



**THE NORTH/SOUTH CONFERENCE FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
MONDAY, 25 MAY 1998**

The North/South Conference for Sustainable Development: "Solidarity for the Future" opened Monday, 25 May 1998 at the Federal Parliament Building in Berne, Switzerland. The first day of the conference was chaired by Werner Külling, President of the Swiss Coalition of Development Organizations. Discussion focused on the theme of Switzerland's Global Role. Participants heard opening remarks and a panel discussion on "What Direction Swiss Foreign Policy Should Take."

OPENING PLENARY

In opening remarks, Chair Werner Külling outlined the conference's objectives: to address aspects of political, economic and social change that will shape North/South relations in the 21st century; to give broad public exposure to the South's concerns with respect to solidarity and sustainable development; and to formulate demands for sound future development, examining them from the perspectives of North and South and forging conclusions relevant to Switzerland. He noted that the basis of the conference is the North/South Manifesto for Sustainable Development, which the Coalition drafted together with partners from the South and whose basic tenets are solidarity and sustainability. He stressed that, as Switzerland celebrates its 150th anniversary, its role in global development in the 21st century must be better defined. He welcomed constructive input from participants on Swiss development cooperation, external economic relations and foreign policy. He urged participants to sign the petition that calls for a Foundation for Solidarity, increased development assistance and inclusion of the principle of sustainable development in the Swiss constitution.

He emphasized the intertwining of people's fates in the South with those in the North. While globalization, deregulation and privatization are widely propagated, few speak of "social globalization" and the responsibility to help those in need in the South. He emphasized that this conference is not just another event in the North about the South but is based on the belief in solidarity with people and the environment and will be addressed by and receive input from many Southern participants regarding Switzerland's role in the 21st century.

Flavio Cotti, President of the Swiss Confederation, addressed human rights, conflict management, sustainable development and the role of Swiss foreign policy. He recalled his participation at the 1992 Earth Summit as the Swiss Environment Minister, and lamented the lack of progress achieved since then. He said that the Bruntland Report and Agenda 21 achieved world-wide understanding that sustainable development will only be realized if ecological, social and economic dimensions are promoted equally, and that while the last decade has witnessed unprecedented economic growth, the necessary adjustments have not been made in

the environmental and social areas. He stressed that the North must demonstrate a commitment to sustainable development. He cited the growing number of international agreements on environmental protection as significant progress and called for further establishment of legally binding multilateral instruments.

Acknowledging the interlinkages between poverty and environmental protection, he said combating poverty must be an end in itself, and humankind must be central to environmental protection. Noting that the scope of human rights embraces all elements of personal development, including social and ecological concerns, President Cotti underscored that respect for human rights is a fundamental prerequisite of sustainable development. He emphasized the need to alleviate human rights violations resulting from violent conflict, and said sustainable development is essential to achieving this goal. He stressed the importance of civil society, particularly NGOs and relief organizations for their contributions to Swiss development policy.

Pallo Jordan, South African Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, shared the experiences of South Africa regarding sustainable development, highlighting its efforts to raise the standard of living and the quality of people's lives, particularly for those who struggled under apartheid. He underscored the need for global cooperation in achieving sustainable development and partnerships both within the South and with the North. He stated that in Africa, new economic policies have been attracting investment, economies are starting to grow faster than populations, regional associations are working towards a free trade area, and improved telecommunications are a major factor in growth and development. Although newly democratized South Africa inherited a modern progressive state and a perception that it is able to look after its own needs and assist the rest of Africa, few of its citizens have benefited from development.

He recommended that developed countries reassess their positions on Southern development. He condemned harsh structural adjustment programmes, ineffective debt restructuring and nationalism as inhibiting progress towards sustainable development. He also stressed the need for new and additional resources to implement Agenda 21 and for developed countries to take the lead in reducing and eliminating unsustainable production and consumption patterns. He emphasized the adoption of new technologies, a holistic approach to the transfer of best practice technologies, and ODA programmes to provide access to these technologies. He highlighted CSD-6's focus on the role of industry in sustainable development, interactive dialogue between NGOs, industry and trade unions, and strategic approaches to freshwater management. He commended the Swiss focus on projects in poorer regions, noting contributions in the Eastern Cape area, and expressed hope that the conference would contribute to future solidarity.

Nafis Sadik, Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), spoke on the role of small nations in international organizations. She emphasized that large and small nations alike play important roles in international organizations. Switzerland, while

not a member of the UN, has actively participated in its debates and contributed to its activities. She noted that the UN was founded on a vision of greater peace, security, freedom and prosperity, and while significant global progress has been made in these areas, it is unevenly distributed. Equity and social justice remain goals for the next millenium, but to achieve them, an understanding of the relationship between population, environment and sustainable development is required at all levels. In this regard, the North/South Manifesto for Sustainable Development is a timely initiative and a good example of the contribution by a small nation's citizens to the dialogue on global problems and their solutions.

She noted that at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the international community agreed on a Programme of Action recognizing population as a critical factor in social and economic development. She highlighted the contributions of many small nations to the debate and consensus on the Programme, including Switzerland. She underscored their notable agreement on a cost estimate for implementation of the Programme's reproductive health component, but expressed concern with inadequate mobilization of these resources to date.

She emphasized that the action plans of recent UN conferences contain agreed policy elements to achieve a better future for all. At the global level, the technical and financial means exist to achieve this goal, but the political will is lacking. The Manifesto is an important expression of political will and reflects the new global consensus from the UN conferences -- that sustainable development is about people.

Conference participants then engaged in open discussion on related issues.

PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel on "What Direction Should Swiss Foreign Policy Take?" was moderated by Esther Girsberger, editor-in-chief of "Tages-Anzeiger" newspaper, and was comprised of Ursula Koch, President of the Social Democratic Party, Adalbert Durrer, President of the Christian Democratic Party, Ueli Maurer, President of the Swiss Peoples Party, and Franz Steinegger, President of the Radical Democratic Party. Panelists first took up the question of why, when discussing Swiss foreign policy, development aid and North/South cooperation are not addressed. One panelist said development aid is and should be part of foreign policy, but discussions on development policy have been pushed to the back burner by domestic problems. Another said that, although he supported funding for development aid, foreign policy is dictated by current events, and development is only discussed with budgetary matters.

Panelists discussed capital flight, tax evasion and tax fraud, particularly regarding funds flowing into development projects. One panelist said no one is interested in accepting money of dubious origin, but banks cannot be stopped from accepting funds and assets. He said the Swiss want to maintain traditional values with respect to banking secrecy. Another panelist noted that, particularly in light of recent events in Indonesia, pressure should be put on the government to examine Indonesian assets in Swiss banks for fraudulence. It was stressed that interests and objectives must be clearly defined with respect to aid and cooperation and that solidarity involves donor country sacrifices. She questioned how long rich countries can continue to pay lip service to development aid.

Regarding development projects, panelists emphasized the importance of taking advantage of valuable local human resources on site, of both NGOs and governments, who make important contributions to the success of projects. It was noted that development aid is a merger of state, private and economic institutions, and development cooperation could be improved by greater cooperation between private organizations in the field and the economy to enable investors to create jobs in recipient countries.

The moderator highlighted the problem of viewing development cooperation as an opportunity to invest and improve the Swiss economy without concern for social justice in recipient countries. It was noted that many European governments' develop-

ment cooperation contributes to enhancing the wealth of developing country elites rather than fighting poverty, supporting rural development and improving education and health.

On the merits of ecological tax reform, one panelist emphasized Switzerland's considerable deficit and suggested that such reform might simply be an alibi to generate additional financial resources for the state, while the global goal of ecological tax reform is being lost. Another panelist said there are no medium- or long-term alternatives to ecological tax reform. He said alternative energy prices must be lowered, and noted that this is being discussed in the Swiss Parliament. He also expressed concern over the relationship between Switzerland and the EU, noting that Switzerland has made greater efforts than the EU toward making transport more sustainable, and emphasized the need for partnerships in implementing ecological policies and providing an example for the rest of the world. It was suggested that the medium- and long-term strategy must be to support renewable energy sources rather than to import and tax potentially polluting energy sources.

Panelists were asked what they would be willing to renounce in order to create a fairer world. Panelists emphasized: the personal and individual nature of this decision; the importance of influencing family and friends to live more sustainably; the inappropriateness of the state dictating who should renounce what and when; the commitment of development assistance in itself as an act of renunciation; and the need to reduce military spending and direct it toward development assistance.

The discussion was then opened for questions from the floor. One participant suggested that globalization might be the real problem and, if so, were panelists willing to renounce international institutions such as the IMF and the WTO that perpetuate North/South inequalities. One panelist said the IMF is a necessary infrastructure, while another stated that the speed of globalization must be slowed and the human factor must be taken more seriously at the next WTO negotiations. Another panelist, noting that the transnational economy is a parasite that drains nations, said countries must globalize politics and develop standards for, *inter alia*, democracy, environment and labor. Another participant said Swiss banks accept money from corrupt sources and Swiss companies sell poisonous products to developing countries and asked what the Swiss government is doing to address this. One panelist noted that Switzerland can only make companies obey Swiss laws and that other countries need to develop national legislation to protect their natural resources.

One participant asked what Switzerland is doing to reduce population growth and help people in developing countries and how it plans to meet the financial commitment it made at the ICPD. A panelist responded that governments make promises at international meetings that cannot be fulfilled and that development and education of women should be the focus of aid. It was also asked what the Swiss government is doing to increase ODA. Panelists replied that the government is in debt and the current national policy is one of austerity. One participant said the panel illustrated that people are only willing to take actions that do not fundamentally alter their lifestyles and again asked what panelists were willing to renounce.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

PLENARY: Participants will hear opening remarks and engage in discussion on "The Global Workplace Versus the Swiss Workplace" from 9:00-12:30 in the Federal Parliament Building.

WORKSHOPS: Several simultaneous workshops will convene in the Hotel Kreuz from 14:00-16:00.

PANEL DISCUSSION: A panel discussion addressing the question "Is Switzerland Facing an Economic Crisis?" will be conducted from 16:30-18:00 in the Federal Parliament Building.