

SPREP
South Pacific...

Statement by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; First Conference of the Parties

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Mr.
~~Madame~~ President,

I welcome the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Director of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) to the distinguished participants of this conference. It is my wish to state briefly the thoughts of SPREP on the occasion of this first Conference of the Parties of the UN-FCCC.

The South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is an intergovernmental organization representing 22 Pacific island states and four metropolitan countries (American Samoa, Cook Islands, Commonwealth of Northern Marianas Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Island, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna, Western Samoa, Australia, France, New Zealand and United States of America). It is responsible for managing the shared environment of the Pacific islands on behalf of its members.

Among the many environmental concerns they face, Pacific islanders recognise that Climate Change continues to be the most important, and indeed a potentially catastrophic, hazard. ~~they face~~. As part of an on-going programme to address these concerns, SPREP has supported its island members through the formulation, signature, and adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Mr.
~~Madame~~ President,

The success of this Conference will be measured by how we address the issue of the adequacy of commitments contained in the Convention. I wish to make a few comments on this topic.

SPREP Pacific island members support the AOSIS Protocol for the perfectly simple reason that their life and future depends upon it. The 1994 IPCC report states succinctly that

- Freezing the current levels of global emissions of CO₂ does not lead to stabilisation of CO₂ concentration by 2100, and CO₂ concentrations would reach about 500 ppmv by the end of the 21st century (presently about 370 ppmv), with concentrations continuing to increase slowly for several hundred years.
- Stabilisation of CO₂ concentrations at any of the concentration levels studied by IPCC WG1 in its 1994 report (which range from close to the present level through to more than twice this level) **is only possible if emissions are eventually reduced to well below 1990 levels**. Further, the emissions required to stabilise CO₂ concentrations are lower than the IPCC's central estimates of future emissions for the first decades of the 21st century.
- **CO₂ remains the most important greenhouse gas**, both now and for the foreseeable future.

The statement by the distinguished delegate from Samoa highlighted the myriad of evidence in the oceans and at the poles which point toward a changing global climate. Professor Bolin has reminded us of the role played by aerosols in masking the full extent of anthropogenic CO2 induced atmospheric warming. We are overwhelmed by facts which clearly point toward a major global catastrophe, but do not confirm it conclusively. We must be guided by Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration (1992) states that:

In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environment degradation.

~~Mr.~~
Madame President,

The way ahead has been marked for us through past negotiations. The precautionary approach is our guiding light, and we ignore it at our own peril. Yesterday the distinguished delegate of the Netherlands spoke of the ship which is heading for the reef, and of the need to take early evasive action, and maintain a course away from the reef in the future. Perhaps we can extend this analogy a little. While we cannot see the reef, we know its there because its marked on a map. Some would tell us that the map is wrong, and we should continue on course as we are. Others wish to continue to drink champagne while they move their deck chairs to the top deck. AOSIS has made a genuine and much needed attempt to take the wheel and alter course.

~~While the position of the island members of SPREP is clear, it is worth noting the position of the annex I members of SPREP.~~ At the last session of the South Pacific Forum Pacific island leaders, together with the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand stated that (Forum Communiqué 1994, Paragraph 19):

The Forum recognised that existing commitments in the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) will not meet the ultimate objective of the Convention, and called for an early agreement on a process for negotiating one or more Protocols to implement and elaborate the Convention so that reductions of Greenhouse gas emissions are achieved.

~~France and the United States have also expressed the opinion that present commitments are insufficient to meet the objective of the convention.~~

~~Mr.~~
Madame President,

While we sit here and negotiate, vacillate and meditate, the people of the Pacific islands are watching and waiting while we decide their fate. The reality is that island states, some with populations of ten thousand people or less, face the prospect of being lost forever. Their unique languages and culture will be lost with them. Many are, quite literally, endangered species. The irony that the Convention protecting species diversity was signed in Rio also is not lost on them. While we protect endangered animals through the Biodiversity Convention, we wish to condemn many endangered people to the long list of species that humankind as rendered extinct.

SPREP calls upon this First Conference of the Parties to tackle the issue of GHG emissions reductions with vigour, and establish a mandate for preparing one or more appropriate protocols to the UN-FCCC which will guide us to the ultimate aims of the Convention as quickly and effectively as possible.

Thank you Madame President.