

Disparate Responses to Climate Change

In a discussion of disparities in the causes and effects of and the responses to climate change, Dr. Gleick pointed out that the industrialized world bears the primary responsibility for the emissions of greenhouse gases. The impacts of climate change will be fairly evenly distributed among nations, but the ability to respond and adapt differs. Unlike Third World countries, the rich countries of the world have the resources for adapting to climate change. This disparity is already causing some North-South tension and may well become a principal source of conflict in the years to come.

Dr. Gleick concluded that although there are both technical solutions (such as energy efficiency, reforestation, water management, grain storage) and political solutions (unilateral, multilateral, and international) to these problems, there was no way to prevent at least some change in climate. And the longer we take to deal with the concentration of greenhouse gases, the more climate change we will be committed to. In this statement he echoed a recurring question throughout the conference of how much time we have to act. As Dr. McElroy pointed out in his opening presentation, if action had been taken earlier, much time would have been saved.