

(Ladies and Gentlemen,)

We all have experienced how the climate is changing. In some areas we have lived through the hottest year in decades, while in others it was the rainiest or in yet others the stormiest. Floods which have killed or left homeless thousands of people in India and Bangladesh are the most recent signs of changing climate. Globally speaking we have experienced four exceptionally warm years during the '90s.

The changing climate and its effect on our ecosystems affect us all. Particularly vulnerable are small island states and low-lying countries, which in many cases are already suffering from salination of their drinking water because of the rising sea level. No country is likely to avoid such consequences. So it is in the interests of us all to work actively to control climate change in a way to make its effects manageable.

There is a no absolute scientific consensus of the consequences of increased greenhouse gas emissions in atmosphere, but it is essential to understand that the risks are greater than of anything else that the mankind has faced.

It is not easy to combat climate change. It will cost a lot of money, but it also offers opportunities for the economy and employment policy. And furthermore, negative consequences of climate change would cost even more. Assessment of the sufficiency of the steps taken must appear on the agenda of all COP sessions; and it should be linked to the scientific process. In this context, the IPCC third assessment report, due in 2001, will be of crucial importance.

In many regions, growing drought will reduce crop yields. The number of people going hungry will also be increased by the fact that pest populations are expected to grow as a result of changes in our ecosystems. The most recent reports from the World Health Organization and World Resource Institute, for instance, show that tropical diseases such as malaria will spread into new areas as the earth gets warmer. This could further aggravate the gap between rich and poor, and the income gap could also be joined by a health gap.

The commitment made in Kyoto to curb emissions of greenhouse gases is historic, but we will actually need far more ambitious emission reductions. Assessment of the adequacy of the steps taken must remain on the agenda of the COP; and it should be linked to the scientific process. In this context, the IPCC third assessment report, due in 2001, will be of crucial importance.

According to the view of the European Union, we should develop revised negotiating text on the Kyoto Mechanisms and on compliance regime, so that the sixth session of the Conference of Parties can make the actual decisions. Therefore we need an intensified work plan so as to ensure that by June 2000 there will be bulk of negotiating texts for discussion. In addition to this we need preparatory process at a