

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Speech by the UK Deputy Prime Minister

Rt. Hon. John Prescott MP

to the United Nations COP3 conference on climate change; held at Kyoto, Japan

12/8/97

Thank you Mr Chairman. First of all I would like to thank the Japanese Government for hosting this meeting. I feel sure that under your Chairmanship, we will achieve a positive outcome for the environment from this conference.

The European Union's position has just been set out by the EU President, so I won't repeat it. The UK is one of the few countries which is on course to meet the voluntary commitments we made at Rio. We speak as a country which believes in the need to tackle global warming.

As a new Labour Government, we have set ourselves an aim of a 20% reduction in CO2 emissions by 2010, which our scientists confirm is achievable. We are aiming for the maximum we can achieve, not the minimum that we can get away with.

During the last seven days, delegations have repeated in the working groups their formal positions on many of the technical issues, based on natural science. Now it is the turn of political science to fashion an agreement. Recently I have visited a number of countries, and again I heard the national positions stated.

But I was struck by the strong political will to reach an agreement here at Kyoto - even if it was only motivated by the desire not to be blamed for a failure to agree. It will not be easy, as we discovered during the past week, to agree strong, legally binding targets. We have only three days standing between success and failure.

And the most important thing is to find an agreement for maximising the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, not the political minimum. Our credibility will be judged on this.

Of course there are genuine concerns expressed by business about the implications of an agreement. But the effects on business could be even worse, if there is no agreement.

The world's scientists tell us they can detect the signs of man-made climate change. This year will break all records for the highest ever global average temperature. Forest fires have caused deadly pollution in South East Asia, and threatened Australia's largest city. Terrible floods have covered central Europe. Droughts and storms have followed from this year's El Nino. Nature is no respecter of boundaries of developed or developing economies.

People in all countries are demanding that we take action, as they did when we had to protect the ozone layer.

The successful Montreal Protocol on CFCs also recognised the responsibility of the major polluters to take action first - a principle we confirmed in the Berlin Mandate. Too often the response to climate change is described in terms of pain not gain.

There are great opportunities here for both developed and developing countries.

- Improving transport systems will not only limit emissions, they will improve the quality of life.
- Better constructed housing will make heating our homes more affordable.
- Wasting less energy will make our industries more efficient.
- And environmental technologies can create new jobs and business opportunities.

The transfer of these technologies will help developing countries to achieve sustainable industrial development.

Last October the Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Edinburgh.

They called on this conference to recognise that: after Kyoto, all countries will need to play their part, by pursuing policies that would result in significant reductions of greenhouse gases, if we are to solve a problem that affects us all.



Of course, many developing countries are making great efforts to tackle global warming. But developed countries must give leadership - the Berlin Mandate must be observed. The issue of credibility is right at the heart of this conference.

We are seeking agreement on legally binding targets. These targets must be credible. They must be seen as practical and achievable. Our commitments must also make a credible impact on global emissions.

But there are considerable difficulties in the areas of: targets, flexibilities, joint action and time scales. And not least the impossibility of requiring developing countries to sign up here and now, as a condition of accepting a Kyoto Protocol.

The scientific arguments, on which the targets depend, are often not straightforward. And impossible to agree within the remaining three days. We need a period after the agreement this week - I have called it a "window of credibility" - to work through the modalities, to prevent loopholes, and to ensure the credibility of this agreement. Our "window of credibility" is provided by the time from adopting the protocol here in Kyoto, through ratification by individual countries, until the protocol enters into force. It will allow the developed countries to show their genuine intent, by starting immediately to implement measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

It will provide time for work out the modalities which are necessary to justify commitments to the targets in the agreement. This will be a priority for the British Presidency of the European Union starting next month. This week we stand at the cross-roads of failure or success.

It will take a great deal of political will and effort, to bridge the gaps between different delegations. We owe it, not only to all our nations, to reach agreement here. We owe it to future generations. Because we don't own the world. We hold this world in trust, to bequeath to our children's children. And it is to them that we have an obligation here today.