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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/

\* A/42/150.

## CHAPTER 2

### TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- \* the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- \* the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

2. Thus the goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability in all countries - developed or developing, market-oriented or centrally planned. Interpretations will vary, but must share certain general features and must flow from a consensus on the basic concept of sustainable development and on a broad strategic framework for achieving it.

3. Development involves a progressive transformation of economy and society. A development path that is sustainable in a physical sense could theoretically be pursued even in a rigid social and political setting. But physical sustainability cannot be secured unless development policies pay attention to such considerations as changes in access to resources and in the distribution of costs and benefits. Even the narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern for social equity between generations, a concern that must logically be extended to equity within each generation.

#### 1. THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4. The satisfaction of human needs and aspirations is the major objective of development. The essential needs of vast numbers of people in developing countries - for food, clothing, shelter, jobs - are not being met, and beyond their basic needs these people have legitimate aspirations for an improved quality of life. A world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises. Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life.

5. Living standards that go beyond the basic minimum are sustainable only if consumption standards everywhere have regard