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# The World 'Can Take Heart' from the Montreal Climate Change Conference

By Richard Kinley

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### Article

The United Nations Climate Change Conference 2005, held in Montreal, Canada, from 28 November to the early hours of 10 December, was one of the largest of its kind, with 9,500 people attending, including the UN Deputy Secretary-General and the Canadian Prime Minister, as well as a record participation from Governments and environmental and business non-governmental organizations. The Conference was also historic, since it served as the first-ever meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, which entered into force on 16 February 2005. Under this treaty, more than 30 industrialized countries are bound by specific and legally binding emission reduction targets.

The results of the Conference go beyond what was widely expected. A series of decisions defining the institutional details of the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, making the treaty fully operational, and its compliance committee was established, with its members elected. With the adoption of the Protocol's rulebook, the so-called "Marrakesh Accords", the three Kyoto mechanisms were formally approved. The first two are on emissions trading and joint implementation, which are both limited to developed-country parties, while the third—the clean development mechanism (CDM)—is a unique instrument that combines support to sustainable development in developing countries through private investment and technology transfer with enhancing cost-effectiveness of required emission reductions by industrialized countries. Another area in which major progress was achieved was the adoption of a five-year work programme to develop the technical basis for increasing the resilience to the potential impacts of climate change. Special adaptation funding arrangements to assist developing countries were also advanced. A significant outcome was the opening of a two-track approach to discussions to determine the future directions of global action on climate change: one involving the 157 Parties to the Kyoto Protocol; the other, all 189 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The global carbon markets created by the Kyoto Protocol came out strengthened from the Montreal Conference. The decision to open negotiations on commitments beyond 2012 provided a signal to the markets, giving them a longer-term perspective that encourages investments with paybacks. The United States, which remains outside the Protocol, has maintained throughout the years that the time is not right to enter into new negotiations on climate change. But as a result of the discussions, and building on the momentum generated by the 2005 World Summit and the G-8 meeting, it has agreed to join in a dialogue process about long-term cooperation and implementation of the Convention.

A solution to a complex global problem like climate change can only be achieved through global cooperation—and all players need to be involved. The active engagement of all countries in the dialogue process should lead to a whole range of new and interesting ideas, which can make a difference in bringing down global greenhouse gas emissions. Like the large industrialized countries, major developing countries were also extremely active in the discussions, but insisted on their long-held perspective that the time was not ripe for a discussion of commitments or targets for developing countries. Still, there was a greater openness to talk about actions they might take to limit the growth in emissions in their economies, linked to financial assistance, technology transfer and market mechanisms.

Whereas there was a reticence not long ago to begin discussions, there is now a growing concern over the seriousness of the climate change problem—its impacts are being felt. All countries need and want to be part of the solution. We can take heart from the discussions and outcome of the Montreal Conference, which demonstrated the concern of countries and the vigour with which they are putting measures in place to try to limit their own emissions—this is also happening at city and company levels, and in some countries at the sub-national level.

One can also sense that there is a firming up of the scientific consensus. The public is becoming increasingly aware of the problem and to some extent of what needs to be done and can be done to deal with climate change. The challenge ahead remains very demanding; reductions of significant magnitude are required over the next 50 years. Global greenhouse gas emissions are still growing and the economic and social changes necessary to bring a lasting solution to the problem are significant. All countries will need to shift to more sustainable economies and lifestyles. The world has begun to turn in that direction, but there is still a long way to go. Heightened multilateral cooperation through the UNFCCC process will play a key role in this transformative change. The Montreal Conference marks the start of a new phase in this long journey.

#### **Biography**

Richard Kinley is Officer-in-Charge of the UNFCCC Secretariat since September 2005. He has served as Secretary of the Conference of the Parties since 1996 and led the secretariat support for the negotiation of the Kyoto Protocol. He has been Acting Deputy Executive Secretary since 1 August 2003.



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