

STATEMENT TO THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT

THIRD 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



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Your Excellency, Mr Hiroshi Ohki, Director General of the Environmental Agency of Japan and President of the Conference of the Parties,
Your Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Mr Zammit Cutajar, Executive Secretary of the Convention,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege for me to address the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). On behalf of the World Meteorological Organization and my own, I would like to thank the Executive Secretary of the Convention for his kind invitation and for the opportunity to address this esteemed gathering. I also wish to express our appreciation to the Government and people of Japan for hosting this important session of the Conference of the Parties. Mr President, allow me to extend my most sincere congratulations to you on your election and to wish you success in your very important task of guiding this Conference. Let me also convey my warmest regards to His Excellency, Mr Chimutengwende, the past President of the Conference of the Parties, for his outstanding leadership during the intersessional period.

As difficult as it might seem, this third session of the Conference of the Parties has the potential to be remembered as a major landmark if we undertake a clear course of action to minimize or avert any future damage to the global environment. Any meaningful commitments in this regard could enable the Convention to make truly significant progress on the global response to protect our climate in a manner similar, for example, to that which the Montreal Protocol to the Vienna Convention is making through the phasing off of the ozone-destroying chemicals in the atmosphere, and in the developments of new substitutes that are ozone-friendly.

It is disturbing that, 18 months after the second Conference of Parties, we see signs of **further deterioration in the world's environment**. This point was emphasized by the Special Session of the UN General Assembly when it met in June this year. For instance, at the end of 1996, levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere had risen by 29% since industrial times, and the accumulation continues to rise. 1995 was the warmest year on record and this year is seriously threatening that record. There are increasing reports of ecological and other changes around the world that are being attributed to climate change. WMO continues to monitor developments and indeed issues annually a report on the state of the global climate.

Since the end of the last session of the Conference of the Parties, some progress has been made in the sense that today, most of the countries around that world have come to accept the conclusion that *"...the balance of evidence*

suggests a discernible human influence on global climate". Accordingly, Mr President, from a scientific view point, the debate on this issue is over and the onus is now on us to take decisive action to prevent further damage to the Earth's climate.

At this juncture, we should consider how much progress has been made in areas of relevance to the Convention and what still needs to be done?

Firstly, the Subsidiary Bodies and the Ad Hoc Groups have risen to the task of providing a solid scientific and technical basis for supporting deliberations of the Conference of the Parties. In this connection, WMO has provided scientific and technical information including a wealth of material on the latest scientific findings of the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP). There is now a range of emerging methodologies for evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of the Convention during its implementation phase, but ***there are still several issues that have to be resolved*** to everyone's satisfaction, ***such as those concerning greenhouse gas "sinks"***.

Secondly, WMO and a number of UN agencies and other organizations recently launched what is called the ***Climate Agenda***, an integrating framework of international climate-related scientific and technical programmes. It will ensure that the full weight of our collective intellect and our capabilities in the climate area are brought to bear on the complex set of problems concerning climate change. A major thrust is the provision of ***high quality and continuous series of climate data*** from all parts of the world. Indeed, the Special Session of the UN General Assembly that reviewed UNCED, and the international Conference on the World Climate Research Programme which was held in Geneva in August this year, both called for special attention to be given to supporting the essential global observational networks. In this connection, WMO and its relevant partner organizations have made some progress in implementing a composite climate observing system for the atmosphere, the land and the oceans called the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) which relies on ***national commitments*** to global networks. It is recognized that ***maintaining and strengthening national capabilities to monitor the climate system at global, regional and national scales*** remains a challenging task, but this is an essential input to WMO's Climate Change Detection Project for the detection of climate change on global and regional scales. The present Conference of the Parties should therefore give its ***full support to the measures aimed at achieving the objectives of the Climate Agenda***. Such a support will ensure significant contribution to the implementation of the UNFCCC.

Thirdly, through the national Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of its Member countries, WMO is putting into place the infrastructure necessary to ensure that the required climate information and, where possible, climate predictions are generated and disseminated globally. Such an

infrastructure could also enable national and international bodies to plan and respond more effectively to incipient extreme weather and climate events such as droughts or floods or other climatic-induced emergencies. In this regard, the forest fires which have had an adverse impact on the environment in countries of Southeast Asia and beyond, clearly demonstrate the need for an effective infrastructure for pooling knowledge and disseminating advice on emerging climatic anomalies and on associated extreme weather events. For example, the likely severity of the current El Niño event was common knowledge in the scientific community as far back as May of this year. It is critical that such information, which can be acted upon to avert or mitigate the disastrous outcome of drought, or fire or flood be disseminated globally in a timely manner. **In this regard, the Conference should encourage the strengthening of the required infrastructures of NMHSs and the establishment of the National Climate Committees, as well as the development of national and regional Action Plans for Climate Change.**

I would like to stress here that *links between the severity of the El Niño-related events of this year and human-induced climate change cannot be made at this stage and this issue is now being addressed by climate research community.* Nonetheless, we can use the current El Niño event to examine what the impacts of interactions between human activities and the climate might bode for the future of our planet, should the evidence of systematic shifts in regional climates begin to emerge. Hence it is essential that we ***provide even stronger support for research*** in order to improve our understanding of the climate system and to establish, as unambiguously as we can, the attribution or otherwise of any unusual climatic events at a regional level to a change in the global climate that might arise from human activities.

Fourthly, as stated earlier, we have made important progress in widening the acceptance of the scientific evidence on climate change. Clearly now, the most important task of the Conference of the Parties is to deal with the heightened urgency for the completion of negotiations on the stabilization of greenhouse gas emissions at a level that will reverse the present trend within a reasonably specified time-frame. We recognize that the road to a consensus on how to bring down the emissions in a fair and equitable manner has not, and will probably not be easy. We believe that governments cannot rely on voluntary cuts in emissions and in many cases, strong political will is required for making meaningful progress. The spin-off of a satisfactory consensus will result in rapid progress in the development of energy-efficient greenhouse gas-friendly technologies which could yield major economic benefits in other sectors. The very presence here in Kyoto today of several government representatives shows that we have accepted the challenge of seeking a consensus. This is surely an important note on which this session has to build.

Finally, the negotiations on greenhouse gas emissions have so far focused on developed countries. However, all nations of the world are affected by variations in the climate at some time or other. In the developed world, the impacts may be more evident at an economic level while developing countries all too often bear the brunt more at the social level. Each country therefore has a reason to ensure the success of the Conference and of the commitments that are necessary to stabilize greenhouse gases. In this connection, there is a continuing need for providing assistance to developing nations and those with economy-in-transition to enable them become effective partners in limiting their future emissions through the development and transfer of greenhouse-gas-friendly technologies. It is anticipated that most developing countries will, on the other hand, balance their national development needs with the state of the environment, and indeed continuously keep in view their responsibilities in the global partnership forged for seeking solutions in the curtailment of emissions of greenhouse gases. But ultimately, the developing countries will take their lead from the actions of the developed countries.

Mr President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have made a good start in most of the five areas I have mentioned. But this is only the beginning. The success of this Conference of the Parties and the Convention itself will only be as successful as the national efforts upon which they rest. As a representative of the climate science community, I recognize that the stakes at this Conference are very high, and that decisions that will be taken here are affected by strong political and economic factors among many nations. But we should not wait to see the climatic impacts of a further rise in the global mean temperature before appropriate and cohesive actions are taken to adequately curb the increases in greenhouse gas emissions. There is now increasing public sentiment for strong measures to protect the planet.

As we grapple with the complex issues before us, I wish to assure you that WMO will continue its efforts in strengthening the knowledge-base of the state of the global climate system, and also ensuring that the acquired knowledge is applied with maximum beneficial effect across the widest possible range of applications, impact assessments and mitigation responses. In the process, WMO will continue its strong support of the implementation of the Convention and to the work of the Subsidiary Bodies of the Conference of the Parties. Additionally, WMO will continue to provide technical support to the Secretariat of the Convention.

I wish the session every success and I hope that the deliberations that will emanate from this session will stand as a milestone in the process of seeking solutions to conserve our present Earth's climate and the environment, and indeed ensure a healthy Earth that we must bequeath to the generation that follows us.

Thank you.

