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Address by Minister Jan Pronk  
President of the Sixth conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework  
Convention on Climate Change  
Bonn, 19 July 2001

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Why is it necessary to reach an agreement here in Bonn?

It is, because the evidence is mounting that never in the course of human history climate has changed as fast as it is changing today. Without any doubt: climate change is to a great extent man-made. Actual changes in weather conditions, which we witness throughout the world, are related to climate change. The consequences of climate change - ocean warming, sea level rise, coastal erosion, changes in food production potentials - are bigger than we expected a decade ago. We do not yet know how big, and exactly when and where they will affect life conditions in an irreversible manner, but we do know these consequences will surface. And we also know that poor people in poor countries will be affected most.

So, precaution requires a political answer now. As we politicians promised our citizens when we signed the UN Convention on Climate Change: "we will take precautionary measures to anticipate, prevent or minimize the causes of climate change and mitigate its adverse effects. Where there are threats of serious and irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing such measures".

Agreeing on this precautionary principle implies a political commitment. And the first precautionary measure is to agree to cut greenhouse gas emissions and to help each other to do so.

That is what we tried to agree to do in The Hague, half a year ago. We did not succeed. We deplored this and we promised each other, without apportioning blame, to give ourselves a second chance.

Negotiations are difficult. We have learnt this the hard way in The Hague. Sometimes, while negotiating, we run around in circles, trying to reinvent the wheel, or to solve a problem with a solution that in an earlier stage had been labeled as problematic itself. Sometimes our memories are short. At other occasions we seem to be unable to forget, but raise the same issue again and again.

In the words of the Dutch national poet Gerrit Komrij, whose booklet with poems "The Straw that Breaks the Camel's Back..." was published on the occasion of COP6:

"He lost his way within a maze  
In search of silver and of gold -  
He searched a lifetime and he found  
He was where he'd been from of old"

You remember that I quoted this poem at the end of our negotiations in The Hague: we had not found silver or gold and ended where we had started.

That is the second reason why we ought to reach agreement here in Bonn: because we have promised to do so, a promise to each other, to ourselves, to our citizens and to future generations.

By deciding that we would not wait another year, until COP7, but that we would resume our negotiations soon, we have raised expectations. That was a deliberate choice. We did not close the meeting. We adjourned in order to come back soon and take up matters where we left them in The Hague.

Since then we have held many consultations. All of them resulted in confirmations and reconfirmations of our decision to resume rather than postpone. This again was a deliberate choice. It implies a commitment to reach a result.

That is why we are here. To resolve the remaining issues, to finish our work, so that we can start the ratification process in order to make the Kyoto Protocol operational. Then we will have a common basis for joint action to meet the targets from 2008 onwards, as we promised in Kyoto.

We do not have much time left. However, we are well prepared. We have all the documents on the table, the result of four years negotiations. We got stuck in a sea of brackets. That is why political leaders now have the task to seek a political compromise, a common denomination, a balanced package. All the necessary ingredients are available.

Parties have asked me to help them with suggestions and non-papers in order to find their way through the sea of brackets. During the last year I have tabled a set of crunch questions, followed by a list of options and, thirdly, a list of possible answers which together could be seen as a balanced package. I have revised that list after many consultations with parties. Finally I produced an integrated consolidated unbracketed text in legal language. It is neither pure nor ideal. It can be criticized on an issue-by-issue basis. But it is the result of a careful consideration of all positions of all parties expressed during a long process. In my view it is credible, both politically and environmentally. And it is balanced. Use it as a tool in order to craft a sustainable agreement.

During the remaining days of these negotiations I will continue to do everything I can in order to facilitate, catalyze and lead the negotiations towards an agreement. The aim is to reach a result, learning from our experience so far. Let me offer you some advice:

- First: Stay faithful to the Convention, live up to all commitment implied in it.
- Second: Do not start all over again. Let us not waste past efforts. Uncoordinated national policies on a voluntary basis do not work.
- Third: Go forward, not backward. Please refrain from adding brackets. Remove brackets. Let us refrain from the rituals. Do not stay 'sur place', but move.
- Fourth: Stay together. However,

- Fifth: If for some reason a nation feels that it is not in a position to become party to a ratified Protocol, let that not result in a situation where others hold back for that reason only.
- Sixth: If a nation cannot agree, or not yet, do not make it difficult for others to move forward.
- Seventh: Do take each other's interests into consideration, do not antagonize, but draft an agreement which is open for all, now or later.

The Kyoto Protocol is complicated. And the legal texts that we should agree on here in Bonn are long and difficult. However, they are of our own making. And with the help of the tool, which I presented to you, they can be made shorter, transparent and workable.

Climate change is a complicated phenomenon, with many economic, social and environmental dimensions. Addressing it, we did do a good job in Kyoto. The Protocol is result oriented, flexible, fair and credible. It is the only game in town. It is the best we have.

If we really negotiate, focusing on the real issues, we can live up to the promise we made in The Hague: not to fail twice.

To quote Komrij again:

"The world can always start anew.  
A fresh, rejuvenating spring  
Is the awareness that this earth's  
The first and last to which we cling."