

**Ninth Session of the Conference of Parties
to the United Nations Framework Convention
on Climate Change
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*Speech by Dr. Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director,
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Mr. President, Madame Executive Secretary, Mr. Leonard Good, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to be here in Milan under the leadership of His Excellency Miklòs Perànyi at the beginning of a conference that must play a vital role in guiding global action on climate change.

I am also personally very pleased that the Government of Italy, which currently holds the EU Presidency, has decided to host this important event.

Mr. President, I note that this forum continues to draw large numbers of participants, including many representatives from civil society. The energetic contribution here of so many people reminds me of last month's plenary session of the WMO/UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Meeting in Vienna, the plenary attracted the highest number of participants in the IPCC's history. These gatherings send a positive signal that the international commitment to addressing climate change remains strong and vibrant.

Global treaties are by their nature complex and demanding. The Climate Change Convention, which is linked to so many economic, social and environmental activities, is probably the most complex of all environment-related agreements. We all know that a global enterprise of this magnitude is bound to have its ups and downs, its detours and delays. We also know that climate change is a long-term problem that requires a long-term solution. We must all therefore commit ourselves to keeping a steady pace on this long and difficult road.

As we learned in the past one week, governments and other actors are doing more to address climate change today than ever before. Private businesses are committing to their own emissions targets and exploring innovative solutions. NGOs are actively engaging the public and educating people about the problem and its solutions. Local governments around the world are adopting their own strategies and measures on climate change. These activities, including those by non-state actors, draw their inspiration from the Climate Change Convention and its Kyoto Protocol.

We can also point to the large investments that continue to be made in climate change science and monitoring. These investments will pay off by increasing our understanding

of the causes and impacts of global warming. So too will the investments being made by researchers and private companies in innovative technologies. Supported by the appropriate policies and measures, these clean technologies will drastically reduce the energy intensity of the global economy. Advances in wind turbines, efficient hybrid-engine cars, fuel-cell technology, renewable biomass fuels, hydrogen technology and energy management all need supportive and encouraging policies to come into effect.

Nevertheless, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, requiring more action and a stronger policy push by the industrialised countries. Their large domestic markets are essential for driving much-needed technological innovations and making climate-friendly technologies economically viable around the globe.

Such technological progress can make an enormous contribution to the goals of the Kyoto Protocol. The Protocol, for its part, can encourage this progress. Its emissions trading regime, for example, will reward innovators that create low-cost solutions to climate change; for this reason, I am extremely pleased with the progress that the European Union has made on this approach. At the same time, the Clean Development Mechanism offers valuable opportunities for technology transfer to developing countries.

Of course, implementing the agreement reached on 11 December 1997 in the Japanese City of temples and shrines does pose a challenge for many countries. It is vital that the lessons we have learned in the past six years be considered when talks start on the second commitment period.

Unless the upward trend in global emissions is arrested and eventually reversed, our world will continue to gradually change. Sea levels will rise further. Climate zones and rainfall patterns will shift. Some of these changes will have a dramatic impact on human well-being. And they are already taking place.

In the Arctic, temperatures have risen by three to four degrees in the last few decades. Arctic ice has disappeared at a rate of about three percent each decade since the 1970s. Scientists at the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder, Colorado in the US recently announced that Arctic sea ice had reached a record low since satellite measurements started 24 years ago. As one scientist has predicted, "If you want to see what will be happening in the rest of the world 25 years from now, just look at what's happening in the Arctic."

Experts at the University of Zurich say in a study published last week that the levels of snow falling in lower lying mountain areas will become increasingly unpredictable and unreliable over the coming decades. Ski resorts below the 1800 m mark in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Canada and Australia will be affected and will be faced with disastrous economic consequences. In the next 30 to 50 years, warmer temperatures will force these skiing resorts to adapt by using artificial snow or give up this important tourist industry altogether. +

In poorer countries, the impacts of climate change are much more life threatening. Climate change has the potential to reduce access to drinking water, negatively affecting

the health of poor people and posing a real threat to food security. This is of utmost concern as it adds to the challenge of reaching the Millennium Declaration goal of halving extreme poverty by 2015. Adapting to some of these changes may be unavoidable and will require urgent financial support, as agreed especially for the Least Developed Countries who have actively and efficiently utilised the funds available through the LDC Fund.

I look forward to progress by Annex I Parties and G77 for operationalising the Special Climate Change Fund to focus on adaptation and technology transfer. Adaptation is a costly and continuous activity. In the long term, more of this work needs to be mainstreamed into national planning processes. Scientists and technical experts also need to help us identify more cost-effective adaptation technologies.

Of course, adapting to a changing climate cannot be a substitute for limiting emissions. In fact, it is early emission reductions that can limit future adaptation costs – and not the other way round.

Mr. President, your leadership at this conference will have a significant impact on the future of the global legal regime and on global climate itself. The global challenge is enormous, especially for countries that choose to take the lead and for those committed to investing in both mitigation and adaptation activities. The Milan conference needs to stand behind such champions.

At UNEP we stand fully committed to assist the Parties implement the convention as and when requested. I have noted your decisions regarding Article 6, LULUCF, Capacity Building and Adaptation and I promise to deliver what is expected from us to meet the growing challenges.

This reminds me of a statement by the Kyoto City Governor Yamada Keiji, who said that there is no progress without challenge. I am confident that good progress will be made by this valuable gathering of nations. Your actions and contributions will be remembered – especially by the young people of this world – for years and possibly decades to come.

Thank you.