

The United States has developed one of the most comprehensive action plans, and we are achieving better than anticipated success from some of our voluntary programs. Still, we are not on course to meet our national commitment announced by President Clinton in April 1993. A full review of our plan should be ready this fall, but preliminary analysis shows that current trends have us on a path that will not return U.S. greenhouse gas emissions to their 1990 levels by the year 2000.

This gap results partly from dramatic economic expansion in the U.S. economy over the past two years -- a welcome event -- and from low oil prices over the same period. But however welcome, these developments also have consequences for U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.

This gap also results in part from our unique system of government. While the Administration has proposed an aggressive program to reduce U.S. emissions and save money for the American economy, the legislative branch controls appropriations. To date, Congress has not provided the funds needed fully to implement the measures contained in our national action plan, and Congressional funding decisions yet to be taken could well result in a significant shortfall.

We are working and will continue to work to meet our national commitment. At the same time, uncertainties surrounding economic growth, fuel prices, and other factors continue to bedevil our ability to achieve a particular emissions objective within a particular timeframe.

And the United States is not alone in experiencing such difficulties. Other Annex I countries are also having significant problems in reaching the goals they have set for themselves. And it is our observation that non-Annex I nations are not making as much progress as we all might like to formulate and implement measures to mitigate climate change.

These hard truths are emerging even though the preponderance of scientific evidence continues to come in that our initial precaution in reducing greenhouse gas emissions was prudent indeed. New evidence continues to mount that global climate change remains a serious challenge to the international community and must be addressed with urgency and priority.

I point this out because it is my government's view that, as we organize ourselves for the next steps, we must individually and collectively reassess the approaches we have been taking to determine whether or not they are the most efficient and reliable means of ensuring real emissions reductions. No doubt this is a difficult question, but it is a legitimate and serious one.