

DR. GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND
FORMER DIRECTOR-GENERAL, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

A medical doctor and Master of Public Health (MPH), Gro Harlem Brundtland spent 10 years as a physician and scientist in the Norwegian public health system. For more than 20 years she was in public office, 10 of them as Prime Minister. In the 1980s she gained international recognition, championing the principle of sustainable development as the chair of the World Commission of Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission).

Dr. Brundtland's first choice of career was neither environmentalist nor politician, but to become a doctor like her father. He was a specialist in rehabilitation medicine, a skill much in demand following World War II. When Brundtland was 10 years old, the family moved to the United States where her father had been awarded a Rockefeller scholarship. The seeds of internationalism were sown in the young girl.

Dr. Brundtland inherited another passion from her father - political activism. At the age of seven, she was enrolled as a member of the Norwegian Labour Movement in its children's section and has been a member ever since, leading the Labour Party to election victory three times.

The sense of global awareness that began in her childhood developed when, as a young mother and newly qualified doctor, she won a scholarship to the Harvard School of Public Health. Here, working alongside distinguished public health experts, Dr. Brundtland's vision of health extending beyond the confines of the medical world into environment issues and human development began to take shape.

The next nine years were to be very hectic for Dr. Brundtland after returning to Oslo and the Ministry of Health in 1965. At the Ministry she worked on children's health issues including breastfeeding, cancer prevention and other diseases. She worked in the children's department of the National Hospital and Oslo City Hospital and became Director of Health Services for Oslo's schoolchildren while bringing up her own family and representing Norway in international conferences.

Such energy, enthusiasm and commitment brought an unexpected change to her career. In 1974, Dr. Brundtland was offered the job as Minister of the Environment. At first, believing she did not have enough experience on environmental issues, she was reluctant to accept the post. But her conviction on the link between health and the environment changed her mind.

During the 1970s she acquired international recognition in environmental circles and a political reputation at home. In 1981, at the age of 41, she was appointed Prime Minister for the first time. Dr. Brundtland was the youngest person and the first woman to hold the office of Prime Minister in Norway. With two other periods as Prime Minister from 1986-1989 and 1990-1996, Dr. Brundtland accumulated more than 10 years as Head of Government.

Throughout her political career, Dr. Brundtland has developed a growing concern for issues of global significance. In 1983 the then United Nations Secretary-General invited her to establish and chair the World

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

Dr. Brundtland finally stepped down as Prime Minister in October 1996. In her successful bid to become Director-General of the World Health Organization her many skills as doctor, politician, activist and manager had come together.

Dr. Brundtland was nominated as Director-General of the World Health Organization by the Executive Board of WHO in January, 1998. In her acceptance speech for the World Health Assembly, Dr. Brundtland said: "What is our Key mission? I see WHO's role as being the moral voice and the technical leader in improving health of the people of the world. Ready and able to give advice on the key issues that can unleash development and alleviate suffering. I see our purpose to be combating disease and ill-health - promoting sustainable and equitable health systems in all countries." As Director-General, Dr. Brundtland was most recognized for her efforts containing the SARS pandemic. She stepped down from her position in July 2003, but remains the leading voice behind promoting a healthier nation

TOPICS INCLUDE:

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- Women Perspective in Leadership Program
- Foreign Policy