GRO HARLEM BRUNDTLAND



Former Prime Minister of Norway
Former WHO Director-General (1998-2003)

Gro Harlem Brundtland was the first female prime minister of Norway, serving for three terms and later was director general of the World Health Organization. Trained as a physician, she became identified with public health and environmental issues and with the rights of women. In her native Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland is affectionately known as “Landsmoderen,” or “mother of the nation.”

Dr. Brundtland completed her medical studies at Oslo University. As a newly qualified doctor, she won a scholarship to the Harvard School of Public Health. Later employed with the Ministry of Health in Oslo, Dr. Brundtland focused on children's health issues. In 1974 she was asked to serve as Norway’s Minister of the Environment focusing on the links between public health and the environment. At age 41, Dr. Brundtland became the first woman Prime Minister of Norway—and the youngest person ever appointed. Her cabinet of eight women and nine men represented the highest level of gender equality in history as Dr. Brundtland continued to lead her country for more than a decade.

She returned to her roots in medicine serving as Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO)—a position utilizing her considerable skills as a physician, politician, and activist. Under her forward-thinking leadership, WHO confronted the global threat of the SARS virus and her rapid response and information networking are largely credited with helping prevent the widespread growth of the disease. Dr. Brundtland also intensified the debate on global health as key to economic development, and began programs to curb malaria, tobacco use, tuberculosis, and AIDS. Dr. Brundtland left WHO in 2003 after succeeding in getting support for the first ever negotiated agreement on a major public health issue: The Tobacco Convention.

She served as a member of the United Nations high-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and was named to serve as UN Special Envoys for Climate Change. In 2007 she became a member of The Elders, a group founded by Nelson Mandela, Graca Machel, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu who contribute their wisdom, independent leadership, and integrity to tackling the world’s toughest problems with the goal of making the world a better place. In May 2007, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, named Dr. Brundtland, as well as Ricardo Lagos, the former President of Chile, and Han Seung-Soo, the former foreign minister of South Korea, to serve as UN Special Envoys for Climate Change. She is a member of the Board of the “United Nations Foundation and served as a member of “The Independent Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament.” In 2010 the UN Secretary General appointed her a member of his “High Level Global Sustainability Panel.” She holds numerous honorary degrees from major universities, including Oxford, Harvard, and Yale, as well as Cape Town and the All India Institute.

Dr. Brundtland travels and lectures extensively as a leading voice for a healthier and better educated world, and a champion of sustainable development.

Topics (Selection):

- The Health of a Nation - The Health of an Economy
- How women's rights can save the world
- Our Common Future - Sustainable Development and Addressing Climate Change