

September 11, 1981

Joint letter by the Chairman and the Member of the North-South-Commission, Brandt and Ramphal, to the participants of the Cancún Summit

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Summary:

Brandt and Ramphal send a message to the Cancun Summit, being its first kind in terms of debating North-South issues concerning Global Security. The letter asks for hope and a new start in the international arena and suggests to work on critical issues such as poverty and hunger.

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Joint letter by the Chairman and the Member of the North-South-Commission, Brandt and Ramphal, to the participants of the Cancún Summit¹

11 September 1981

AdSD, Nord-Süd-Kommission, 3.

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We write to you in our individual capacities, but also as persons from the North and South respectively who, through the work of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, believe profoundly that North-South issues demand from our global society a programme of urgent, concerted and sustained action. That experience convinces us also that the convergence of interests of North and South and their fusion with the mandates of moral purpose are real enough to encourage hope for consensus on such a programme.

We feel, therefore, that while the Cancún Summit confronts issues of considerable gravity, it can do so without a sense of hopelessness. The very fact of the meeting encourages hope. It is the first occasion in history when the political leadership of so large a part of human society meets to jointly confront the dangers facing mankind, and these dangers are real. The conjuncture of a major world economic recession with both persistent North-South failures and heightened East-West tensions in these early years of the 80s highlights serious deficiencies in our internationalism; deficiencies in the areas of perception, of ideas, of institutions, and, not least, of political will. No one is blameless; but all are endangered. The Cancún Summit provides a unique opportunity for precisely the kind of political dialogue by which a new start can be inspired.

In the Report of the Commission we tried to convey the situation of crisis threatening our human society: the desperate plight of hundreds of millions of the world's poorest people, the political instability that deteriorating economic conditions are inducing, the way in which the fate of the developed and developing countries is inextricably linked, the degree to which East-West tensions and North-South failures are interacting upon and reinforcing each other, the unravelling process that is at work in many areas of international effort, the threat to even those international institutions on which man's hopes have centred in the post-war era. We do not seek to traverse that ground here. Suffice to recall that the Commission expressed the view that at the beginning of the 80s the world community faces much greater dangers than at any time since the World War II.

Since the completion of our Report in 1979, these dangers have become even greater and more serious. They now threaten all countries and, therefore, all governments. They become clearly noticeable in the lives of people all over the world: in the poorest countries, where people, for the most part, have nothing else to expect [of life], but hunger, disease, and early death; in the richest countries, where prosperity no longer appears secure to many people – on the overall, people's misgivings about the future of their children increase.

It is in this context that we seek to put before you some suggestions on possible goals for Cancún and on the ways by which, as participants, you might attain them together. If they appear to be modest it is because we repose our greatest faith in commencing a genuine advance to consensus through a mutually reinforcing act of political will on the part of the leadership of both North and South; and because we know that without that nothing is attainable.

Against this background, we believe that the following might be among the specific objectives of the Cancún Summit, and we commend them to you:

1. To enable the Global Round of negotiations to commence:

The Special Session of the General Assembly on development issues in August/September 1980 came close to agreement on the framework of the Global Round of negotiations which should have commenced early in 1981.² Since then much effort has been devoted to clearing the remaining procedural obstacles. Progress has been made, but agreement remains deferred.³ The Global Round under the aegis of the United Nations could and should be the process by which North-South issues are negotiated and resolved in terms of the broad objectives already agreed by the international community. If all participants at Cancún were to agree to use their best endeavours to ensure that the Global Round of negotiations commences early in 1982, a significant step would have been taken towards improving the climate and providing the means for international co-operation for development.

2. To recognise the need for emergency action in critical areas:

The Global Round of negotiations will cover a wide field and could be a protracted process. Meanwhile, the world economy as a whole and many countries – particularly, but not exclusively, in the South – face situations of acute crisis. The resulting emergency requires an immediate and direct response. In the Report of the Commission we outlined an Emergency Programme for the period 1980–85⁴ in certain critical areas, namely:

(a) a global food programme to stimulate world food production and to begin to abolish world hunger;

(b) a global energy strategy to accommodate the need for security of both producers and consumers;

(c) additional financial flows to ensure the stability of national economies strained by persisting balance of payments deficits and mounting debts;

(d) reforms to achieve broader participation in international financial institutions and more balanced conditions for world trade.

The overall deterioration that has occurred in these areas since our Report appeared confirms the case for prompt and effective action, and the time that has passed underlines the danger of further postponement. We do not imply that ours are the only approaches, but we do urge upon you the need for the international community to come to grips quickly with the grave situation that exists. While the formal negotiations proceed, it would be wholly in keeping with the spirit of the Cancún meeting for the participants to alert the international community to the need for immediate action in these particular areas. We hope, indeed, that you would be ready yourselves to stimulate an examination of the forms that such a response might take – the identification of a programme of emergency measures needed to rescue the world economy and hundreds of millions of people from the critical dangers now confronting it and them.

3. To enlarge the prospects for consensus on North-South issues:

Clearly, however, after nearly eight years of an intensive North-South dialogue that yielded only marginal consensus, and in the current economic turmoil and accompanying distress, something more is needed than agreement to resume negotiations. The parties to such negotiations must enter them with a will to succeed. We believe that the prospects of success can be significantly enlarged if the participants at Cancún themselves truly agree on the political and economic importance – indeed, essentiality – to all countries of these negotiations being successfully pursued. Such a commitment would represent a major advance, and one that is of critical importance to all future progress.

In this context, we think it important that leaders at Cancún specifically include in their commitment a pledge that their negotiators will work assiduously for agreement on practical and effective measures in the areas under negotiation – eschewing rigid positions on all sides and promoting a new and constructive dialogue. The most promising advances made at Cancún will only be sustained if the political will that

makes them possible is carried over into the negotiating process itself.

We urge as well that it would be of practical importance in enlarging success in North-South negotiations if leaders at Cancún were to agree to take all appropriate steps to strengthen public awareness of North-South issues in their respective countries and, more particularly, to develop a consciousness of the importance to all countries, North and South alike, of a successful outcome to the negotiations. North-South consensus will come more easily if encouraged by the people of all societies; indeed, it will not be possible without their support.

4. To preserve the potential of Cancún:

Particularly in the light of a successful beginning at Cancún we urge on you that, at least during the period of great danger through which the world is now passing, the potential of Cancún for contributing to human progress is not lost. We are convinced that you can help the process of North-South negotiations and that it is in the interest of all countries and peoples that you should. To this end, we hope you will keep open the possibility of meeting again – together, and with such others as may be agreed – to take account of North-South relations as they develop in the light of your commitments at Cancun, and to examine the ways in which you might further contribute to their continuing improvement.

Cancún is in one sense a measure of last resort in the face of serious failures in the development dialogue. However, it arises not merely out of desperation, but also out of an awareness of the degree to which all parts of our human society depend upon each other and, therefore, need to agree with each other on the essential elements of a tolerable existence for all people. Cancun, in this sense, is not an end but a beginning.

With deep respect,

Willy Brandt

Shridath Ramphal

¹ The letter was sent to the 22 heads of state or government who attended the Cancún

(Mexico) „International Meeting on Cooperation and Development“ on 22/23 October 1981: President Benjedid (Algeria), President Sattar (Bangladesh), Prime Minister Zhao (China), President Mitterrand (France), Prime Minister Thatcher (Great Britain), President Burnham (Guyana), Prime Minister Gandhi (India), Prime Minister Suzuki (Japan), President Krajger (Yugoslavia), Prime Minister Trudeau (Canada), President López Portillo (Mexico), President Shagari (Nigeria), President Marcos (Philippines), Crown Prince Fahd (Saudi-Arabia), Prime Minister Fälldin (Sweden), President Nyerere (Tanzania), President Reagan (USA) and President Herrera Campins (Venezuela). Austria, Brazil, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Ivory Coast were represented by their Ministers of Foreign Affairs Pahr, Guerreiro, Genscher and Aké. Finally, U.N. Secretary General Waldheim also participated. See Europa Archiv (EA) 36 (1981) 22, p. Z 231 f.

² See no. 52, note. 11 and 12.

³ At the G-7 summit in Ottawa on 20/21 July 1981, only the FRG and the UK had given up their resistance. US-President Reagan was the only participant to reject an early start of global negotiations, but even he did not totally oppose them anymore. See EA 36 (1981) 16, p. D 423–D 427.

⁴ See Brandt-Report 1980, p. 344–9.