

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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A View from Abroad!

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to attend a lecture given by Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland. You may probably ask, "Just who is Dr. Brundtland?" She spent ten years as a physician and scientist, and 20 years in public office, including serving as Prime Minister of Norway, the first woman and the youngest person to ever do so.

She came to real prominence when she chaired the World Commission of Environment and Development. This special commission was formed by the United Nations in 1983. It consisted of 21 members from across the globe with its charge to propose long term strategies for achieving a sustainable environment, and to recommend ways in which concern for the environment may be translated into greater co-operation among developing countries and between countries at different stages of economic and social development. Four years and 15 meetings later, The Brundtland Commission, as it has since been better known, issued its final report, "Our Common Future" in 1987.

When people ask what is meant by "sustainable development" or "sustainability", you will hear many different definitions. However, the one that is quoted the most is now known as the Brundtland definition: "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Being the guiding force behind the "Brundtland Report" on sustainability over 20 years ago, she maintains her focus on the developmental impact of climate change and global warming. She now serves as UN Special Envoy on Climate Change.

During her lecture, she couldn't help but be critical of our elected officials and of those campaigning for the presidential nomination. She believes that the Republican candidates have the intelligence to know that climate change is a major environmental issue yet a few of them don't believe it is a real problem. Basically, they must be lying because this is what their constituency or their financial backers want to hear. She was obviously referring to Rick Perry and Michele Bachman. Dr. Brundtland feels that Americans are at such a disadvantage when political candidates cannot be honest with them, so we really don't know their position on most issues.

She talked about the North Sea oil reserves that belong to Norway and all of its citizens. Instead of distributing the proceeds from the oil production to all the citizens, they created a fund currently worth about \$570 billion. To manage this fund, they are limiting distribution to about 4% per year for the maintenance of its infrastructure and other national needs. As a result of smart management of its resources, Norway is a very wealthy country. Like Switzerland, it does not belong to the European Union nor to the Eurozone.

Another interesting comment made by Dr. Brundtland was about her TV habit when traveling to the U.S. In Europe, she keeps up on local and world issues by watching CNN or BBC on television. Here she watches FOX News to see what is being conveyed to the Americans.

After the presentation, a reception was provided in her honor. At that time, I had the opportunity to talk to her, and I found her very cordial and responsive to my questions. For example, I mentioned to her a proposed program to offer an executive education masters program on sustainable strategies in Greece. After describing the program, she thought it was a good idea but it would be better if offered jointly with a top American university.

Her bottom line was that we have much to do to reduce consumption of our natural resources and reduce carbon emissions. Her mission includes promoting sustainable development, increasing environmental awareness, and advocating for good health as a basic human right.



Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland with George Nassos