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Statement at the opening of COP 6
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Welcome to the United Nations in The Hague! Welcome to the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC.

I would like to pay tribute to the outgoing President, Jan Szyszko, and thank him for his commitment to keeping the negotiating process on track since COP 5. It has been a pleasure to work with him.

I am delighted by the prospect of joining forces again with Jan Pronk. I assure him of my personal support and that of all my colleagues in the challenges that he will face over the next two weeks. I thank him for the investment of his personal time in the preparations for the conference and for the generosity of the resources made available by the host Government.

Preparations for COP 6 since our September sessions have been intense. National positions have been reviewed; numerous contacts have taken place among delegations; informal consultations have helped to refine negotiating texts throughout October. The Convention secretariat has made a special effort – beyond its promise in Lyon – to produce these October texts in all languages in time for the opening day of COP 6. That we have been able to do so is due to the cooperative efforts of our United Nations colleagues in Geneva and also in Nairobi. As a result, I am pleased to report that the Conference documentation is in good shape. With our Dutch partners, we have put up special COP 6 web sites to facilitate your work. And we hope that the conference facilities here give you the support that you need.

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The remarkable presentation by the Chairman of the IPCC this morning gives us all food for thought. I would like to pick out two messages from it. The first is that we cannot afford to delay action to deal with climate change. The second is that we are building for the long-term and must build soundly. Taken together, these two messages say to me that we must work towards a comprehensive success at COP 6 without resorting to any “quick fixes” that will be regretted later. The goal of action must continue to be to modify long-term trends in emissions of greenhouse gases.

What is success at COP 6? In my view, it is twofold. First, developing country delegations should leave The Hague feeling significantly better off in terms of support for their efforts to address climate change and its impacts, their genuine efforts to play their defined and proper part in the emerging global strategy. Second, delegations from all Parties should go home convinced that the Kyoto Protocol can be effectively implemented; they should leave here ready to launch domestic processes towards ratification, where this has not already been done. It would be a fitting result of the conference if delegations from Annex I Parties, whose ratification would bring the Protocol into force, were to state in public that, in their judgement, the outcome of COP 6 had made the Protocol “ratifiable”.

The Kyoto Protocol was an heroic achievement. It made a strong mark upon public awareness. Since Kyoto, economic actors in the private sector and in government have been taking climate change seriously and getting ready to participate in the implementation of the Protocol.

In the nature of heroic acts, Kyoto achieved the main aim but left many loose ends. Parties have spent the last three years refining their understanding of the Protocol, of the way it could be made to work and of each other’s positions on these matters. What is needed here in The Hague is an agreement that will tie up the loose ends, an agreement using clear and unambiguous language that can be put to work by economic operators as soon as the Protocol enters into force – and even before entry into force, if there is an early start for the CDM. We do not need more heroism in The Hague! We need political agreements, followed by careful drafting, leading to workable conclusions.

If you agree with this view, you may also agree that the sequencing of the work of the Conference is extremely important, that there is a need to achieve substantive results in the first week, to seal the main political agreements in the middle of the second week and to leave enough time for the consequential technical drafting to be completed before closure. This first week should not be a replay of Lyon. The real negotiation must start here and now. Governments must start moving towards convergence before next week's crunch.

Since time is of the essence, President, I will stop now with my best wishes to you and to all Parties for a successful negotiation. To take up the message from the banners in this Congress Centre, I say to you: "Please make it work!"