

June 7, 2003 – Plenary VIII

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It is a great honour to me to have this opportunity to address the challenge to create the necessary conditions for ensuring the future hope for our children. This conference has taken place during the most beautiful period of our region, when spring is turning into the fullness of summer, and when life and light have so evidently defeated death and darkness. In the Christian year, this is also the time when we celebrate the victory of the God of life, over evil and death. This is a time of great joy. At the same time that we are celebrating life, we are also reminded that life and death is very obviously knitted together. There are limits to life, and there are limits to what can be achieved. It is our duty to find ways to limit pain in all forms, but there is no possibility to avoid death or pain. We need to understand that trying to escape pain or death is like trying to escape life itself. Life is composed of light and darkness, of both joy and pain.

When turning our attention to the question of how we deal with our common resources, and how to create a sustainable society, the message of life through death has something very important to say to us. The motivation for change must come from inside each individual member of society, and must be based on positive driving forces. The major driving force for creativity and specific action must be love and hope, but also anger about injustice and the destruction of creation. In the long run, action built on guilt or demands from above will not lead to a socially morally healthy society. At the same time it is vital to understand that a radical change towards sustainability cannot be achieved without sacrifice. And brave leaders of the society must have sufficient courage to spell this out clearly. Every sportsman or artist or scientist knows that results do not come from nothing. To achieve good results, a great deal of hard work must be invested. Why should any of us expect a shift towards sustainable development to be any different?

When we turn our perspective towards the future, it is also important to learn from the past. The degradation of the environment and the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, are not rooted only in greed or arrogance. These things contribute, of course, and need to be dealt with. But the degradation of the environment is also caused by the current ideology of development which purposes that technology, science and economic growth will create a much better world in a linear process towards the future.

In earlier centuries, natural resources were regarded as raw materials to take control of and to dominate. The idea that natural resources should be controlled for the sake of modernity has been given up, but we are still held captive by the concept of linear progress. According to this view of development, quantity is often considered more important than quality. The implication is, to achieve a good life, you need more.

Let me take my own country of Sweden as an example. Swedish welfare was built on the concept of modernity. There are many positive elements, like human rights, solidarity, women's rights, etc. Technology and science have provided convenience and a quality of life that even not my grandparents could have dreamt of. My own personal history is an example of how people in the poorest communities were given the opportunity of education and to join the middle class. At the same time, Swedish welfare,

Swedish development, and international aid policy, as well as Swedish politics of the environment, were all built on the concept of a distribution of surplus. It is becoming increasingly evident that this concept does not work any longer. The environmental challenges, as well as the challenge of bridging social injustice, tells us that for the sake of future generations and also for the sake of our poorer neighbours in various parts of this planet, we must respond seriously to the challenge to refrain from some of those aspects of life that we have come to take for granted.

While becoming early promoters of the concept of sustainability, the churches have never combined this concept with that of one linear process of development. From the beginning, churches spoke of sustainable society. Already in 1974, the churches met in a conference organized by the World Council of Churches in Bucharest to discuss this concept. At that time the WCC introduced the idea of sustainable communities, rather than sustainable development. To concentrate of sustainable communities might be one way to avoid the linear thought-pattern embedded in the concept of development. The WCC has also introduced the concept of sufficiency as an objective of sustainable community, for quality rather than quantity.

The concept of sustainable development has been discussed over the last thirty years. Even if much has happened and awareness of the importance of finding a sustainable way ahead, it has proved to be very difficult to reach below the surface and to start developing in actual social and political practice, an approach by which logical social culture and economic dimensions are mutually supportive rather than for different competing aspects. Listening in to the discussions on how to integrate the concepts of sustainable development into all political sectors, it is all too often too easy to assume that sustainable development is no more than the sum of interchangeable entities, and thus to imply, for example, that a little more economic growth could be justified even at the cost of a little more environmental degradation, since the sum is still the same. I have experienced this myself while working as a civil servant for the Swedish government when dealing with the E.U. strategy for sustainable development.

The current ecological crisis in our own Baltic Sea constitutes many examples that so far there are many lessons to be learned. Let me just consider a little further some of the challenges that have been discussed the last week. The Swedish Minister of Agriculture mentioned the crisis on the fish stocks. Recent studies show also globally that fish stocks have been depleted by 90%, and that there is a good likelihood that they never will recover again. As far as I've understood, in the Baltic Sea the eastern cod stock is more or less out-fished. In the Bornholm Deep, there are still fragments of the western cod stock; this stock, however, is under grave threat and cannot replace the eastern cod stock as there are differences in salinities. And in spite of all efforts to tackle eutrophication, there is still little progress in the Baltic Sea ecology. On local spots, there are improvements, as well as you can observe improvements on the surface water, but what remains to be solved is the problem with diffused sources of eutrophication.

Johannesburg Summit last year was a very important step forward, and still, I would say that it constituted another example of the gap between what is needed to achieve real sustainability and the political reality, and the will from the whole entire society to engage seriously with these issues. For example, it turned out to be impossible to agree on any target or timescale for renewable energy. Also, the concept from Rio on the precautionary principle was challenged and marginalized.

Maybe the issue of climate change is one of the best examples on the difficulty to adjust politics and lifestyles in order to achieve sustainability. The political will and courage to combat climate change may be seen as an indicator for readiness to take on this global challenge. According to the third assessment report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change, changes to the climate are already taking place, and will increase in magnitude unless radical changes to the emission of greenhouse gases are put into effect very soon. A reduction of sixty to eighty percent of the current emission rate must be reached by 2050. If not, the lives of millions of people and large ecosystems will be put at great risk.

The year 2050 might seem very distant, but by this time I assume my own children, assuming they are still alive, will be about sixty years old. Early policy innovation will lead in the long term to relatively low costs for society compared with the higher investment to meet the problem of greater magnitude if action is delayed. However, despite the availability of technology and the means with which to respond successfully to this challenge, actions are too slow. The Kyoto Protocol is an important first step, however its target of 5% is very little compared to what will be needed. Instead of negotiating radical targets and measures for the period after 2010, the global negotiations on climate have reached a statement of technological details. And despite that the E.U. has done a lot of work, they are not on the track to meet even its own reductions by 2012.

To conclude, the work towards sustainable development provides an opportunity to create new policy and politics suitable for the 21st century. Science, as well as religious communities, have a vital role in identifying new models and in creating awareness in order to mobilize hope and motivation. The challenge is not to leave the entire concept of modernity, but to adjust it in the light of the knowledge that we have today. The concept is not to abandon new technology, or healthy economic growth, but to always ask for whom and how this should be developed. The challenge is not to work against globalization, but to find ways and means to ensure that global development reaches even the poorest of the poor. We need conversion but not *tabula rasa*. We need a deep-reaching and radical change to our lifestyle in our society, and we need a new understanding of what brings real sustainability. We need to evaluate modernity in the light of the experiences of different communities—and especially in the light of suffering communities—but we can build on the good fruits of modernity and utilize good technology and good science. In doing so, we need humility towards life itself and the good life that was intended for all people. The concept of sustainability but be accompanied by hope and pleasure. The challenge of conversion and restriction must be combined with the recognition that we are all human beings, subject to failure. A sustainable community must also be a community of forgiveness.

Coming from the church, I would also like to challenge the church and her leaders. The churches and religion can play an important role in searching for inspiration, methods and motivation. However, the churches often retire to a backseat role. The churches still have a long way to go before they can claim that their activities and properties are run in accordance with the concept of sustainability. In a few weeks time, the European Orthodox and Protestant churches will be meeting in Trondheim for a week-long conference on the future of the role of the churches in Europe. One of the question is how the churches can engage jointly in advocacy and policy, building on

environmental issues as well as other burning issues for the Europe of the 21st century. What priority and what resources will the churches give to these issues at that conference?

And to the rest of the society, to scientists and to our political leaders, I would like to say, as has been said before, it is very important to implement and to meet all already existing targets and agreements, but we must go further down that road. I think the situation for the fish stocks in the Baltic Sea is one example that we need to go further down, and I am very grateful for the willingness that the Swedish government is showing right now. In order to tackle the diffuse sources of eutrophication, the challenge of transportation and traffic must also be met, and a more radical target must be set. The problems of oil pollution and ship transportation have been mentioned many times during this conference.

To end up with, this conference has been one of good and challenges speeches. Now it is time to move from work to practice. Now is the time to be brave and creative. Only if we take this challenge seriously, including in our personal lives, will I be able to look my two girls in their eyes and tell them that there is a future of hope, and that the generation that went before them not only talked about sustainability, but also lived sustainable lives and created sustainability.