

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
MESSAGE TO THE THIRD SESSION OF THE
CONFERENCE OF PARTIES TO THE UN
FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

(To be delivered in abbreviated form by

Mr. Maurice Strong,

Executive Coordinator for United Nations Reform)

Kyoto (Japan), 8 December 1997

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

United Nations colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

**This meeting in the historic city of Kyoto, generously hosted
by the Government of Japan, is a milestone in the search by the
human community for a sound, sustainable balance between its**

economic and social priorities and the environment and life-support systems of our planet on which all human activity and well-being ultimately depend.

I am proud of the central role the United Nations has played in this process. The Organization convened the first world Conference on the Human Environment, in Stockholm in 1972, as well as the landmark Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro five years ago.

The UN Environment Programme has been a leader in monitoring the state of the global environment and in raising public awareness of environmental issues. The UN Conference on Trade and Development has undertaken an important and promising lead in examining the prospects and potential of

emissions trading.

The programmes, funds and specialized agencies of the UN system have contributed greatly to the pursuit of sustainable development.

And the United Nations has been deeply involved in negotiating and servicing the conventions on the environment and sustainable development -- including the Framework Convention on Climate Change -- which provide the legal basis for dealing with the environmental challenges and dilemmas that are shaping our future.

All of this activity will continue as a matter of the highest priority. / For the risks of climate change pose the most critical

and pervasive environmental threats ever to the security of the human community and to life on Earth as we know it. As your difficult negotiations have made clear, reaching an agreement is no easy task. But the very fact that legally binding targets and timetables for limiting carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions are now in prospect shows how far the community of nations has come in accepting responsibility for its shared stewardship for the future of our planet.

There are sharp differences of opinion about the risks of climate change, and about the measures that need to be taken to ameliorate those risks. (Some have called into the question the validity of the science which points to the probability that human activities are contributing to climate change. In this I am convinced it would be wise and prudent to be guided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which represents

the majority view of the world's leading scientists. (Of course, there is a continuing need to refine and elaborate the science.)

But Governments, leaders of business and people in every walk of life routinely take important decisions because they have to -- and they do so based on evidence less complete and compelling than that which the IPCC has produced. There is no doubt that, on an issue that could have such a decisive effect on the future of humanity, we must act on the principle that precaution now is wiser than panic later. Indeed, some of the actions that can be taken initially are already justified on economic and other grounds.

Some of the most important first steps we can take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will produce economic as well as environmental benefits. The concept of "eco-efficiency"

articulated and implemented by some of the world's leading industrialists makes it clear that efficiency in the use of energy and materials, and in the prevention and disposal of wastes, contributes to economic performance and competitiveness.

There is also immense potential in making the markets an ally. Government incentives for energy efficiency and other desirable goals could unleash the floodgates of industrial creativity. Indeed, give companies and entrepreneurs clear signals -- convincing targets, cost-effective policies, innovative financial mechanisms -- and they will respond by developing climate-friendly technologies and services faster than many now believe possible.

The world's richest countries acknowledge their principal responsibility for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Leadership

on their part is clearly the way forward, and I urge them to commit to cuts that are significant, binding and verifiable. They have the wealth and the technology to do so. I call on them to act in the interest of a sustainable future. I hope they will seize this opportunity to spearhead a global and cooperative response to global warming.

The position of developing countries requires special consideration, and I sincerely hope this issue will not be a stumbling block to agreement here in Kyoto. Developing countries have contributed little to the build-up of greenhouse gases, nor have they enjoyed the benefits of the economic growth which generated this build-up. Most are still in the initial stages of the development process. They cannot be denied their right to grow; nor should their development be constrained by the imposition of undue costs and constraints.

At the same time, developing countries are rapidly becoming the major source of additional emissions, even while they remain at relatively low levels on a per capita basis.

Already, many have undertaken voluntary measures designed to limit the environmental impact of their growth. They have also indicated their willingness to cooperate in global efforts to reduce the risk of climate change if their interests can be protected and their needs met on a fair and equitable basis.

To do so they need access to technology and, especially, capital. At a time when prospects for increased official development assistance are not promising, new combinations of public and private funding will be needed. The Global Environmental Facility provides a unique instrument for this, and the World Bank's proposed Carbon Investment Fund would be another valuable addition to the mechanisms available for this

purpose.

Special efforts must also be made to develop ^{new} and innovative means of mobilizing and deploying the substantial amounts of capital that are required. The Office for Development Financing that I plan to establish as part of my reform programme will take this as one of its most important priorities.

The advocacy and involvement of non-governmental organizations and civil society are also a key factor. These groups continue to help shape the debate; they help hold Governments to account; they were a vital presence at the Earth Summit and at all conferences since; and they are present on the ground, helping improve the quality of people's lives. Local governments are also making outstanding contributions, with

many cities implementing programmes to reduce their emissions in ways that attract popular support.

The issues with which you are grappling will not be resolved quickly or easily. As you move into this final stage of your negotiations, (as you seek common ground), I know you will be inspired by the knowledge that what you do here will have a fundamental, perhaps decisive, effect on our hopes and prospects for building a secure and stable future for the human community. The stakes are high. Please accept my best wishes for the success of your important deliberations.