

SWEDISH DELEGATION
to the UN Conference
on the Human Environ-
ment

Statement by Prime Minister Olof Palme in the
Plenary Meeting, June, 6, 1972

The realization of the importance of the human environment has had a great impact on international opinion.

Some years ago public discussion - at least in the industrial countries - centered around a probable future of affluence and abundance. This optimistic view was rooted in the experiences of the first post war decades, with their unparalleled technical and economic progress. It was not much disturbed by the reality of poverty and starvation for the vast majority of people in the world. They would, it was thought, ultimately share the abundance.

Nowadays, the debate largely centers around a future of scarcity on this one earth. Progress continues, yes, and world production increases. But we have become increasingly aware of the fact that our natural resources are limited. We have come to discuss more and more the interrelated problem areas of population, poverty and pollution.

And we realise that just as we could not afford the laissez-faire economy we shall not afford laissez-faire technology.

This has led to some prophecies of doom, and many expressions of gloom, concerning the future of the human race. It has led to a very genuine sense of fear among ordinary people all over the world. They fear the consequences of overpopulation, of uncontrolled technology, of the exhaustion of natural resources, of too rapid urbanization, of environmental decay.

People show concern and they demand action. They attack representatives of the bureaucratic established order, they attack anonymous economic powers - all those forces who, rightly or wrongly, are held responsible for the present and possible future state of affairs. They try to^{act, to} make them-selves heard and understood. All this is basically a sign of health. A feeling of concern and a sense of urgency among the people is a prerequisite for change and for political action.

Can solutions be found? Can they be found in time?

These are disturbing questions. We must naturally

beware of false optimism. Technological forecasts that are little more than quantitative extrapolations of the future, can in fact be dangerous if they are allowed to divert our attention from the real/^{and}serious problems of the world.

But I must also warn for prophecies of inevitable catastrophe. I have seen no convincing evidence that the problems of the human environment - and the interconnected problems of food production, ~~with~~ population, resource management and economic growth and distribution - could not be solved.

I am certain that solutions can be found. But it is absolutely necessary that concerted, international action is undertaken. It is indeed very, very urgent.

At the same time the feeling of urgency should not overshadow the fact that solutions will require far-reaching changes in attitudes and social structures. Agreement on the necessity of action will not eliminate the many conflicts of interest that are inherent in social change.

The human environment will always change, development will continue. There will be growth. This cannot and should not be avoided. The decisive question is in which direction we will develop, by what means we will grow, which qualities we want to achieve, and what values we wish to guide our future.

The draft declaration on human environment, which is one of the basic documents of this conference, is an attempt to express in succinct terms some basic aims and values, to find a common denominator on which we all can agree.

I would venture the hope, on behalf of my government that the text as submitted will prove generally acceptable. It represents a careful and delicate balance between different interests designed to achieve a consensus. It is an important starting point. In the future the ambitions probably will be higher.

It is above all of decisive importance that the declaration establishes the principle that all countries must accept the responsibility to ensure that their activities do not cause damage to the environment of others. This is

an expression of a deepening understanding of the need for international cooperation and solidarity.

My government attaches the greatest importance to the stress laid in the declaration upon the need for development. It is an inescapable fact that each individual in the industrialised countries draws - on the average - thirty times more heavily on the limited resources of the earth than his fellow man in the developing countries. We know that our resources, both renewable and non-renewable, are limited. These simple facts inevitably raise the question of equality, of more equal distribution between countries and within countries. We are beginning to see the outlines of this problem. But we are not yet ready - as was shown for instance at the UNCTAD conference recently - to accept the full implications of international solidarity.

It is terrifying that, to quote the draft declaration, "immense resources continue to be consumed in armaments and armed conflict, wasting and threatening still further the human environment".

We think it essential that the Stockholm con-

ference unequivocally proclaim the aim that this trend must be broken, although we know that work towards its fulfillment must take place in other fora. The disarmament conference in Geneva continues to work for the elimination of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

The immense destruction brought about by indiscriminate bombing, by large scale use of bulldozers and herbicides is an outrage sometimes described as ecocide, which requires urgent international attention. It is shocking that only preliminary discussions of this matter have been possible so far in the United Nations and at the conferences of the International Committee of the Red Cross, where it has been taken up by my country and others. We fear that the active use of these methods is coupled by a passive resistance to discuss them.

We know that work for disarmament and peace must be viewed in a long perspective. It is of paramount importance, however, that ecological warfare cease immediately.

During the preparatory work for the conference

"Action-orientation" has been a key word all along the road that has led us here today. As a result of this work we have a well-prepared documentation and I wish to pay warm tribute to the Secretary-General of the Conference and the Conference Secretariat for the imaginative endeavours in producing the framework for our deliberations.

The Swedish Government supports the concept of an action plan as proposed in the conference document. The basic element of this plan is the proposed global environmental assessment program. During the preparations for the Conference my government has repeatedly stressed the need for a more efficient coordination of international systems for environment monitoring and surveillance. We therefore fully support the so-called Earth watch-program as presented in the proposed action plan. We are confident that this program will increase substantially our possibilities to assess the status of the global environment and to identify trends of change. This must, in our view, be the starting point for a long term international action program, aimed at forecasting possible environment reactions.

The Swedish delegation supports the recommendations for national and international action that are contained in the documents.

The need for intergovernmental control of pollution is only one aspect of international environmental cooperation. The document on environmental aspects of natural-resources-management underlines the resource perspective.

Today the most commonly known **exhaustion** of our natural resources is that of those in the sea. In all parts of the oceans, nations tempt to overestimate the highest possible sustainable yield and overfishing is not uncommon. To this is added the increasing pollution of regional and high seas. We expect that the draft convention on ocean dumping will be proceeded positively and rapidly.

We support the proposed study on future energy resources and the forecasting of demands.

This study could in fact be a first step towards some kind of international energy policy.

We can already distinguish several aims for such an international effort.

The first is a general advice to decrease unnecessary spending of fossil fuel, mainly oil and natural gas. This obviously applies to the industrialized regions, where serious cutdown on luxury production is clearly desirable, from several points of view.

The second is a substantial increase of units for conversion of nuclear energy to electricity. In this context, I want to stress that although the problem of leakage of radioactive products from the reactors may seem to be under control, and the fact is that the nuclear industry is one of the best safeguarded, large scale production poses problems of final disposal of the radioactive waste. International cooperation through proper channels is necessary.

The third is an international spreading of the technical know-how with regard to conversion of coal to fluid fuels, in other words in the future we need the conversion of "industrial energy" to "transportation energy".

The fourth is a substantial increase in the support for the research in the field of fusion power or, other forms of less polluting power production e.g. by utilization of solar energy. On the track to this goal we can see the breeder

reactor emerge.

Let me point to another factor in the energy complex. Energy is vital for any development effort. Nature has a limited capacity, different for every particular region, to act as purification plant taking care of the wastes. The only way to prevent damage to this system is the introduction of man made technical purification and recycling, both alternatives in their turn demanding more energy. Again the necessity of balance between pollution and energy supplies and needs is shown and we cannot escape working out an immediate energy planning on international level.

The general demand for a good environment also concerns working and housing conditions. This is an aspect to the recommendations that has become particularly important in my country.

At the workplaces, particularly in the factories, we can recognize many of the problems occurring in the general environment but in a concentrated or amplified form. It is important that we recognize the need for international action for a better working environment. A special report on this subject has been published as part of the Swedish preparatory work. We would

well-come any additional effort that international organizations could give to the problems of the working environment, paying particular attention to the interdependence between the working environment and the general physical environment. I hope that other delegations share our views and that this could be reflected in the report of the conference.

This conference will, I hope, represent a break-through for giving to future international action in this field a common outlook and direction. The principle will be established that we all carry a common responsibility and must not act without regard for the interests of others.

Thus, the ground is laid for the creation and the functioning of some international machinery in the environmental field. We feel that the proposals for the setting-up of such a machinery are among the most important projects of this conference. Part of this project is an Environmental Fund. The Swedish government has already taken a decision to contribute to this fund.

The history of international cooperation has always been a careful balancing act between national independence and international interdependence. How much national sovereignty are

we in each instance prepared to give up in the interest of interdependence and international solidarity? In the field of environment the case is in some important respects more simple. The air we breathe is not the property of any one nation - we share it. The big oceans are not divided by national frontiers - they are our common property. What is asked of us is not to relinquish our national sovereignty but to use it to further the common good. It is to abide by certain agreed international rules in order to safeguard our common property, to leave something for us and future generations to share.

If we manage our own national environment in a sensible way we are not only contributing to the well-being of our own people, we are giving proof of international solidarity. This simple fact is giving a new dimension to the concept of national sovereignty, and to the common work for peace. In the field of human environment there is no individual future, neither for human beings nor for nations. Our future is common. We must share it together. We must shape it together.