



REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA

STATEMENT

by

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THE FEDERAL MINISTER
OF
ENVIRONMENT

First Conference of the Parties
to the
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

Berlin, 6 April 1995

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY!

Ms. President,

People around the world are following our deliberations with expectation and with hope. They know that decisions adopted here in Berlin will be of paramount significance for the future of our planet and thus for the future of mankind. We have sufficient scientific data on climate change to prompt us to immediate and incisive action. Not scientific certainty is called for, rather the application of precautionary measures. To wait until a climate change is with us will mean that the damage has become irreversible and this again means that our lives will have been profoundly affected. Let us therefore shoulder the responsibility and respond in a manner which guarantees that future generations will not become the victims of our carelessness.

Austria stands ready to share in this common endeavour. We believe that strong concerted action is justified even if our apprehensions should be exaggerated since measures to reduce CO₂ emissions also reduce the consumption of valuable non-renewable natural resources as well as the emissions of air pollutants. Thus we think that a „no-regrets“-approach is doubly justified and that we should not hesitate to embark on the course of action mapped out by the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Because we thought that the Convention was not sufficiently explicit as far as stabilization is concerned, we pledged ourselves together with Switzerland and Liechtenstein almost three years ago in Rio in a „like-minded“ declaration to stabilize CO₂ emissions at their 1990 level by the year 2000 and to further greenhouse gas emission reductions beyond that date.

Let me stress that we do not overestimate the contribution a country like Austria can make to the solution of this global threat. Yet this will in no way influence my

determination to press ahead with the implementation of the Climate Protection Plan endorsed by the Austrian Government. This Climate Protection Plan reconfirms Austria's commitment to the Toronto Target. I have recently taken the initiative for securing a formal adoption of the Toronto Target as well as for the reduction of other greenhouse gas emissions by the Austrian legislature.

Admittedly, stepped up efforts will be required to reach this ambitious goal. Our task would most certainly become easier if it were to become part of concerted international efforts. It is for this reason as well that we invite other industrialized countries to commit themselves here in Berlin to stabilization and we strongly support the adoption of a mandate for negotiations on a protocol. This mandate should be clear and unequivocal so as to permit fruitful and action-oriented negotiations.

In our view the protocol should contain reduction targets and timetables as well as policies and measures for all greenhouse gases. The target we will be striving for in these negotiations will be in line with the proposal of the AOSIS countries whose representatives have vividly exposed to us the plight which continuing climate change means for them.

As far as developing countries are concerned, we fully acknowledge their special needs and the concept of differentiated responsibilities contained in the convention. While we think that our developing country partners should uphold their commitments under the Convention, we understand their reluctance to enter any new ones at this stage.

As far as joint implementation is concerned, we do not believe that the time has come for the application of a system of crediting and we welcome the agreement that has emerged on this issue. In particular, Austria could not agree to any kind

of future crediting for the construction of nuclear power plants. While it is true that nuclear energy does not contribute to greenhouse gas accumulations, it is also true that the risks and dangers entailed in the use of nuclear energy are high. We are thus unable to go along with any attempts towards solving the problem of climate change by a recourse to nuclear energy. In this context, let me also point out that we do not consider the current efforts of bringing Sovjet type nuclear power plants in Eastern Europe up to our western standards as a promising path towards sustainable development. Not only do we doubt that combining eastern and western technology is a good idea, but we have convinced ourselves that the investment required for this kind of transformation is not cost-efficient. Much more could be achieved, if the same amount were used for projects of energy efficiency and renewable energy. We therefore advocate a strategy for Eastern Europe which is, at the same time, economically viable and environmentally sound and safe. We hope that other donor countries will follow our example of cooperation with the Eastern European countries in the field of energy.

I trust we all will leave Berlin with a feeling of satisfaction and gratitude - of satisfaction for having contributed to the fight against climate change and of gratitude to you, Ms. President, for the skilfull and far-sighted manner in which you have been guiding us through our negotiations. Our gratitude also extends to the entire German Government and to the City of Berlin for the warm welcome and exemplary hospitality we have been enjoying here.

Thank you, Ms. President.