

**Ninth Session of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations
Convention on Climate Change
(Milan, 1-12 December 2003)**

*Address of Welcome
by
the Minister for the Environment and Territory of Italy*

H.E. Altero Matteoli

I have the honor to welcome, on behalf of Italy, all of you, delegates of the 188 ratifier countries of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, and representatives of the 100 International Governmental and non-Governmental Organizations.

COP 9 gives us the opportunity to assess the progresses achieved towards the implementation of the programs and commitments agreed under the Convention and to identify new and stronger initiatives to protect climate change.

The recent extreme weather events confirm that the climate variability has serious consequences for public health, agriculture, water supply, electricity production and distribution.

Climate change is a global challenge and requires a comprehensive and global response. The United Nations Convention on Climate Change is the common ground where all Parties have to jointly work and where all Parties have to respond to this challenge. The Kyoto Protocol offers for the first time at international level the architecture and the tools to use the challenge of environmental protection as “driving force” and as growing factor.

We would had liked to have here, in Milan, at COP 9 also the first meeting of the Parties of the Kyoto Protocol. Unfortunately, we did not have this opportunity but this does not mean that our commitment and our work to strengthen the global strategies to reduce GHGs emissions and to strengthen the adaptation of the Planet’s most vulnerable regions to climate change, should be weakened.

The sustainability of this commitment will depend on strengthening the technological cooperation at international level and sharing, within global economic regulations, common minimum standards for environmental and energy efficiency by a wider use of clean technologies in order to reduce the use of fossil fuels in the world energy market.

In this regards I would like to recall the Conclusions of the EU Informal Meeting that for the first time in the history of the EU has convened the Environment and Energy Ministers of the 25 European Countries, plus Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Norway, hosted by the Italian Presidency in Montecatini from 18 to 20 July.

Ministers have underlined the urgency to integrate in one vision and one strategy the energy and environmental policies, both to implement the Kyoto Protocol, and to identify a path towards further global commitments which will allow both to guarantee secure and clean energy in the coming decades and to substantially reduce GHGs emissions.

In this perspective, the agreement signed some days ago in Washington D.C. among 15 countries, such as the USA, Japan, China, India, Brazil, UK, Germany, France, Australia, Canada, Korea, and the European Commission, to start an international partnership on the hydrogen economy, is of great importance. This initiative represents a concrete step towards the global reduction on the use of fossil fuels and the CO2 emissions.

With the same goal, the programs that Italy has started to implement the National Plan to Reduce the GHGs emissions, approved by the Government on December 19th.

Rules have also been adopted at national level to promote renewables in coherence with the European Directive, and to improve energy efficiency. Furthermore the National Program has been developed and financed to develop distributed generation of energy through high efficiency distributed micro-CHP, which will pursue both emission reductions and a "relief" of the electricity demand in the distribution network, where black out risk is very high.

Furthermore, we have strengthened our commitments on research and development of hydrogen sector and of fuel cells both for the electricity production and to test new vehicles and transport systems.

Among the Italian commitments let me also highlight the decision taken by the Government and the Parliament to devote US\$ 86 to the Climate Change Funds that we agreed to support with the 2001 Bonn Political Declaration.

The Italian contribution is far higher compared to our national GHGs emissions and it testifies our concrete commitment to strengthen the international cooperation programs with Developing Countries for mitigation and adaptation programs to climate change.

With this spirit, Italy wishes to convey to COP 9 a positive signal to reiterate that the international strategy on climate change is an opportunity to promote technology innovation and international technology cooperation, towards the sustainable economic growth of the entire Planet, and represents, at the same time, a guide for policies and programs to preserve the vulnerable ecosystems from the climate change effects.

The three roundtables scheduled next week, during the high level segment, on the impacts and adaptation to climate change, on technology cooperation, and on the assessment of the international initiatives to fight climate change will be an important opportunity to orient the Conference towards a positive conclusion.

But I would like also to remind that during these 12 days at COP 9, more than 100 side-events have been organized, many of them also in the “Padiglione Italia”, which has been expressly realized for this important event, for contributing to a positive and constructive dialogue.

Finally let me thank Region Lombardia, the Municipality and the Province of Milan, which have actively and substantially contributed to the organizational efforts to guarantee the best conditions for COP9.

And at the same time I would like to thank the Secretariat of the Convention with whom we have had and we will continue to have a very positive collaboration, sharing COP9 goals.