

2 November 1998 (17:15)

FINAL

Fourth Session of the Conference of the Parties  
to the  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

**Opening Statement**  
**by**  
**Michael Zammit Cutajar**  
**Executive Secretary, UNFCCC**

President Alsogaray, former President Ohki, Governor de la Rúa, Executive Director Toepfer, Honourable Guests from Government, Parliament and the Diplomatic Corps, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to add my word of welcome to this Conference, over which the blue flags of Argentina and the United Nations float against the blue sky of Buenos Aires.

I congratulate President Alsogaray on her election and thank former President Ohki for his contribution to the work of the conference.

My thanks go to the Governments of Argentina and of the City of Buenos Aires for their efforts to create a functional base for the conference and for their activities to raise awareness of the climate change issue. Among the latter, I would like to underline the programme of events launched today by the City of Buenos Aires, the work of various non-governmental organizations - including the Asociación Conciencia which organized a "model Conference of the Parties" in which the roles of delegates were played by students - and the forthcoming conference of Latin American parliamentarians.

I also warmly thank the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations, the Director of the United Nations Information Centre and their colleagues. They have made us feel at home in the "United Nations House" in Argentina. Their support and assistance has made all the difference to the Convention secretariat in preparing for this conference.

Finally, a word of thanks to our friends from Cyber Kansai who, as at COP 3, are helping us to broadcast this conference live on the internet.

Symbolically, holding the Conference of the Parties in a developing country is very significant. It underlines that climate change is a global problem which, while it originates in the historical development patterns of the presently industrialized countries, requires the equitable participation of all countries in a global strategy to deal with it.

It also reminds us of the vulnerability of poor countries and poor people to climate change and to the extreme weather events that are expected to become more frequent because of it. This vulnerability too calls for an equitable response. And, at the present time, it reminds us of the suffering recently undergone by the countries and people of Central America, to whom I express deep sympathy.

The task of this conference is to maintain the political momentum generated by Kyoto. Climate change must remain high on national agendas; ministers must remain committed to seeking agreement and achieving timely results.

Those who in good faith adopted the Kyoto Protocol must now get down to the task of putting it into effect and designing its mechanisms - mechanisms that will provide flexibility, ensure credibility and promote sustainable development. They must create the conditions that will attract the ratifications necessary for the Protocol to enter into force. As with the Convention itself, the vulnerable island States have once again taken the lead in ratification. They set an example for others to follow.

The bottom line for this conference is an action plan on all aspects of the Kyoto Protocol that will set ambitious and politically firm deadlines for agreement. These could aim not only at a prompt start of work on the Protocol once it enters into force, but also possibly at the advance application of certain mechanisms, rules and procedures before the Protocol enters into force.

At the same time, this conference is not only about the Kyoto Protocol. It is also an occasion to put new vigour into the implementation of the Convention. The provisional agenda reflects this balance. In the basket of Convention issues, none is more important - in my view - than the transfer of technology and know-how to developing countries. It is time to break through the rhetoric of the debate on this subject and start taking the "practicable steps" that are called for by the Convention.

Many developing countries are taking actions, in promoting their national sustainable development, that are lowering their emission trends. The transfer of technology and financial resources called for by the Convention, as well as the Clean Development Mechanism envisaged by the Kyoto Protocol, will support developing countries in progressing down the path of sustainable development.

Looking beyond the specifics of the agenda, it is clear that much of the action called for by the Convention and the Protocol must be delivered by business and industry. It is the private sector that generates most emissions, that holds the key to technology transfer and that commands the bulk of the financial resources that could flow into projects that will put developing economies onto climate-friendly paths. A number of events will be organized by and for the private sector at this conference. I hope that, when we look back at Buenos Aires, we will remember it as the occasion when the business community as a whole signalled its positive engagement in the search for a global solution to climate change that combines economic efficiency with the fundamental principle of equity.