



FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE – Secretariat

CONVENTION - CADRE SUR LES CHANGEMENTS CLIMATIQUES - Secrétariat

COP 5 PRESS RELEASE No. 1

25 October 1999

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United Nations Conference on Climate Change Opens in Bonn, Germany

Hears German Chancellor Calling for ‘Concerted and Resolute Action’
To Master the Challenges of Climate Change

BONN, 25 October (UNFCCC) -- Over 3,000 government officials and other participants attended the opening session today of the Fifth Session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The meeting continues until 5 November.

The Session was opened by the outgoing President of the COP, Maria Julia Alsogaray, Argentina’s Minister for Natural Resources and Sustainable Development. Minister Alsogaray chaired last year’s Session, which resulted in the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for advancing the implementation of the Convention and finalizing the operational details of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

Jan Szyszko, Secretary of State and Plenipotentiary of Poland, was then chosen by acclamation as the new President of the COP. He will preside over the COP and its intersessional talks for about one year after the conference, until a new president is chosen at COP-6.

Michael Zammit Cutajar, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Convention, presented a statement from Secretary-General Kofi Annan calling on the assembled Governments to send a strong message to the world that they are fully committed to taking effective action to address climate change. He stated that global warming is one of the major challenges facing the world in the early 21st century and urged Governments to ratify the 1997 Kyoto Protocol quickly so that it can enter into force by 2002.

Participants were then addressed by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder who noted that “efforts at home” must be the key to implementing the developed countries’ commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Only if the industrialized countries took the lead in climate protection, could developing countries be expected to gradually limit and – where necessary – reduce their emissions.

The Mayor of Bonn, Baerbel Dieckmann, also made a welcoming address to the meeting.

After the departure of the special guests, delegates turned to the agenda. They also selected new chairmen for the Convention's two subsidiary bodies. Mr. Harald Doulend of Norway will chair the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technological Advice, and Mr. John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda will chair the Subsidiary Body on Implementation.

As of this morning, 3,428 participants had registered, including 1,366 government delegates from 168 countries, 1,750 observers from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and 312 journalists. This two-week conference has a heavy agenda of both technical and political items that must be resolved to ensure that the Kyoto Protocol will be fully operational by the time it enters into force.

Statement by German Chancellor

In his statement to the opening session, Gerhard Schroeder, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, recalled that environmental protection was not a luxury. Only if humanity's sources of life were safeguarded could there be viable and lasting economic development. That was nowhere more evident than in the warming of the Earth's atmosphere and the greenhouse effect; no other environmental problem posed such a major threat to all humanity, he said.

Under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, he noted, the industrialized countries made their first ever binding commitment under international law to considerably reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. That undoubtedly, was a genuine breakthrough, the Chancellor stated. The Protocol must enter into force as quickly as possible, by the year 2002 -- ten years after the Rio Conference -- at the latest. Effective controls were needed to ensure that the Kyoto arrangements are implemented. Implementation of reduction commitments should be monitored, and flexibility mechanisms agreed in the Kyoto Protocol should be swiftly clarified, Mr. Schroeder said.

While emission trading or joint projects by industrialized and developing countries could be a meaningful addition, they could not be a replacement for the industrialized countries' national climate protection measures. Efforts at home must be the key to implementing the developed countries' reduction commitments. Only if the industrialized nations took the lead in climate protection, could developing countries be expected to gradually limit and -- where necessary -- reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. There could be no doubt however, that developing countries must also undertake their own efforts in the medium term. While their per capita emissions were still substantially lower than that of industrialized nations, they would increase considerably in future if they pushed ahead with economic development without climate protection measures.

Whether coming generations would recall the Kyoto Protocol with appreciation or disappointment would depend also on the Bonn conference. Only if the climate protection process was seen as a chance to achieve lasting environment-friendly development world-wide, and problems were tackled together in a spirit of sincere solidarity, could the great challenges ahead be mastered. Mr. Schroeder appealed to the delegates to send a message from Bonn that concerted and resolute action had been taken to ensure that this world remains one worth living in for future generations.

Message of the Secretary-General

In a message conveyed to the Conference by UNFCCC Executive Secretary Michael Zammit Cutajar, Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that in the five years since the Convention on Climate Change entered into force, its Parties had laid a solid foundation for long-term action to minimize climate change and its consequences. They had launched effective institutions and technical capacities and a credible international system of data-gathering and information-sharing and started to set targets and design a system to ensure compliance. While these were signs of a maturing international regime, those efforts would bear fruit only if they are understood and supported by the voting and taxpaying citizen, the investor, the business executive, the city officials for transport and waste management or the national official responsible for forestry or agriculture.

Given the time it would take to turn around emission trends, action now was essential if developed countries were to demonstrate progress by 2005 and start hitting the targets by 2008, the Secretary-General stated. The global audience also needed to be reassured that the Conference of the Parties is working for a fair and inclusive strategy, sensitive to the concerns of vulnerable countries and driven by the need to protect the climate as a global resource. They wanted to see the developing countries being empowered, through finance, technology and capacity building, to follow environmentally sound paths of economic development and make their rightful contribution to limiting global emissions. They wanted to see that the Clean Development Mechanism will be ready after the next session of the Conference of the Parties, and they would like to be confident that the climate-friendly decisions and investments being made today will be rewarded by the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol by 2002 at the latest, the Secretary-General said.

In a time of extraordinary technological creativity, old industries were being turned upside-down or replaced by new ones. The key energy and transport sectors would not remain static over the coming decades. Even if the issue of climate change was set aside, the need to be more competitive and less polluting points to increases in efficiency and a cleaner future. Pioneering firms were already leading the way to green profits. The Convention and the Protocol are moving with this tide, the message concluded.

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