

The Honorable Timothy E. Wirth
Under Secretary for Global Affairs
on behalf of the United States of America

Second Conference of the Parties
Framework Convention on Climate Change

Geneva, Switzerland

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In the opening scientific report, Mr. Chairman, I want to note that the United States is proud of the more than \$1 billion annual investment it has been making in recent years on global change research. This is a cost we have taken on in order to enhance our own and the world's understanding of the Earth's atmosphere, ocean, and biological systems and ingredients not only the seriousness with which we view these systems, but also the willingness of President Clinton and the American people to help pursue progress on behalf of the environment.

The United States of America takes very seriously the IPCC's recently issued Second Assessment Report, which underscores and amplifies the panel's earlier work - refining estimates and revealing new understandings that serve to heighten and clarify global risks. From our perspective, the most salient of these findings are as follows:

The chemical composition of the atmosphere is being altered by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. Chimutengwende, on your selection as Chair of the Conference. My government appreciates your willingness to assume this important role and the leadership you have brought to this task. I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate the distinguished representative from Germany, Angela Merkel, for the remarkable job that she has done in guiding our work over the past several years. The task of moving forward more than 150 nations is difficult enough. In this instance, however, the challenge has been compounded by the fact that we are dealing with what is probably the most complicated scientific, environmental, economic and political challenge in history. The international community is in your debt for hosting us and helping us reach the mandate agreed upon in Berlin last year.

Since Berlin, our deliberations have benefitted from the careful, comprehensive and uncompromised work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Their efforts serve as the foundation for international concern and their clear warnings about current trends are the basis for the sense of urgency within my government. We are not swayed by and strongly object to the recent allegations about the integrity of the IPCC's conclusions. These allegations were raised not by the scientists involved in the IPCC, not by participating governments, but rather by naysayers and special interests bent on belittling, attacking and obfuscating climate change science. We want to take this false issue off the table and reinforce our belief that the IPCC's findings meet the highest standards of scientific integrity. We also note with regret that the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), blocked by a very small group of countries, did not agree on how to use the IPCC report. Let me make clear the U.S. view: The science calls upon us to take urgent action; the IPCC report is the best science we have, and we should use it.

In the ongoing scientific effort, Mr. Chairman, I want to note that the United States is proud of the more than \$1 billion annual investment it has been making in recent years on global change research. This is a cost we have taken on in order to enhance our own and the world's understanding of the Earth's atmospheric, oceanic and biological systems and represents not only the seriousness with which we view these matters, but also the willingness of President Clinton and the American people to help pioneer progress on behalf of the environment.

The United States of America takes very seriously the IPCC's recently issued Second Assessment Report, which underscores and amplifies the panel's initial work -- refining estimates and revealing new understandings that serve to signal even louder alarm bells. From our perspective, the most salient of these findings are as follows:

The chemical composition of the atmosphere is being altered by anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases.

The continued buildup of these gases will enhance the natural greenhouse effect and cause the global climate to change.

Based on these facts and additional underlying science, the second assessment reported that "the balance of evidence suggests that there is a discernible human influence on global climate." This seemingly innocuous comment is in fact a remarkable statement: for the first time ever, the world's scientists have reached the conclusion that the world's changing climatic conditions are more than the natural variability of weather. Human beings are altering the Earth's natural climate system.

In turn, the best scientific evidence indicates that human-induced climate change, if allowed to continue unabated, could have profound consequences for the economy and the quality of life of future generations:

Human health is at risk from projected increases in the spread of diseases like malaria, yellow fever and cholera;

Food security is threatened in certain regions of the world;

Water resources are expected to be increasingly stressed, with substantial economic, social and environmental costs in regions that are already water-limited, and perhaps even political costs where there is already conflict over limited resources.

Coastal areas -- where a large percentage of the global population lives -- are at risk from sea level rise.

In our opinion, the IPCC has clearly demonstrated that action must be taken to address this challenge and that, as agreed in Berlin, more needs to be done through the Convention. This problem cannot be wished away. The science cannot be ignored and is increasingly compelling. The obligation of policymakers is to respond with the same thoughtfulness that has characterized the work of the world's scientific community.

Unhappily, Mr. Chairman, while the established international scientific process is working well, the international policy process, as established under the Convention, has not been as successful. The shortcomings of the Convention -- its failure to address the post-2000 period, for example -- were well explored in Berlin and do not bear repeating today. The most salient fact is now more apparent than ever: the current Convention structure has not achieved the results that were anticipated. Few nations in either the developed or developing world have been fully successful in meeting their commitments under articles 4.1 and 4.2 of the Convention. We have to do better.

Over the past year, the United States has been engaged at home and internationally in serious analysis of the successes and failures of the current Convention structure, as well as of the practicality of the various proposals for next steps that have been put forward in recent discussions. While we still have much work to do, our analysis and consideration of this issue to date have led us to certain conclusions about the form of an agreement we hope these negotiations will consider and pursue. In the months ahead, our ongoing analysis and assessment will allow us to more precisely articulate the specific contents that the United States could support.

We begin, Mr. Chairman, from the following set of principles, which will guide our consideration of various proposals, and which we believe should guide our multilateral negotiations:

First, our negotiations focus on outcomes that are real and achievable. Sound policies pursued in the near term will allow us to avoid the prospect of truly draconian and economically disruptive policies in the future. Measured adjustments now and in the years ahead will enable all nations to reduce emissions in an economically sensible manner. Denial and delay will only make our economies vulnerable in the future.

Second, the United States will continue to seek market-based solutions that are flexible and cost-effective. We will not accept proposals that are offered for competitive, not environmental reasons. Serious proposals in the future must not be thinly veiled attempts to gain economic advantage. This is a global problem with global impacts and therefore requires solutions that are fair, and that will ensure prosperity -- now and in the future -- for all the world's people.

And third, the agreement should lay the foundation for continuing progress by all nations in the future. The United States believes that international cooperation on this challenge remains critical to any effective response, and that all nations -- developed and developing -- must contribute to the solution to this challenge. We believe that, while this is a long-term challenge, we must start making progress now and engage the public and private sectors over the medium-term as well. Climate change is a serious problem and will require sustained long-term investment and the full creativity of the marketplace.

President Clinton has urged all Americans and all nations to prepare their economies for the 21st century. Meeting this challenge requires that the genius of the private sector be brought to bear on the challenge of developing the technologies that are necessary to ensure our long-term environmental and economic prosperity.

Based on these principles -- encompassing environmental protection, realism

that this effort must be a partnership with all nations. We stand ready to continue our efforts to provide technical expertise to work with developing countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to continue the partnership which we have begun with many.

In summary, we have come to the conclusion that the current structure of the Convention is less than ideal. Performance under the current regime -- or lack thereof -- suggests that a new model must be considered. Next steps must be structured in a way that will help produce the desired results -- not just more rhetoric. We believe that circumstances warrant the adoption of a realistic but binding target, leaving it to individual governments to decide the most appropriate measures needed to meet the agreed target. We are convinced that the target must be both realistic and binding because it is only through the surety of a commitment of this nature that governments will take their obligations seriously and the only way we can be assured of progress.

We are also convinced that it is the target that should be binding, not the individual measures, thus allowing maximum flexibility in implementation. Continued use of non-binding targets that are not met makes a mockery of the treaty process. It leaves the impression that rhetoric is what counts rather than real emission reductions -- an outcome that is both unacceptable and counterproductive.

Mr. Chairman, the United States is committed to making the international climate change process work. The science is convincing; concern about global warming is real and that we must continue to take steps to address this problem consistent with our long-term economic and environmental aspirations. Working together, it is imperative that we marshal the creativity and will necessary to address this far-reaching challenge. The United States hopes we can negotiate an agreement that is comprehensive, flexible, fair and certain, and which will help prepare our country and the world -- environmentally and economically -- for the next century.