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Calls for effective and equitable results heard as Climate Change Conference opens Ministerial segment

THE HAGUE, 20 November 2000 (UNFCCC) -- The urgent need for an effective and equitable outcome of the United Nations Climate Change Conference was at the core of statements made by Prime Minister Wim Kok of The Netherlands and President Jacques Chirac of France this morning at the opening of the Ministerial segment of the Conference in The Hague. The opening session was attended by Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands and other high officials.

In his address, Prime Minister Kok stressed that, while climate change affects all countries, developing countries would bear the brunt of the impact, exacerbating existing problems of poverty and reducing options for sustainable development. The climate conference in The Hague, he said, is very much about global governance issues connected to globalisation and sustainable development. He underlined the need for a balance between economic and environmental concerns. Policy changes were needed to make the production and consumption patterns in the industrialized countries more compatible with the requirements of sustainable development.

Whatever would be decided this week should be environmentally credible and provide adequate and substantial assistance to developing countries, the Prime Minister stated. The package that was being negotiated should accelerate technological innovation in developing countries, assist them with capacity building, adaptation and with accelerating technological innovation in energy services. Least developed countries should be given preferential treatment in the financial mechanisms of the Convention on Climate Change. His Government was ready to allocate 200 million Dutch Guilders for adaptation measures and capacity building in developing countries, Mr. Kok stated.

President Chirac said the negotiators in The Hague had "a moral and political duty" to move forward in the right direction. Time had come for action "if we are not to be guilty of failing to come to the assistance of a planet in danger", he stated. He called upon the United States to join with the other leading industrialized nations "to work together in making a successful transition to an energy-efficient, yet not less thriving, economy". Conscious of its responsibilities, the European Union would play its part in this common effort, he said, announcing that the 15 EU member States will ratify the Kyoto Protocol in 2002 in keeping with decisions of the European Council.

While recognising that developed countries should take the lead in the fight against climate change and that “it is premature to demand quantified commitments” from developing countries, President Chirac said that “the time is coming when their level of economic development will justify this, depending on each nation’s progress”. The ultimate objective is the convergence of per-capita emissions.

Efforts to curb global warming must become a priority for bilateral EU and multilateral official development assistance programmes, President Chirac stated, calling for a new North South partnership for sustainable development to be forged in The Hague.

As a result of The Hague Conference, the European Union wanted “an equitable and effective agreement that leaves room for future developments”. Only when OECD member countries and in countries with economies in transition effectively cut their emissions, would they be in a position to expect similar undertakings from developing countries. In order to avoid the “free-rider “ problem, the agreement should provide for an independent and impartial compliance mechanism, processing irrefutable data and able to decide remedial political and financial penalties in case of non-compliance, the President said.

During the second week of the Conference, more than 100 Ministers and other high-level officials will assemble in informal groups after having made public policy statements on Tuesday, 21 November, in an effort to finalize decisions needed to make the Kyoto protocol operational.

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