one of the Commissioners would have chosen different words if writing the report alone. Still, we managed to agree on the analysis, the broad remedies, and the recommendations for a sustainable course of development.

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In the final analysis, this is what it amounts to: furthering the common understanding and common spirit of responsibility so clearly needed in a divided world.

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Thousands of people all over the world have contributed to the work of the Commission, by intellectual means, by financial means, and by sharing their experiences with us through articulating their needs and demands. I am sincerely grateful to everyone who has made such contributions. Many of their names are found in Annexe 2 of the report. My particular gratitude goes to Vice Chairman Mansour Khalid, to all the other members of the Commission, and to Secretary General Jim MacNeill and his staff at our secretariat, who went above and beyond the call of duty to assist us. Their enthusiasm and dedication knew no limits. I want to thank the chairmen and members of the Intergovernmental Inter-sessional Preparatory Committee, who co-operated closely with the Commission and provided inspiration and support. I thank also the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Dr. Mostafa TolSa, for his valuable, continuous support and interest.

Gro Harlem Brundtland
Oslo, 20 March 1987