

**Taiwan March 3018**

**Gro Harlem Brundtland**

**“Sustainable Development Goals, a thirty year story of international collaboration”**

**It is great to be back here today, remembering the wonderful events in 2014, when the first Tang Prizes were awarded. I was deeply grateful to be receiving this great honour.**

**One of the positive developments was the Tang Prize Grants that we could use for each one of us to further our key causes.**

**The Gro Brundtland Week was one of these initiatives; inspired by my conviction that to promote women and their role in society is a crucial element of a sustainable world of prosperity, peace and security.**

**The world has fortunately step by step moved forward, over my lifetime, to realize that human rights also need to be women’s rights, and that empowerment of women is a prerequisite for sustainable development.**

**I am grateful for the excellent efforts, also by the National Cheng Kung University and the quality of the process of assembling young women scientists who wish to contribute to the global knowledge base for pursuing Sustainable Development.**

**The title of my speech today is about the critical need we all are facing, for our world and our more than 190 different countries, to be working together for our shared interests to safeguard our common future.**

**Sustainable Development, the concept we coined back in 1987, has nearly 30 years later, in 2015, led to a crucial global agreement, The Sustainable Development Goals.**

**It has been a long journey, but it has successfully brought the world together behind key common goals.**

**It is also an important part of my own life story, and how I became personally involved, engaged and convinced, already as a young environment minister of Norway, in pursuing a pattern of development that could benefit all, protect our planet and promote peace.**

**2015 became a year of historic breakthroughs, as our leaders finally agreed on the Sustainable Development Goals in New York in September, and then on the Climate Agreement, in Paris in December!**

**2015 fulfilled the hopes of so many, and became the breakthrough year for a critical agenda for our world and our future.**

**I had become greatly inspired at the UN in New York, having spoken at a session lead by the French President Hollande at the historic meeting when world leaders signed up to the new Global Sustainable Development Goals. It was really uplifting to witness the passion and determination only weeks before Paris, shown by the leader of the host country, France!**

**I am convinced, however, that we would not have seen the success of Paris, without the hard work for years towards the Sustainable Development Goals, an initiative taken by the UN Secretary General after the breakdown in Copenhagen in 2009.**

**This again inspired the results of Rio plus twenty in 2012.**

**It all led to a broad global effort to agree on sustainable development goals, for rich and poor countries alike.**

**For the first time, a development agenda now fully integrates the environment and applies to all our countries, not just to the developing world.**

**So does the Paris agreement.**

**Sustainable energy for all, empowerment of women, addressing inequality and good governance, also within countries, are certainly concerns and obligations that also rich countries need to take seriously!**

**After a hard fought struggle, the goals did include as goal number 13, a crucial, strong commitment by all countries seriously to address climate change!**

**That is what was demonstrated and confirmed in Paris.**

**It had taken a quarter century of negotiations to reach this stage of common responsibilities, based on national commitments and agreed principles and rules, common goals and aspirations, to be reporting and to be counted, and to increase the level of ambitions at regular intervals.**

**The long journey of follow-up to the work of our commission, in 1987, has a broad range of efforts by so many countries, institutions, individuals and leaders behind it.**

**I will share with you some critical parts of that story.**

**In 2015 we also celebrated the 70th anniversary of the United Nations.**

**When the United Nations was established in 1945, I was six years old. The world was emerging from the horrors of the Second World War. In my country - Norway – we were reasserting and re-establishing democracy after five long years of Nazi occupation.**

**By the time I was ten, my family was living in New York and I was proud and keenly aware that a fellow Norwegian, Trygve Lie, had become the United Nations' first Secretary-General.**

**Little did I know then that I would have a long-time involvement with the United Nations.**

**Over the past 35 years, I have had the honour and privilege to serve on various United Nations committees, as well as heading up one of its flagship agencies, The World Health Organization.**

**However, today, more than ever, the relevance of the United Nations is also challenged. There have been profound shifts of power and wealth in the world since it was established. Of the 193 member states of the United Nations today, nearly three quarters were not members in 1945.**

**Its purpose now is greater than just trying to maintain peace and security among nations; it is also to help solve the economic, social, humanitarian and environmental problems facing us.**

**| Sustainable Development**

**| My first role serving the UN was in 1983 when the UN Secretary-General invited me to establish and chair the World Commission on Environment and Development.**

**Our Commission considered the interwoven challenges of environmental degradation, poverty and population growth.**

**The Commission, best known for developing the broad political concept of sustainable development, published its report Our Common Future in April 1987.**

**The Commission's groundbreaking and radical recommendations led to the Earth Summit - the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.**

**The whole process of our work was from the outset geared towards a broad international learning process, reaching out to all relevant parties, not only governments and the NGO community, but to Universities and think tanks, research bodies, and not least to the whole business community.**

**We knew we would be in this together, and that the future depended on unparalleled cooperation to succeed.**

**In Rio 1992 impressive results were already possible to achieve:**

**The Climate Convention, The Biodiversity Convention, and of course: Agenda 21, describing the development needs of the coming century.**

**5 years later we had the Kyoto protocol on Climate, leading to seemingly endless rounds of negotiations, up to the historic meeting in Copenhagen, in 2009.**

**There it became clear that new ways of collaboration were of the essence, after the serious breakdown between different groups of countries that dominated that important summit.**

**However, at least one common goal was agreed: The world must not see a higher temperature rise than two degrees Celsius, an essential outcome, after all.**

**Parallel to the climate focus, over the years, the UN system continued working on several critical issues for our common future:**

**The Social Summit in Copenhagen**

**In Cairo, the conference on Population and family planning,**

**In Beijing, the Conference on Women's rights,**

**Just to mention three of the critical ones-**

**At the Millennium, our world leaders were able to agree on a number of crucial issues, and launched Millennium Development Goals.**

**This was a key effort to follow up Agenda 21, but it turned out it was impossible to take into account the serious climate and environment dimensions we were all facing.**

**Also, the idea that a development program should address all countries, not just the developing world, was still unthinkable!**

**We have come a long way since the publication of the report nearly 30 years ago.**

**Indeed, great strides have been fought since the launch of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. We have dramatically reduced the proportion of people living in extreme poverty. More people have access to safe drinking water. Fewer children are dying in infancy, fewer mothers die due to giving birth to new generations.**

**However, even a quick glance will show that while some in the world are experiencing unprecedented levels of prosperity, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening.**

**Environmental degradation continues, and the effects of climate change have begun to threaten the world's most vulnerable populations and ecosystems.**

**This is why the new Sustainable Development Goals will be crucial in continuing the momentum to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 and to address a number of critical economic, social and environmental issues, including climate change.**

**Over the last 28 years, since the launch of Our Common Future, I have often been asked to confirm that so little is being done, that the challenges are too large to tackle, basically been confronted with the issue of giving up.**

**Yes, it has taken too much time; yes the pace of change has been devastatingly slow.**

**However, I have always tried to remain focused on the urgent goals, and counting even small gains in wisdom and commitment.**

**Today, I believe it is time to also turn it all around.**

**We should celebrate while reminding people that looked at historically, it is maybe not so surprising that close to 200 countries, with widely varying stages of development, culture and history, have needed some time to overcome such large differences in background and perspective.**

**When I was asked to chair the World Commission on Environment and Development, in 1983, I was leader of the opposition, and had my hands more than full with my responsibilities on the Norwegian political scene. The Secretary General put upon me a heavy feeling of responsibility when he explained: “ You are the only environment minister to have become Prime Minister”. I just could not decline.**

**Years later, now for the third time Prime Minister, during question hour in the Norwegian parliament, I became exasperated. After a long round of questions from an opposition leader, who insisted I must tell him which single factor was the real essential one, I concluded:**

**“Everything is linked to everything else!”**

**I was immediately attacked and criticised for being so unclear and evasive!**

**Interestingly, as awareness and global debates have increased the understanding of the multiple and complex challenges we are facing, my remarks are now often referred to and quoted as an example of deep wisdom!**

**In 2015, after nearly 3 decades, countries of the world have been able to overcome often very deep differences of opinion and priorities.**

**These deep divisions over the new threats to the global environment came fully to the fore already in Stockholm, more than forty years ago, at the first major UN conference on the Environment.**

**Indira Gandhi, the most forceful voice from the developing nations, said the famous words: “Poverty is the greatest polluter”.**

**When I was appointed a decade later to lead, what later would be called the Brundtland Commission, I was profoundly aware that there was no alternative road ahead, but to confront the two challenges, environment and development in an integrated manner.**

**Clearly, a key concern for human development must be eradication of abject poverty, and meeting the needs and rights of every human being for dignity, real choices and a decent life.**

**On the Commission I put together, with more than half of the members coming from the developing world, we analysed these basic links, as well as raised the new dimension of intergenerational responsibility.**

**Never before had humanity been faced with having to extend their moral responsibility, concern and obligations to all future generations.**

**In our report, which called for radical change and transformation, we pointed at the need for equitable growth, one that is forceful and at the same time, socially and environmentally sustainable.**

**Crucially, I believe, we did not ask for Zero growth.**

**What really matters is the quality of growth, both in terms of promoting growth that benefits the poor, but also in terms of reducing the impact on the environment.**

**We addressed the dangerous trend towards Climate change and global warming as a major challenge, to the international community and to our common future.**

**This was, in fact, dramatic enough for the world to be able to agree, only 5 years later, in Rio, on the Climate Convention!**

**The type of policy changes that are needed, enter directly into the core of our development patterns and the use of Energy.**

**The fact is that many countries have been much too reluctant to commit to change, especially the largest emitters of greenhouse gases.**

**Over the last 20 - 25 years, the reality that the effects of climate change is so much harder hitting poor people has increasingly become a key part of the discussion.**

**Ecosystem losses, due to climate change, are constraining livelihood opportunities, especially for poor people.**

**Growth patterns, both in Africa and China still see the poor falling further behind. Many leaders now realize this can also be a source of social instability.**



Poor countries and emerging economies are already responsible for 2/3 of global emissions, a proportion that will increase, year by year.

We all need to recognize that the drivers of that challenge include unsustainable lifestyles, production and consumption patterns, and the impact of population growth.

As the global population grows from 7 billion to nine billion by 2040, with the emergence of three billion new middle-class consumers over the next 20 years, the demand for resources will rise exponentially.

By 2030, the world will need at least 50 per cent more food, 45 per cent more energy, and 30 per cent more water.

It has now become clear how closely linked climate change is with the sustainable development challenge. Negative effects through climate change are illustrated by their impact on food security, water scarcity, poverty and livelihoods, health and the wellbeing of oceans and other ecosystems.

It gives me new hope that today there is a greater appreciation and concern about the increasing gaps within and between countries.

**To bring all countries and peoples into an era of sustainable development and progress, while protecting Planet Earth, only a broad and consistent approach to overcome poverty and secure dignity, human rights, health and education for all, is a viable and acceptable alternative.**

**We have seen considerable progress in the Human Development Index in countries across the world.**

**However, it will not be desirable, or sustainable if these improved averages are accompanied by rising inequalities in income and unsustainable patterns of consumption.**

A recent report from Oxfam reminds us of the dimension of the drama: the richest 1% of us is now as wealthy as the remaining 99%!

**I believe we now need to put inequality at the heart of the agenda.**



**Inequality is a barrier to human development in the first place. And greater equity is a condition for reaching the goal of eradication of abject poverty and deprivation.**

**Investing in people's capabilities, women as well as men, through health, education, job creation and other social services must be an integral part of sustainable development.**

**We can no longer assume that our collective actions will not trigger tipping points as environmental thresholds are breached, risking irreversible damage to both ecosystems and human communities.**

**We all need to recognize that the drivers of that challenge include unsustainable lifestyles, production and consumption patterns, and the impact of population growth.**

**As the global population grows from 7 billion to nine billion by 2040, with the emergence of three billion new middle-class consumers over the next 20 years, the demand for resources will rise exponentially.**

**By 2030, the world will need at least 50 per cent more food, 45 per cent more energy, and 30 per cent more water.**

**Our Panel strongly emphasized a critical point for our common future: The need to always measure and to price what matters.**

**The marketplace has to reflect the full ecological and human costs of economic decisions and establish price signals that make transparent the consequences both of action and inaction.**

**This means:**

- **Pollution, including carbon emissions, can no longer be free.**
- **Subsidies should be made transparent and phase out for fossil fuels by 2020.**
- **We must build new ways to measure development beyond GDP.**

**Ironically, these are word for word recommendations that we had presented in the UN World Commission's report back in 1987.**

**Also then, we pointed to the need for science to allow for a more informed and integrated decision-making. This is essential for decision makers to share the basic knowledge upon which to act.**

**Most countries have by now experienced the dramatic changes in their own environment, and are finally opting for cooperation instead of conflict and denial.**

**It has now become clear how closely linked climate change is with the sustainable development challenge. Negative effects through climate change are illustrated by their impact on food security, water scarcity, poverty and livelihoods, health and the wellbeing of oceans and other ecosystems.**

**Water, Food and Energy are all essential components as we promote sustainable development.**

**They clearly have a human rights perspective, and are basic for health and for abating poverty.**

**Women are now increasingly being acknowledged as a vital force for growth and sustainable development.**

**Countries and companies with higher levels of gender equality have faster growth and better performance.**

**We have the knowledge, data and experience to prove that this is the case, and that those who remain stuck in patriarchal patterns of economic life, will lose and lose badly.**

**Leadership , first and foremost among key global players is of the essence.**

**Nothing moves fast enough or strongly enough if the USA is not one of the driving forces.**

**It is also true: Very little of any consequence will happen if China, India and other important emerging economies do not engage for results.**

**Fortunately, there are several good signs of large and emerging economies, like China, taking important action to promote Public Health, a cleaner use of energy, and efforts to reduce dangerous emissions.**

**The world took note when US and China, together responsible for nearly half of global emissions, announced their commitment to take action and be part of a global solution.**

**It did make it much less attractive for reluctant countries to choose to line up behind one or both of the two major players as an excuse for their own inaction!**

**Financing is a critical issue.**

**Limited public funds must be used strategically, as incentives to unlock greater private investment flows, share risks, and expand access to the building blocks of prosperity, including modern energy services.**

**Governments are taking action. Many are preparing for pricing carbon. Together, they represent almost half of global GHG emissions.**

**This means taking advantage of the vast potential that lies in maximization of resource productivity, especially with respect to energy and water, and reducing waste. It means investing in sustainable technologies that will create jobs and support the poor, improve health and education, and build more resilient and equitable societies.**

**The private sector must be fully engaged and fully responsible..**

**The traditional separation between the public and private sector is becoming increasingly irrelevant as our societies realize how interdependent we all are, in a world with mounting common challenges and threats. Not just the public and voluntary sectors, but also the business community must be socially and globally responsible.**

**Business now needs, and calls for, much more government action to inspire innovation and the solutions to reach a sustainable world.**

**Public policies are needed to stimulate markets, remove barriers, level the playing field, and establish clear objectives and targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency.**

**This also means we must urgently turn around the widespread and paradoxical policies still rampant across the world: Subsidies for fossil fuels that give additional incentives for their use, a policy that goes in the opposite direction of what is needed.**

**In fact, annual subsidies for established fossil fuels are estimated to cost around \$500 billion worldwide depending on the oil price. India is today using 14 % of its federal budget for subsidies of gasoline prices, 43 billion dollars!**

**These are resources, which could be channeled to clean low-cost, sustainable energy technologies, as well as to social programs to benefit the poor.**

**It is hard to believe that 16 years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century; exposure to indoor air pollution from the use of wood, dung, and coal for cooking and home heating is still one of the world's biggest public health problems.**

**Yet 2.7 billion people still use these fuels, and more than 1 billion people have no access to electricity.**

**Globally, the good news is that the production and deployment of renewable energy is gaining much speed.**

**Asia's energy needs will double over the next 20 years. This certainly illustrates the fundamental need to decouple this new era of growth from growth in CO2 emissions, while ensuring universal access to sustainable energy!**

**Governments are taking action. Many are preparing for pricing carbon. Together, they represent almost half of global GHG emissions.**

**Business has increasingly become aware that carbon pricing is the most efficient and cost effective means of reducing emissions, leading them to voice their support for carbon pricing.**

**Partnerships will be crucial, to deal with the dangers of climate change, and to promote a green economy and sustainable development.**

**So, in closing, I believe we are all in this together, as individuals and as representatives of civil society.**

**This scenario, this awareness was certainly not there, when I go back more than thirty years to some of my first meetings at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.**

**I had been invited as speaker, the only woman, but for Simon Veil from France. My title: “Quality of life in the 1980ies”.**

**I spoke about equality, the need to protect the environment, empowerment of women.**

**Only after the turn of the century could we see a growing awareness among business leaders that they too are part of the equation.**

**All I heard, for years and years, was: These are responsibilities for governments and the public sector. We in the business community have only one goal and responsibility: Our financial bottom line.**

**The scene has changed. All serious business leaders are now on board, realizing they too are part of the solution for a future that is prosperous, safe and secure.**

**I remain optimistic. Advances in science have given us a better understanding of climate and ecosystem risks.**

**Billions of people, even in developing countries, are socially connected by technologies that that have shrunk the world and expanded the notion of a global neighborhood.**

**As long as we all live on the same planet, there is no alternative path ahead.**