

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conference focussed on the political, social and economic consequences of climate change. There was little disagreement on the basic processes and geophysical effects of climate change, which include changes in temperature, amount and distribution of precipitation, storm frequency and intensity, and sea level.

That the world's economy and ecology are now totally interlocked, was an underlying theme of the Conference. This linkage raised fundamental questions about how policy decisions are taken and their implications for ecological sustainability. While the scope for possible action may grow with technological developments, it is very clear that the obstacles to sustainability are not technical or even economic: they are social, institutional and political.

At the 1988 Toronto Conference on the Changing Atmosphere sponsored by the Canadian Government, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization, there was a call for a twenty percent reduction in global carbon dioxide emissions (from 1988 levels) by the year 2005. Since then, worldwide emissions have increased by approximately six percent and the likelihood of meeting the target is increasingly doubtful. As Christopher Flavin of the Worldwatch Institute pointed out at the Ottawa conference, the twenty percent goal was formulated on the basis of what the climate needs, not what politicians are ready to accept or what economists are willing to put into their econometric models.

Because energy use is the principal source of atmospheric contaminants, energy is viewed as the crux of the problem. An effective response to climate change, Flavin argued, must recognize two things: energy politics is "hardball politics" dominated by a handful of powerful industries and interests; and economic soundness and market forces must be the guiding force in determining appropriate technologies and strategies. There was a strong call at the conference for a political and economic "levelling of the playing field." Subsidies attracted particular attention. According to Jim MacNeill, "When you compare \$40-50 billion a year [for subsidies] in North America to promote fossil fuels, and hence to promote acid rain and global warming, with the decreasing amounts spent