

Climate change is a global problem that cannot be solved by developed countries alone since emissions from rapidly growing developing economies are increasing significantly. All parties to the convention on climate change will have to take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to meet the ultimate convention objective of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous interference with the climate system.

The main contributor of greenhouse gas emissions is carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels. Given the prominent role fossil fuels continue to play in economic development, there is also a growing awareness that an agreement on legally binding targets and timetables requires significant social and economic adjustments by developed countries. Reducing fossil fuel use in Canada is a challenge, due in part to our large land mass, cold climate, energy-intensive and resource-based industry, relatively high rate of population growth and a thriving economy.

Although progress has been made in reducing emissions, current projections show that unless additional measures are taken, Canadian greenhouse gas emissions in the year 2000 will be at least eight per cent higher than our 1990 emissions. Most other countries will also be unable to achieve the Rio commitment. Partnerships with industry, non-governmental organizations and provinces, and involvement by the public are key to finding cost-effective solutions. At the Joint Energy and Environment Ministers' meeting in Toronto in December 1996, ministers agreed to continue to strengthen efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions.

Fresh water and development

Pressures on the quality and quantity of fresh water resources are quickly emerging as major environmental, economic and social issues, particularly in the developing world. More than 1.2 billion people lack access to clean drinking water and over 2.9 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation facilities. The result is a spread of infectious diseases causing more than five million deaths annually, mostly infants. Sustainable management of fresh water resources is essential, given that availability of good quality fresh water is a basic element of human need, economic development and environmental conservation. Canada, as a country with a strong capacity in the sound management of fresh water resources, will work in partnership with developing countries to strengthen their capacity to address their current and future fresh water needs.