

SPEECH BY FIJI'S MINISTER FOR HOUSING, URBAN DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENT,
DELIVERED AT THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS
FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE
THURSDAY, 6 APRIL 1995

Madam President,

I would like to extend to the Government of Germany, the appreciation of the Government of Fiji, for hosting the first Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Climate Change Convention. You have spared nothing to ensure the comfort of all delegations, and the facilities that have been made available to us have been first class. Fiji would also like to congratulate Germany and the city of Bonn in being designated the home of the permanent secretariat of the Convention.

Fiji has always attached the highest importance to climate change issues, and to the Convention. Our entire perspective on the Convention has been driven by the fact of our vulnerability to the adverse impacts of climate change. Many delegates yesterday have spoken about my region's geographic and environmental susceptibility to the adverse impacts of climate change. These have included amongst others, Chancellor Kohl. Fiji welcomes the continued recognition that have been given to small island developing countries. But recognition and sensitivity alone can never be enough. The world needs to move from verbal gymnastics to concrete action!

My delegation had come to Berlin with realistic hope and modest expectations. We have been aware since INC 11 that particularly on the question of adequacy of commitments, that there has been an inability to find common ground. Fiji has listened patiently over the course of debate to repeated interventions on the question of inadequacy of commitments under Article 4.2(a) and (b) of the Convention. The last INC recognized that these were only a first step towards meeting the ultimate objective of the Convention, and that it would be subject to review at the first COP.

Fiji would like to express its profound disappointment that the COP has wavered over taking the next step to achieving this objective. I regret that much of this wavering has come from industrialized countries. In this vein, I must commend the courageous admission of my Danish colleague and Minister for the Environment who said yesterday that the rich world - the real culprits, must first clean up the global mess first.

It has been also evident that a small group of developing countries ^{seem to have} ~~has~~ come with a mandate to obstruct progress towards strengthening the Convention. While Fiji appreciates the economic arguments that underlie this approach, we would ask that they in turn appreciate that for us, inaction threatens our very survival.

Let us be frank. While many have talked of the inadequacy of commitments, it is apparent that beneath the rhetoric, there is no real desire for change, no real commitment to the spirit of the Convention. It is this preference for complacency, a "business as usual" approach that has undermined the collective effort to move forward.

When the Conference opened last week, the Executive Director of UNEP reminded us that "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." Let us heed these wise words of advice.

Yesterday in the general debate in the plenary the clear consensus was that we should move forward. Almost all delegations seemed to agree on this. Yet despite all this talk, I find it somewhat strange that agreement on the modalities to agree to an effective negotiating mandate on a Protocol has been slow in coming. I am afraid that unless we are all sincere about our commitment to the Convention real progress will continue to elude us. Fiji has been prepared to work in active partnership for constructive outcomes during this Conference. Such partnership however does not mean working towards the lowest common denominator.

The Convention makes it clear that the COP must take "appropriate action" at its first session in relation to the question of review of adequacy. We must in all honesty ask ourselves whether we have taken any action at all; whether we have been faithful to the spirit of the convention; whether we have been faithful to Rio. Fiji believes that the answer to the questions I have just posed is in grave danger of being answered in the negative unless we overcome the political complacency that has plagued this Conference.

Fiji believes that a credible outcome of the Conference of the Parties, as a minimum would be to agree to a clear negotiating mandate to negotiate a Protocol to the Convention. We are not alone in this hope. In this context, Fiji has consistently maintained that the AOSIS Protocol is a sound basis to begin such negotiations. It contains realistic and achievable targets. To this end, Fiji has worked alongside like minded states to sponsor the Green Paper. We must express our disappointment that the industrialized countries have refused to take on reductions commitments, and to take the lead in addressing the problems being caused to the planet by global emissions. Fiji therefore urges Annex 1 countries to boldly face the challenges mentioned by Chancellor Kohl in his eloquent speech yesterday.

The AOSIS Protocol provides the COP a good chance to meet the challenges of tomorrow. It will be a great pity if the conference chooses not to meet these challenges. Unless we reverse the inertia of past days, it seems that our generation is happy to go down as one that wasted the opportunity to deal decisively with problems that beset the global climate system.

Fiji deeply regrets that paralysis of leadership has been partially responsible for our failure to exploit this first COP to achieve constructive outcomes. In this connection, let me say that we are equally disappointed that some of this paralysis has been evident by some in my own region, who refuse to take the lead. Unfortunately, much of the rhetoric about commitment has not been matched by corresponding action. I know that as I speak, many in my region, the Pacific, are awaiting the outcome of Berlin. I shall have great difficulty explaining when I get home that this generation of leaders has abdicated its responsibility to planet Earth, if we emerge from this Conference without a clear mandate on negotiation of a Protocol.

Where do we go from here? During the coming months, Fiji will continue to use its best efforts to achieve the objective of the Convention. We will work within the framework of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation at its first and later sessions to achieve more specific outcomes that will strengthen Article 4.2(a) and (b) of the Convention.

For the record, Fiji would like to re-emphasize its position on the question of adequacy:

- (1) We need strengthened commitments from Annex 1 parties NOW ;
- (2) No new commitments should attach to developing countries; Continued attempts to shift reduction efforts to developing countries are undermining the objective of the Convention;
- (3) "The polluter pays principle" and the principle of "common but differentiated responsibility" are fundamental, and cannot be compromised;
- (4) Legally binding commitments to cover the post-2000 period should be agreed to before COP 2;
- (5) The Toronto Target and the AOSIS Protocol must be the starting point for any negotiations on new commitments.

It is still not too late to move forward. In particular, we call upon those in our own region who profess to lead, to give practical demonstration to their past expressions of support for the strengthening of adequacy commitments under the Convention. Failing this, we do not think it is unreasonable to ask that they not frustrate our efforts to move forward in this direction. My delegation has gone on record as saying that small islands such as ours do not have the luxury of time to wait while others politicize the "climate debate"

Madam President, as we prepare to leave Berlin, my government would make a plea to all governments, especially to the developed industrialized countries, to re-dedicate themselves to

the compact we concluded at the Earth Summit in Rio. Fiji is willing to do her part to save our planet for succeeding generations who will inhabit the Earth. Fiji is willing to take the risk to act now. Let us all move forward together in a spirit of global partnership. Let us set aside selfish politics in the broader interests of Mother Earth. Let us create a better tomorrow for all our children. Let us all reaffirm that the Earth's climate is the common concern of mankind. Our common heritage demands that we re-energize and re-double our efforts to save the planet.

I thank you.