

STATEMENT AT THE
EIGHTH SESSION OF THE
CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE
UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK
CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

by

Professor G.O.P. Obasi
Secretary-General
World Meteorological Organization



(New Delhi, India, 30 October 2002)

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**His Excellency Mr. T.R. Baalu, President of the Conference of the
Parties,**

Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ms Joke Waller-Hunter, Executive Secretary of the Convention,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honour and a privilege for me to address you today on the occasion of the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). On behalf of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and my own, I would like to thank Ms J. Waller-Hunter, the Executive Secretary of the Convention for her kind invitation and for the opportunity to address this esteemed gathering. May I also seize this opportunity to congratulate Ms Waller-Hunter on her assumption of duties and to give assurance of WMO's continued support in the discharge of her responsibilities. I will also wish to express my appreciation to the Government of India on the excellent preparations for the Conference, and to the City authorities and citizens of New Delhi for their warm welcome and hospitality.

Mr President, allow me to congratulate you on your election and to wish you success in your very important task of guiding this Conference. Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate H. E. Mr. Mohamed El Yazghi, the former President of the Conference of the Parties, for his outstanding leadership since the last session of the Conference.

Mr President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Conference organized in the wake of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held last month in Johannesburg, South Africa should no doubt benefit from the high priority given by the Summit to the issue of climate change in its Declaration and Plan of Implementation. In particular, it is recalled that the Summit had reaffirmed its commitment to achieving the ultimate objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of stabilizing *"greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system, within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner, in accordance with our common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities"*. The challenge for the Conference is therefore to build on this commitment at the highest level, and to take urgent action which also arises, among others, from the following considerations:

- (a) The atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases continues to increase. At the first Conference of the Parties in Berlin in 1995, the concentration was 359.5 parts per million by volume (ppmv) which was already an increase of 28 per cent since the industrialization period. Subsequently, year after year, I have drawn the attention of the Conference to the inexorable increase of CO₂. Measurements indicate that at end of last year the atmospheric concentration of

CO₂ stood at 370 ppmv which represents an increase of over 32 per cent. The annual growth rate fluctuates. Over the last 30 years, the fluctuations range from 0.5 ppmv/year to 3.5 ppmv/year. While it is hoped that the compromise reached at Marrakesh and other previous sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) on various issues would facilitate the early entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, I would like to urge the Conference of the Parties to work urgently towards reversing the observed trend in the increasing greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere;

- (b) The 1990s was the warmest decade on record and 1998 the warmest year with 2001 being the second highest. The global average surface temperature has increased by 0.6 °C since 1860s when instrumental record began. Most of the warming occurred during the twentieth century, especially over the periods 1920 to 1945 and from 1976 onwards. Other changes include a reduction in snow and ice cover, especially in non-polar mountain glaciers and a rise in the global average sea-level of 18 to 20 cm;
- (c) We are witnessing manifestations of weather events that will characterize a warmer Earth. These include unprecedented weather extremes such as tropical cyclones, severe floods and droughts. These events continue to cause considerable loss of life and inflict damages to property. In recent months, major storm events and floods affected many countries across Europe, including Austria, the Czech Republic, France and Germany, in Asian countries such as Bangladesh, China, India and Nepal, in African countries such as Niger, Mali and part of Guinea, and recently in South America including Southern Argentina and Chile. In Mozambique, the direct and indirect economic cost of the floods caused by tropical storms *Elyne* and *Gloria* in the year 2000 is estimated at 11.6 per cent of its gross national product.

We also continue to witness severe effects of droughts in several countries. Record-breaking droughts have had adverse consequences in a number of Middle East coun-

tries, Brazil, the Horn of Africa and the area from Central Asia to Northern China. The drought in China, last year, was the second most widespread since 1949, surpassed only by the 1978 dryspell. Southern Africa is currently in the throes of severe drought affecting the livelihood of about 13 million people.

- (d) Warm episodes of the *El Niño*/Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomenon - which consistently result in regional variabilities in precipitation and temperature over much of the tropics, sub-tropics and some mid-latitude areas - have been more frequent, persistent and intense since the mid-1970s, compared with those of the previous 100 years. Needless to emphasize that climatic phenomena associated with past ENSO events have inflicted untold socio-economic disruption in many countries. The 1997/1998 *El Niño* event alone affected 110 million people and cost 96 billion US dollars in damages. However, the current *El Niño* event is predicted to be weak; and,
- (e) It is to be recalled that in its Third Assessment Report in 2001, the WMO/UNEP-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that "*there is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities.*" The IPCC is supported by the best experts and scientists the world has on the issue of climate change. Also, all the advanced climate modelling centres collaborate with it. Therefore, the conclusion that most of the warming is attributable to human activities has to be taken seriously.

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The World Summit on Sustainable Development in addressing the climate issue had called for the promotion of "*systematic observation of the Earth's atmosphere, land and oceans by*

improving monitoring stations, increasing the use of satellites, and appropriate integration of these observations to produce high-quality data that could be disseminated for the use of all countries, in particular developing countries." In this regard, WMO maintains the unique global observing system including stations over land and oceans as well as meteorological, environmental and research and development satellites that responds to this call. WMO also ensures the free and unrestricted exchange of such data and the derived products among all countries. This represents a tangible contribution to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which is also supported by the WMO-sponsored Global Climate Observing System (GCOS). Other similar programmes include the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) and the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS), which WMO co-sponsors. It is to be recalled that, at the request of the UNFCCC, GCOS prepared the first "Report on the Adequacy of the Global Climate Observing Systems" in 1998 and is currently preparing a Second Adequacy Report with input from IPCC experts and is scheduled to be available next year.

Also in response to decision 5/CP.5 of the Conference of the Parties, the GCOS is implementing a Regional Workshop Programme. A number of regional workshops has been organized in various parts of the world and others are planned over the next couple of years in co-operation with the National Communication Support Programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). WMO strongly supports this Programme which is essential for the effective implementation of the Convention's objectives. In this regard, it is recalled that the goals of the workshops are to assess the contribution of each region to GCOS baseline networks; to help participants understand the UNFCCC guidelines for reporting on systematic observations; to identify national and regional needs and deficiencies for climate data; to improve links between National Climate Change Co-ordinators and National Meteorological and Hydrological Services; and to initiate the development of Regional Action Plans for improving climate observing systems.

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In addition to systematic observations, Article 5 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) commits Parties to promote research. In this regard, the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP), jointly sponsored by WMO, the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), continues to be in the forefront of international efforts to improve our understanding of the climate system and to develop predictive capabilities. WCRP jointly with other WMO programmes is providing sound scientific input for the IPCC assessments in support of the UNFCCC with particular emphasis on refining the expected regional impacts and projections of global climate change. Thus the tremendous progress in understanding the climate system exhibited by the IPCC Third Assessment Report, can to a large extent be attributed to the achievements of WCRP projects. However, the IPCC has indicated that some uncertainties exist in climate change projection. Some of the uncertainties are a result of inadequate understanding of some of the processes inherent in the global climate system. In view of the considerable efforts underway through the WCRP to address these uncertainties, they should not be the reason for inaction now.

In the context of the above considerations, I wish to emphasize the following issues that the Conference may take into consideration in its deliberations:

Firstly, the proposals for the implementation of the decisions of the Conference of the Parties relating to observing the state of the climate system remain critical to the success of the Convention. *I would therefore urge the Conference of the Parties to continue to support the strengthening of all climate-related observing programmes and systems, as called for by WSSD;*

Secondly, the continuation of a strong programme in climate research is essential for the implementation of the UNFCCC. While the Third IPCC Assessment Report has provided a clearer and more definitive set of observed changes within the climate system, many uncertainties remain about the rate and geographical distribution of expected future changes. *It is essential, therefore, that the Conference continues to provide strong support for climate research in the context of the World Climate Research Programme and related global change research efforts, so as to ensure continuing significant progress in our understanding, simulation and prediction of the climate system;*

Thirdly, developing countries and, in particular, the Least Developed Countries and the Small Island Developing States, are likely to be most adversely affected by climate change, while also being the least able to respond and adapt. In this regard, the progress made at the previous sessions of the Conference of the Parties in establishing funding mechanisms for capacity building activities must not falter through a lack of commitment from those countries that are able to contribute. In particular, we welcome the progress made in ensuring that the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism becomes operational as soon as possible. *However, the Conference should ensure that conditions under which these funds are to be made available should not be so constraining as to inhibit development of adaptation strategies and activities that will be needed to grapple with the complex impacts of climate change; and*

Finally, *the Conference may urge all Parties to continue to provide the endorsement and support required for the WMO/UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Panel to maintain its objectivity, independence, authoritativeness and the high quality of its work while involving scientists and experts from all countries, especially those from developing countries.* The earlier experience of the Panel should stand us in good stead as it initiates the preparation of its fourth assessment report and any other special and high priority reports that the Conference may require for underpinning the implementation of the Convention. In this connection, WMO welcomes the initiatives of the Government

of India for the establishment of the proposed International Centre for Science and Technology Capacity Building in Climate Change for Developing Countries of Tropical Asia which we believe will be highly beneficial for advancing the objectives of COP.

Mr President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

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I wish to assure you that WMO will maintain its commitment to improving our understanding of the climate system and the prediction of its future state. WMO will also continue to support the work of the Conference of the Parties and its Subsidiary Bodies, and the implementation of their decisions as they relate to the Organization. I hope that this eighth session of the Conference of the Parties will stand as a further landmark event in the preservation of the Earth's climate for the generations that will follow us.

Thank you.

