

ADDRESS BY MR JOHN GUMMER, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, UNITED KINGDOM, TO THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE, 5 APRIL 1995, BERLIN.

Madame President thank you for the excellent organisation of this conference. It is with particular pleasure that I have come back to the city of Berlin, which meant much to me in my youth and which is a symbol of reconciliation and commitment. It is good that this conference should be held in the European Union, for the Union has committed itself to combat climate change and the UK is determined to play an effective role within the Union to bring this about.

We need to recapture the spirit of global partnership that characterised the Rio Conference and which some of us found still vibrant when we met recently in the UK.

Global climate change is a long term issue but that is a reason to act urgently, not an excuse to do nothing.

We are increasingly confident in our understanding of the science of climate change as the recent research results from the UK based Hadley Centre show. It is now clear that we need to put in place further commitments for the decade after 2000. At this Conference, we must agree a clear mandate for negotiations to achieve this.

The UK looks to further commitments by developed countries on policies and measures for the period 2000 to 2010. We are sure that a commitment to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions on a comprehensive basis below their 1990 levels is essential.

An agreement on a figure in the range of 5 to 10% below 1990 levels by 2010 would seem to be a credible and achievable outcome of the negotiating process we are about to launch. Anything less will neither live up to our global responsibilities today nor meet our children's needs tomorrow.

To be effective we need not just a partnership between nations. In the UK, private enterprise, innovation and privatisation have played a major part in achieving our targets. Government has to set a framework which allows the private sector to make its full contribution. It is now time to examine, internationally, more closely whether tackling climate change effectively is consistent with high levels of subsidy to the energy industries, or indeed, with their public ownership.

Our policies and measures will ensure that we more than meet our commitment to return emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000. The UK has already removed subsidies and privatised energy utilities. This programme underpins our successful efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

Agreeing the measures to achieve this was not politically easy. It involved difficult choices and hard decisions. The Government did not gain popularity because of it. It is nevertheless vital and, therefore, encouraging that many countries, including many in the developing world, are now taking up the challenge.

Madame President, I come from a fossil fuel exporting nation which is also quite a small island state. My own Parliamentary constituency, positioned on the flat east coast of England, is very vulnerable to sea level rise. In dealing with this complex and difficult issue, we must not be trapped into making a false choice between our children's interests and our own shorter term interests. Climate change and the unsustainable use of fossil fuels threaten us all - economically as well as environmentally.

Madame President, the commitments we all made in Rio are but the first step on the long road towards the ultimate objective of the Convention. In the light of our growing knowledge of the serious consequences for all of us of failure, we must now make another large step for mankind.