

Some of the draft conclusions contained reservations and they needed to be lifted to have agreement. Saudi Arabia relented in the face of a wide consensus and set aside its reservation on the compliance issue. China reminded Parties that it could and would block progress if its developing country issues were not addressed. This is where the ministerial statements and roundtable discussions proved to be useful reminders to China that there was a general will to make progress. By Friday morning, all remaining issues had been negotiated out of the way and the session closed with a feeling of achievement.

Progress and goodwill notwithstanding, the divergences among the groupings of Parties will re-emerge. If the range of expectations concerning the flexibility mechanisms is not met, the go-slow approach on each and every clause will return. With this in mind, the CoP agreed to modify the schedule of meetings for the year 2000 to give negotiators more opportunity to work out and reconcile differences. The subsidiary bodies will meet in formal sessions for a week in June and again in September. Both sessions will be preceded by a week of informal meetings (no simultaneous interpretation).

The sixth meeting of the CoP will take place in November and is expected to have the negotiating text after the four weeks of preparatory meetings and a series of special workshops. Privately, veteran negotiators from Umbrella Group wonder how they will manage the accelerated work plan and make quality decisions. They once worried that they were going too slow and making poor decisions along the way because the key issues were delegated up to ministers for late night and last minute rulings. Cutting corners at this speed and at this stage in the development of the flexibility mechanisms and the compliance regime could well invite disaster.

Ministerial session

- The ministerial statement portion of the meeting was uneventful, as ministers were not asked to make in camera decisions or resolve problems created by negotiators. The statements by ministers (some 110 statements at 3 minutes each) contributed to reassuring Parties that actions are already underway in many countries to reduce GHG emissions. The clear message emerged from the statements that Parties wanted progress now and decisions at CoP-6.
- The Secretary General of the UN did not attend but the speech read on his behalf asked Parties to press on and aim at ratification by 2002 to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the Earth Summit in Rio. Some EU countries picked up on this theme but the Umbrella Group countries declared that entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol should be at the earliest possible date and did not specify a date.
- Argentina announced it would voluntarily take on a reduction commitment but did not want to join Annex B of the Protocol. It pledged to reduce GHG emissions by 2 to 10% from business as usual and specified how the baseline was calculated.
- In the roundtable portion of the ministerial session, non Annex1 countries joined the debate and talked about preparing their national communications and implementing conservation strategies. This was taken as an indication that developing countries