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Speech on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Friedrich-Ebert
Stiftung New York office

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Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Friends of the FES,

It is a very special occasion for me to speak on the 30th anniversary of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York office. I want to welcome you and thank you--not only for joining us tonight--but also for your excellent cooperation with us throughout the years.

Many of you probably already know the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung from your native country. We are a German political foundation committed to the advancement of public policy issues in the spirit of the basic values of social democracy with 110 offices around the world.

Our rationale for establishing an office in New York was to promote dialogue around the Willy Brandt report, which was published in 1980 and was the most comprehensive and broad analysis of the various issues of international development. The "Brandt Report" received a great deal of publicity and wide-ranging acceptance as the best way forward for governments to realistically reduce the growing economic disparity between the rich North and developing South.

The work of FES worldwide has always been guided by these ideas of Willy Brandt, the former German chancellor who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize exactly 40 years ago, in October of 1971.

The Willy-Brandt-report reminded governments, multilateral organizations and non-state actors that peace, security and development are intertwined.

This central message of the Brandt-Report is still very much relevant in today's world. The world has become even more intertwined since his report was published, and the global financial and economic crisis has further aggravated the social and economic situation for millions around the world. People, especially the young, are in despair about their future, and are increasingly taking political developments into their own hands. From the ongoing democratic uprisings in the Arab world, to the protests against further social burdens in Europe, Israel, Latin America and now in the United States, too, we see that young people are deeply concerned about inequality and an international financial system that threatens to destroy their future.

Thus, in our national and international work we put a lot of emphasis on strengthening youth organizations and their participation in political decision making processes. Democracy can only thrive, if the youth supports it and creatively contributes to shape it.

The broad public discontent expressed in social movements around the world has also triggered a major debate on how economic and social disparities between countries, as well as inequality within countries negatively affect long-term sustainable growth and development. We have raised this issue not only here in New York, at the UN, but also in Washington with the Bretton-Woods-Institutions and even with the G20. In each instance we could count on high-level participation from political leaders from your countries, who could highlight the threat rising inequality poses to international security, the global economy, social stability, and our global environment.

The next major opportunity to address these challenges is the upcoming UN conference on sustainable development – RIO+Twenty. It gives all countries and their governments a major opportunity to come to an agreement on a new paradigm for development, one that would address sustainability and equity together, and that would identify policies on both national and global levels, which could initiate mutually reinforcing progress towards these interlinked goals. Bold political action is needed on both fronts if human development progress for the world's poor is to be sustained. If an agreement is not reached, or only a watered down compromise, we could experience further environmental deterioration and social inequalities would continue to intensify.

Thus it is imperative to find political consensus on a number of issues, including the human right to a healthy environment, the importance of integrating social equity into economic and environmental policies, and the critical importance of transparency and public participation, as well as accountability. Also, new approaches to global development financing and environmental monitoring and controls are essential to reach those goals.

Again, we do everything in our power in our national and international work to help create the necessary political will to help chart a course in RIO towards sustainable development and the formulation of a new paradigm for development.

On behalf of the people your governments represent, the challenge is to jointly embark on the transition to sustainable development, a journey that—if done right—will trigger a new wave of *green* industrialization and become a new paradigm of development for us all.

The Brandt-Report, 30 years ago, said: “We must try to lift ourselves above the day-to-day quarrels or negotiations to see the menacing long-term problems. We see a world in which poverty and hunger still prevail in many huge regions; in which resources are squandered without consideration of their renewal, in which more armaments are made and sold than ever before, and where a destructive capacity has been accumulated to blow up our planet several times over.”

All of these issues are still relevant today, 30 years later. I sincerely hope we do not have to wait for another 30 years to turn his vision for a better world into reality for all of us.

Thank you