



FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE - Secretariat

CONVENTION - CADRE SUR LES CHANGEMENTS CLIMATIQUES - Secrétariat

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**World climate change conference opens in The Hague
Challenge is to make Kyoto Protocol operational**

Dutch Environment Minister Jan Pronk chosen as President

The Hague, 13 November 2000 – International negotiations on action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions today entered a crucial phase as a two-week United Nations meeting in The Hague got underway. Ministers and diplomats from some 170 countries are faced with the challenge of finding an internationally acceptable agreement on the best way of translating the climate change treaties of 1992 and 1997 into action. Dutch Environment Minister Jan Pronk was chosen to be President of the Sixth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 6).

“The task before us is enormous,” UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the participants in a video message at the opening ceremony this morning. “If we are to bring greenhouse gas emissions down to a sustainable level, we need to make radical changes in the world economy, and in the way we all live. The meeting could make a big contribution if it succeeds in drawing up “a credible rule book of measures that industrialized countries must take”, charting “a new path of development”, and giving “a convincing signal to the private sector that reducing greenhouse gas emissions will pay”.

“The effects of climate change are irreversible – for ecosystems, agriculture, water supply and health”, Mr. Pronk stressed at the opening ceremony, which was attended by H.M. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands. “The less we do and the longer we wait to tackle the roots of the problem, the more serious the effects and the greater the strain on the resilience of people, plants and animals,” he warned.

“It’s ironic that developing countries, which are least of all to blame for this predicament, will suffer the most devastating consequences. And on top of that, it is they whose economic resilience is lowest. The damage caused by climate change aggravates the socio-economic inequalities that already exists. The poorest people often live in the worst locations in the world, the driest, the least productive, the most vulnerable. They are the first hit and the least able to defend themselves,” said Mr. Pronk.

Mr. Pronk also drew attention to the Precautionary Principle, which had been applied in the Montreal Protocol. He argued that it was a good thing that we did not wait before taking action to ensure the recovery of the ozone layer. “We cannot wait on climate change either – or we will certainly live to regret it,” he said.



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“We must work towards a comprehensive success at COP 6 without resorting to any ‘quick fixes’ that will be regretted later,” Mr. Michael Zammit Cutajar, Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Climate Change, warned today in his statement at the first plenary meeting. He stressed that “the goal of action must continue to be to modify long-term trends in emissions of greenhouse gases”. The Conference would be a success if first, developing countries leave The Hague “feeling significantly better off in terms of support for their efforts to address climate change and its impacts, their genuine efforts to play their defined and proper part in the emerging global strategy”. Second, “a fitting result” would be “if industrialized countries, whose ratifications would bring the Kyoto Protocol into force, were to state in public that, in their judgement, the outcome of COP 6 had made the Protocol ‘ratifiable’”.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol will enter into force after it has been ratified by at least 55 Parties to the Climate Change Convention, including industrialized countries representing at least 55% of this group’s total 1990 carbon dioxide emissions. Entry into force would give legal force to the commitment to reduce overall emissions by developed countries by 5% compared to 1990 levels during the five-year period 2008-2012. So far, only 30 countries – all from the developing world -- have ratified the Protocol.

At the opening session, Mr. Robert Watson, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, also underlined the point that action to deal with climate change could not be delayed if sustainable development were to remain an option. Delaying action would increase both the rate and eventual magnitude of climate change, and hence adaptation and damage costs. He urged policy-makers to build for the long-term and to build soundly.

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