

Delegation Report

Subsidiary Bodies February 27 - March 4

Consideration of the Second Scientific Assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the issue of whether or not to have a ministerial portion at the Second Conference of the Parties were key issues for members of the Climate Action Network attending the meeting of Subsidiary Bodies February 27 - March 4.

The formal submission of the Second Assessment Report, particularly the Summaries for Policy Makers and Synthesis Report, to the SUBSTA by Dr. Bert Bolin, Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) set the stage for a week-long debate on how the SUBSTA should translate the scientific assessment into policy recommendations for government negotiators.

The United States, led by Working Group II co-chair, Bob Watson, and members of JUSCANZ, including Canada, defended the key conclusions of the SAR, while China and Saudi Arabia did all they could to undermine it. The debate in plenary, as well as presentations during two workshops on policies and measures and emissions limitations focused the Climate Action Network on the key message: a doubling of carbon dioxide equivalent concentrations in the atmosphere is dangerous and must be avoided.

Results of a Dutch modelling exercise, IMAGE, clearly demonstrated that to avoid a rate of warming that exceeds the ability of many ecosystems to adapt, particularly forest ecosystems, warming should be kept to no more than 0.1°C/decade. The IMAGE project used the concept of a safe emissions corridor to explore various emissions scenarios that would be allowed between now and 2010 and still allow future generations to live within the assumed ecological limits. The results show that to keep emissions to a level which would keep temperature increases at no more than 1°C/decade emissions in Annex 1 countries must drop between 37 - 64% from their 1990 levels by 2010. To keep temperature increases from exceeding 0.2°C/decade emissions must fall between 19 and 47%.

The numbers are large and underscore more than ever that a phase-out of fossil fuel use as the world's primary energy supply is inevitable within the next 50 years.

As a result of these and other findings, the need for a ministerial portion at the Second Conference of the Parties is urgent. Ministers, in the view of CAN, must debate the critically important question of what dangerous interference with the earth's climate system is. In the view of CAN, ministers must agree at COP 2 that a doubling of carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere is potentially dangerous and must be avoided. A communique with this conclusion is what negotiators need to focus the work of the AGBM in the coming months. In this regard, the intervention of the United States calling for a ministerial to deal with the greatest environmental issue facing the planet, is important. Leadership on the part of the United States is critical to progress and a significant shift from negative to a more positive approach was noted at these meetings.