



## ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY

Statement by

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at the

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to the United Nations Framework Convention  
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**Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates**

Today we rightly celebrate yet another significant achievement in the quest for environmental security. The adoption of an environmental treaty is a collective acknowledgement of a common environmental problem and an agreement to co-operate in its solution. Today, we begin the process of ensuring this treaty's success.

The message from our scientific colleagues is clear. The IPCC assessment indicates the degree of greenhouse gas emission reduction that is necessary to stabilize atmospheric concentrations and maintain a climate similar to that we enjoy today. There are many uncertainties in our understanding of how the atmosphere behaves that may inhibit some from accepting the full significance of the inherent dangers of a changing climate. The pace of scientific investigation has been rapid and the prediction of future climates has been sufficiently convincing for countries to collectively take the precaution of negotiating a framework convention.

We have a powerful mechanism for scientific assessment through the IPCC but assessment is only as good as available research results and we must therefore secure a strong climate research base to underpin the assessment.

I commend to you the climate agenda, a proposal for an integrating framework for international climate science to ensure that the IPCC and the Parties have access to the finest of investigative science in a timely fashion. This is one of the requirements for this treaty's success.

Science will not in the short term, confirm the existence of climate change. It can only chart the inexorable rise in global temperatures to a point beyond which a new climate regime can no longer hide in the familiar extremes of climatic variability. We may need a decade or more for that certainty. But are we not convinced enough of the probability of a changing climate to accept responsibility for its cause and act with purpose towards its mitigation? It is an indisputable fact that to ensure concentrations of atmospheric trace gases are stabilized at a level we hope will not cause severe adverse impacts, anthropogenic emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases must be immediately and significantly reduced. We have known this from the time of preparing the first IPCC scientific assessment.

Yet we are informed that almost all of the developed nations who guaranteed as a first step, the early stabilization of national emissions of greenhouse gases and, in some cases, pledged significant reductions from 1990 emission levels early in the next century have retreated from those positions. There is talk of fiscal frailty and unforeseen changes in the economic condition which prevent promises being kept.

Has science declared a reduction in the risk? Has technological development proved inadequate for the task? What has weakened their resolve?

Scientific uncertainty is an unsatisfactory excuse for those who advocate a wait and see policy. The present state of knowledge is alone sufficient for the precautionary principle to apply and no-regrets programmes to be put into operation. There has been, and will probably always be, swings in the economic climate. Meantime the physical climate is changing, inexorably and adversely. It will not wait for us to get our monetary house in order and it will eventually punish us for our tardiness.

I acknowledge the arguments made and the real challenges to be faced. I cannot however accept a compromise. It is my conviction that we must move swiftly to secure a rededication to the objective of this treaty. Emissions can and must be stabilized by the year 2000 in developed countries. Future emission levels must lie well below 1990 levels. I urge the close examination of the draft protocol submitted on behalf of AOSIS. It suggests a rational platform to launch our assault on a changing atmosphere, requiring commitments well within our technological ingenuity to achieve without significant adverse developmental consequences.

Commitment then is key to this treaty's success. Although it will be the responsibility of the industrialized nations to effect the majority of emission reductions I urge developing countries, within their ability and resources, to share the burden of emission control particularly through the enhancement of carbon sinks and the preservation of existing reservoirs.

And finally, it would be a grave betrayal of this treaty if Parties to a Convention took advantage of rules allowing consensus blocking to seek short-term national advantage at the expense of long-term global protection. International response must not be limited to the level beyond which one nation or a small group of countries are prepared to go. Can we negotiate to the highest, not the lowest common denominator?

While targets and timetables hold us accountable, success will depend on effective mechanisms for implementation - policies and measures. International mitigation measures including energy conservation and efficiency measures; the employment of new and renewable energy sources, effective transport policies, joint project ventures and national fiscal policies

that reduce the use of fossil fuels, provide immediate opportunities. In fact, with increased focus in this area, options will expand. Implementing such measures now will begin to reduce growth in greenhouse gas emissions immediately and will stimulate the creation of new opportunities for further reductions.

Market based policies and measures can provide effective incentives to ensure that greenhouse gas emissions are reduced at the least cost.

Preparations for national and regional adaptation so the worst impacts of a changing climate to which we are increasingly committing ourselves can be avoided, should also be considered.

As a contribution to the implementation of this convention, UNEP, in collaboration with the Government of Costa Rica, and other interested parties, will convene a meeting to extend the dialogue on effective mechanisms, including Joint Implementation. Thus far, our discussions have been fraught with misunderstandings. Yet while we talk past each other, countries are actively experimenting with joint projects. Is the objective of the convention best served by a continuation of ad hoc bilateral arrangements, or by common ground rules - an international regime?

By providing an opportunity for open dialogue outside of the negotiating process, to reflect on these experiments, we can explore policy questions, technical barriers and theoretical possibilities without polarization. Our aim is to help build consensus before the next Conference of Parties.

Finally, success will require the involvement of people, as well as their Governments. More than five hundred non-governmental organizations are present in Berlin. This is an enormous constituency of concern and a reservoir of talent that we must harness in defense of climate control. Governments may have to apply eco-taxes against corporate carbon emitters and fossil fuel consumers. They will have to adopt joint programmes in a burden-sharing and mutual development nexus.

But people have a part to play in energy conservation and ecological improvement. At the grass root and community levels important contributions can be made. I am aware of the effective actions of many municipalities because of the alarm felt by civic leaders and people. Leadership by this "third level of Government" holds real promise for action that is tangible, pragmatic and truly significant in the collective.

I am also encouraged by the emerging interest of the private sector. Recent statements from the insurance sector are a welcome reminder that there is not a single unified industry position in the climate change debate, opposing all proposals for greater efforts to address the potentially devastating effects of climate change. The financial services sector is beginning to view environmental costs as direct and indirect economic costs, while also recognizing the investment potential of the environmental sector.

In ratifying this Convention you moved beyond differences brought about by cultures, national interest and stages of development. Once more, we must focus on what we have in common - the objective of this Convention - a world secure for our children and grandchildren. Success will depend on sound science, continuing commitment, effective and innovative mechanisms and mobilization of society.

With thanks to our hosts in Berlin, with admiration for the dedicated work of the Secretariat, we now begin to complete this "unfinished work". We must not be the generation that squandered this opportunity or paralyzed our future. Our common vulnerability must be met with courage and boldness.