

We hope that our views will strengthen Canada's position at this conference, and reinforce the growing international call for action.

The sense of urgency which prompted this Committee to undertake a study of the complex and compelling phenomenon of global climate change has been reinforced in the course of its work. We acknowledge that much remains to be learned about the phenomenon of climate change, the rate at which the activities of human society will propel such change, and the magnitude and distribution of its effects. By the time scientists have all the answers to these questions, however, global climate change may have been driven by human society to the point where the answers are largely academic.

Given the speed with which humanity's energy-using, industrial, forestry and agricultural activities are altering the composition of the atmosphere, and consequently changing its thermal properties, we see no validity in the argument that governments should delay acting until more detailed information on the likely effects of global climate change is gathered. If human society is in fact initiating profound changes in the climatic systems of our planet, then delaying action could lead to devastating effects on many of the Earth's peoples. If the skeptics are correct and climate change is less of a problem than most scientists anticipate, the policies which we are proposing will still return many benefits, both environmental and economic. We have accepted the argument that a precautionary principle must apply in so vital a situation.

The World Resources Institute (WRI) in a 1990 report, *World Resources 1990-91*, ranked the 50 countries of the world with the largest net emissions of greenhouse gases in 1987, using carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) as the indicators for its "Greenhouse Index", with methane and CFCs expressed as carbon dioxide heating equivalents in metric tons (tonnes) of carbon. According to the WRI estimates, Canada ranked twelfth that year and contributed 2% of total global emissions. While this may not appear to be a substantial share, it is being generated by only 0.5% of the world's population. On a per capita basis, WRI placed Canada fifth at 4.5 tonnes annually per person, exceeded only by four developing countries which either have high rates of deforestation or are Persian Gulf nations consuming energy at a high per capita rate while flaring large quantities of natural gas. Figure 1 shows Canada's ranking both as a total and a per capita emitter of greenhouse gases in 1987.