

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION
(UNESCO)

Statement by

Mr. Gisbert Glaser
Director, Bureau for Coordination
of Environmental Programmes

to the

**First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Framework Convention on Climate Change**

(Berlin, 27 March-7 April 1995)

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished delegates,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak here on behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO. In doing so, let me convey the greetings of the Director-General, Mr. Federico Mayor, as well as his best wishes for a successful first session of the Conference of the Parties.

I wish to state at the outset that UNESCO attaches great importance to the implementation of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and to this meeting. Addressing the problem of global climate change is not a concern for a group of countries or specific regions and subregions only. Nor is it an imperative of concern only to an elite group of scientists or policy-makers. At stake are fundamental questions relevant to all people, such as food security, water availability, the viability of low-lying coastal areas - and islands - for human habitation, and the survival of whole island States.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) has as its overall objective the « *...stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.* »

This overall objective cannot be achieved without two essential elements: science and education. One major need in implementing the Convention is to acquire greater knowledge about the climate system and to reduce scientific uncertainty about climate change. To this end, a vigorous internationally coordinated research and global monitoring effort is needed with the full support of Governments and citizens worldwide. A similar research and global monitoring effort is needed to assess the impact of climate change on ecosystems, sea-level, freshwater resources, agricultural production and economic development.

Public information and education at all levels both within and outside the school system will be indispensable to explain to citizens at large the economic measures and technological changes necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to bring about, over time, the necessary changes in behaviour and lifestyle.

Education and sciences are, as you know, among UNESCO's main areas of competence. Let me take a few minutes to explain in which way UNESCO can contribute to the implementation of the Climate Convention. From the point of view of science and capacity building, UNESCO channels its work on climate

change through its intergovernmental scientific bodies and programmes which deal with four major components of the earth system: the oceans, the earth crust, ecosystems and freshwater resources.

A subject of major concern to UNESCO, within its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), is the role of the ocean in the climate system, a role which is complementary to that of the atmosphere and is of comparable importance. The climate system cannot be adequately understood, modelled, and predicted without taking the role of the ocean properly into account. Many of the most severe potential repercussions of climate change are transmitted through the ocean, by the effects of sea-level and temperature rises, in particular on coastal areas and small islands. The Secretary of IOC will make a statement later this morning on IOC's important work in the context of the Climate Convention.

Within its International Hydrological Programme UNESCO is concerned with the global hydrological cycle and freshwater resources. Important likely impacts of climate change still need to be understood: how rainfall would be affected in specific regions; and consequently rivers, lakes and aquifers; how to connect climatic models to precipitation models; how to assess the hydrological consequences of sea-level rise, since many coastal aquifers are hydraulically connected to the seas.

I should also mention that very little is known so far about possible effects of climate change on plant and animal life, on ecosystems and agro-ecosystems. This is a research area of increasing concern to UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme. Moreover, a better understanding of global climate changes in the past will also help to establish conclusive evidence of current climate change caused through human action. UNESCO's programmes in the geological sciences contribute to these scientific efforts.

Another scientific area in which UNESCO is active is related to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Here, I would refer to UNESCO's programme dealing with renewable sources of energy, especially solar energy. UNESCO has initiated a World Solar Programme, in cooperation with other relevant UN organizations as well as non-governmental scientific and technical organizations. High-level political support and commitment for increased use of solar energy is expected from the World Solar Summit to be held in Harare in March 1996, upon the invitation by H.E. Dr. Robert G. Mugabe, President of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

As regards public information and education related to climate and climate change, for several years UNESCO has made this issue an integral part of its

programmes in science education and environmental information and education. The issue has been identified as a high priority area in the joint UNESCO-UNEP International Environmental Education Programme, as well as in new initiatives launched in response to Agenda 21 to reorient the whole education process in support of sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman,

UNESCO's climate-related programmes and activities which I have just described respond directly to Article 5 (research and systematic observation) and Article 6 (education, training and public awareness) of the Convention. All these programmes and activities also include important components aimed at capacity building at the national level, in particular at improving the endogenous capacities and capabilities of developing countries, as stipulated in Article 5, subparagraph (c), and Article 6, (b) (ii).

On behalf of the Director-General I wish to state here that, through these programmes, UNESCO is fully committed to working together with the Convention Secretariat and with our partner organizations within and outside the UN system in support of the implementation of the Climate Convention under the authority of the Conference of the Parties. We also offer our closest possible

cooperation to the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation. We would like to suggest that the scientific and educational inputs into the Convention process should be drawn to the largest extent possible from already existing relevant international programmes. However, we believe that a number of these programmes would need to be expanded and strengthened in order to enable them to respond fully to the requirements of the Convention.

Mr. Chairman,

In the field of climate-related research and systematic observations, UNESCO works in close cooperation with other UN organizations and relevant international non-governmental organizations.

UNESCO and its IOC are among the sponsors of the inter-agency World Climate Programme, together with WMO, UNEP, FAO and ICSU. The WCP is the international scientific and technical programme working upstream to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It serves as a major source for new knowledge and data necessary for IPCC's assessment work. UNESCO and its IOC also sponsor and contribute significantly to the development of the Global Climate Observing System, the Global Ocean Observing System and the Global

Terrestrial Observing System. IOC is the lead agency for the Global Ocean Observing System, which has an important climate-related component. As requested by the Intergovernmental Meeting on the World Climate Programme held in Geneva in April 1994, all sponsors of the WCP have worked together during the last 12 months in order to prepare an integrated Climate Agenda of the relevant international organizations. This integrated Climate Agenda will include the World Climate Programme, the three global observing systems and the climate related parts of associated international programmes such as, to mention only one, UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme.

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to add a final comment which, I think, is important in order to place our discussions in Berlin in the right context. Although we regard climate change as a major and most serious concern, this does not mean, in my view, that climate change should become the most important item on national and international agendas. The world community needs to address simultaneously a number of often interrelated high priority issues and to strike a balance between sometimes conflicting objectives. Economic development, alleviating poverty, eradication of illiteracy and human diseases need to go hand in hand with combating desertification, conserving biological diversity, and managing in an

environmentally sound manner toxic chemicals and hazards wastes, to mention only a few of the other pressing environmental problems.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me close my statement on behalf of the Director-General by reiterating UNESCO's full commitment to working with the Conference of the Parties and the Convention Secretariat to implement the Framework Convention and to prevent and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. It is our duty to the present and future generations to address this major challenge in the most effective way possible.