



**Speech by the Prime Minister during the plenary session of the  
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**  
Wednesday, 19 February 2003

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to welcome you and I am proud to open your very important meeting.

Thank you for coming to Paris and to UNESCO. Thank you for your welcome. Thank you, each and every one of you for being concerned with the important cause of protecting our planet.

Their Excellencies Mrs Bachelot and Mrs Haignere  
Mr Secretary-General  
Mr Director-General  
Mr President  
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very happy to be with you today to open the working session here at UNESCO and I am proud that my country, France, is hosting the plenary session of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

As you all know, the President of the French Republic, Mr J. Chirac, has made global and national sustainable development one of the priorities for France and therefore for my Government. Combating climate change is a fundamental component of the sustainable development mechanism that we wish to establish.

When UNESCO was being created, the founding governments declared and engraved in marble the following: "Since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed ....."

The foundations of all progress lie in the fields of environment, education, information and knowledge and we should wage war on irresponsible behavior. We should instill the environmental spirit, founded on responsibility and fair use of the resources of our planet, in all people, rich and poor alike.

France has received much recognition, esteem and honour for the work that IPCC has carried out since it was created in 1988 and also through the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). I would therefore like to greet the directors, Professor Jarraud and Mr Kakakhel. It is a real honour for me to be with you today. I consider IPCC's work to be an interdisciplinary work that is unrivaled in other areas of our society.

You have completed successive syntheses of scientific knowledge in the field of climate warming. You have stimulated research on subjects as diverse as the mechanics of climate change under the influence of the increase in the greenhouse effect - we will come back to that - and its impact, not only on nature, but also on society. You have also contributed to work on measures to adapt to this change and to contain it, limiting the greenhouse gas content of the atmosphere.

By means of an original working method - and I would particularly like to say - a method that is rigorous, transparent and open, climatic change is now one of the rare fields in which governments are supported by consensual scientific analyses. We have many scientific analyses, we have some consensual analyses, but consensual scientific analyses are rare and yet they are crucial for guiding policies, our policies and the policies of different governments.

While retaining its personality, and therefore its scientific objectivity, the IPCC has known how to listen to questions from political decision-makers on this subject which is extremely important for humanity, while retaining - and here I must insist - its indispensable independence. Moreover, this is a very important subject and, in the final analysis, it is one of the rare fields in which I see a fair balance between scientific expertise and political decision. I see here something authoritative, an ethic of deliberation which

appears to me to be a sign for the future.

This expertise in the scientific, technical and socioeconomic fields has also been recognized by the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Today we can say that the results of the IPCC constitute the main motivating force for the progress of political agreements that appear to be necessary now.

It is very fortunate that governments are able to use this tool. That it is possible today to refer to work carried out by an incontestable and fundamental organization, on such a difficult subject in which the approaches are often different and even, at times, contradictory.

Some have tried to place in doubt the IPCC's conclusions. Some wanted to close their eyes to the evidence. Today it is impossible to deny the observation that is recognized by the whole scientific community; our planet is getting warmer. We are no longer at the debating stage; we no longer have time to ask questions and to make analyses; we have arrived at the moment of reality, facing our responsibilities: our planet is getting warmer. Let us all weigh the consequences.

We know that action in the field of combat against climate change is no longer a matter of precaution. It is now reality.

Although knowledge of the effect of climate change is still imperfect, this fact should clearly not justify passive behavior, let alone inaction.

Hiding behind uncertainty, as some do, to put off action is a pursuit that we in France consider to be irresponsible. As our President Jacques Chirac vigorously underlined in Johannesburg: "It is obvious that our house is on fire".

And I would like to add that it is up to us all here in the world to do collectively what we can to put out the flames.

The three reports that have resulted from your work, and the scientific community in its overwhelming majority, today predict that by 2100, that is by the end of our century, the average global temperature will have increased by between 1.4°C and 5.8°C.

However, half of this difference, and only half of this uncertainty, depends on policies that we will establish. There are 2% of margins of manoeuvre! But this 2% could change the lives of millions of people around the world today and tomorrow.

Our fellow citizens are asking themselves today about the possible relationship between the frequency and intensity of weather events that we are experiencing and that preoccupy us, as well as climate change due to the greenhouse effect.

To date, nothing has been proven. It is not proven that recent weather events are a sign of climate disruption since we can only come to a scientific conclusion on the longer, more obvious, statistical series.

But when climate change is clearly visible, it is highly likely that it will be accompanied by an increase in extreme weather events, such as more intense rain in certain parts of the world and more intense drought in others.

A number of models, therefore, predict stronger El Niño events and, in our latitude, an increase in both the frequency and intensity of cyclones and depressions over the Atlantic.

And if France until now has been completely spared from these extreme weather events - and I have just stated this to you - we are already taking note of the effect of climate warming on our climate.

Can we remain inactive when faced with the increase in average daily air temperatures, which are at an average of 0.6°C around the world during the 20th century and are even close to 0.9°C for mainland France?

And can we accept that our mountain glaciers - although the same thing is happening in most areas of the world - be considerably reduced in size? We are all thinking of the retreat of the Sea of Ice in the French Alps.

Can we stand by and watch the disruption of the growing cycle of France's forests, a cycle which has been lengthened by 12 days during the last 10 years?

Can we leave the jewels of biodiversity - the coral, particularly in Polynesia - to fade away, a phenomenon that is at least partially due to climate warming?

These considerable worrisome and disquieting issues have led our country to establish an observation centre on the effect of climate warming in 2002, with the mission of collecting and disseminating information, studies and research on the risks associated with climate warming and extreme climatic events.

I also expect this observation centre to draft recommendations on preventive and adaptive measures that could limit the risks linked to climate change.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although the intensity and the scale of these climatic extremes is still covered by much uncertainty, we must all act together, we must all work together to put out the flames that threaten us all.

Even if the challenge today, here and now, may appear immense to us, we can get there if we mobilize ourselves and establish goals to produce results.

The objectives are known; they are specific.

It is a matter of halving the greenhouse gas emissions worldwide before 2050.

For us, the industrialized countries, this means making our emissions four or five times smaller. By virtue of the principle of common, but differentiated, responsibility, we must indeed set the example by implementing domestic policies to combat the greenhouse effect.

Some think, and others want to believe, that this is unrealistic. I am against this opinion, which is also a programmed resignation to facing our collective responsibilities.

Let us look at the figures: such an objective represents an annual gain of 3%. Is this really impossible to attain?

The competitive nature of energy provision today is not only that of providing low-cost energy, not only that of turning to renewable energy, even if these are clearly needed, but is primarily that of more economic consumption hand in hand with greater competition, which will therefore clear new margins for growth.

We need growth and we think that energy savings can enable us to obtain these new margins for growth.

The control of energy consumption should come from several separate sources. Some savings can be made by means of technological progress and particularly thanks to information technology.

However, let us not pull the wool over our own eyes. The main source of savings is primarily changing our behavior and our lifestyles, which must be governed by the environmental spirit that my Government wants to provide.

This spirit must be instilled everywhere, including among those who measure the performance of the county. And the performance of the country must not be the only criteria for the GNP.

We cannot base our development on the exhaustion of our fixed capital - our natural resources. We must take into account this essential factor, environmental capital, when we calculate national prosperity and, in this way, determine new indicators that will enable us to guide this new action.

Creating 50 units of national prosperity is, I believe, naturally very important, but if that is to destroy 100 equivalent units of environmental capital, then it is neither efficient nor acceptable. We cannot pass a degraded situation on to our children and grandchildren.

Even more than in other fields, we must be publicly accountable so as to be more responsible. Assessment will enable us to favour the raising of awareness and commitment to responsibility.

Along with the President of the Republic, who is working with all his contacts on this subject, we would like to reinforce diplomatic multilateral and bilateral action so as to achieve universal ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

Last week, during his interview with President Putin, the President of the French Republic restated his desire to see Russia, member of G8, ratify the Kyoto Protocol without delay and transform that commitment into tangible action. Russia's proposal to organize an international scientific conference on climate change in September 2003 would therefore be even more appropriate.

This conference must contribute to the raising of collective awareness of the urgency of global action.

The Kyoto Protocol, for which the geographic coverage, and objectives, remain limited, is a first step for us to act. It is the result of very long negotiations that associate voluntary measures, market measures and incentives for technology transfer in order to achieve the objectives of reduced emissions.

Today, despite its imperfections, the Kyoto Protocol is the best tool for combating the greenhouse effect. It is already leading us to improve our performance regarding energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, based on existing technology. Today we can gain through economies in the investment and acquisition of new technology for tomorrow.

Although technological progress is important, it appears to me to be fundamental, from social, economic, environmental and even ethical points of view, that make our organizations, logistics, buildings, products and procedures progress so that we implement what we already know rather than put all our eggs in the basket of new technology so that we can bring about real progress for controlling emissions.

Our final objective is simple, but also ambitious: climate change with its disastrous consequences must not become an obstacle to human development and mobilization must start with us, here in France, where I am speaking to you.

What should we do? Some think that tax measures are necessary; others want more information and awareness-raising of the actors, and still others want a constraining, regulatory system.

For myself and the ministers present here, we must implement a pragmatic and determined approach, combining these different tools, all these tools, taxes and information, mobilizing so to let these tools help us obtain, by a good combination of the effects of each, a sufficient result that will enable us to stop the growth of emissions. This is our notion of sustainable development.

My Government is strongly determined. I know that I can count on the enthusiasm and dynamism of Mrs Roselyn Bachelot to make collective awareness progress. I myself am committed to this. In addition to the different initiatives that have already been taken during 2002, we are preparing a priority action plan for 2003, the "Climate Plan 2003" within the framework of the national strategy for sustainable development, which will enable us to foresee all the measures required to plan our action and face up, in this way, to the national stakes.

I expect this Climate Plan to give tangible results. This will require substantial effort from the parties present today.

Last November, during a governmental seminar on sustainable development, bringing together the entire ministerial team, I mobilized all the ministers in my government on this subject and Mrs Aloisi de Laderel came to offer her testimony. We are quite committed to this subject and would certainly like to be able to mobilize our research efforts. The Minister of Research, who is with us today, can bear witness to this commitment France is ambitious to be a world leader by 2010 in everything relating to clean transport, whether such is public or private transport, to be able to provide citizens of this country, here in France, but also in Europe, with vehicles that can engage in liberty of movement, while being able to protect the future of the planet.

We will be able, with the help of research and of industry, to bring about the development of different forms of clean vehicles - I'm thinking of a hybrid vehicle; I am thinking of all types of intervention, both in collective and private transport emissions. This is the number one priority. This does not exclude renewable energies; this does not exclude control of energy consumption as a whole, but establishes a limit, a national limit that can be shared by all, both industry and the citizen, in a development perspective.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Those who seek to oppose adaptation and prevention have taken a wrong turn. As in other fields, we need to combine a curative approach with a preventive one. Scientific knowledge should enable us to better adapt global requirements of responses to the immensity of the stakes. And all this is the objective that the Minister of Research has set for herself.

Scientists and politicians are complementary. The role of the scientist is that of lighting the way for political decisions. He must state the problem and find solutions. He must push back the limits of the possible and provide warnings so that the irreversible never happens.

For the preparation of its fourth assessment report, which you will debate in this conference in the days to come, the IPCC will need all the resources of the international scientific community.

France will contribute actively to this task. We will increase participation of French scientists in the international report process. We will mobilize more means to give you the ability to produce this international report. We will also favour the participation of scientists from developing countries, which are the most vulnerable to the harmful consequences of climate change.

France would like the work to be focused on three main points:

- First, better knowledge of the regionalization of the impact, such as climate change by region in specific forms. What are these forms? How will climate change be felt in each region? What are the tangible threats to small islands? To Europe? This expertise is needed to be able to anticipate and limit the damage;

- Next, we would like to have better knowledge and understanding of the ultimate objective, expressed by the Rio Convention, on the "level of concentration of dangerous greenhouse gases". We can achieve this by leaning on point one and this will enable us to calibrate our efforts from the beginning of this century;

- Finally, we must better take into account the state of our planet's climate and environment using economic piloting and world authority tools.

The final point is outside your field of work, but it must be derived from, and in the same manner as, the contribution you are bringing to a consensual awareness of climate change. I hope that future groups of scientists will quickly bring to us, the politicians, and to us, citizens of the world, pilot instruments to win the climate challenge.

I am confident of your abilities, your energy and your collective intelligence. I know that the distance we have covered to date is remarkable. The results are visible to all. I would therefore like you to continue in this excellence within the UNESCO halls, where all nations are represented. You are interested in one of the most important subjects our planet is living today.

We are very much in a time when the whole world is asking itself about the threat of war and how necessary it is, about all the great subjects in our future, thinking about world authority. The President of the French Republic has called for a World Environment Organization, so that we may be able to ensure that international rules direct the movement of the peoples of the world. We can see that we need this World Environment Organization for the future of our planet just as we need the World Trade Organization (WTO) to balance world trade, balance the development of the South and to look to a better-balanced multi-polar world and, just as we need the UN to defend international policy that favours peace in all circumstances and that only chooses war as a last option. We can clearly see that our planet will be subjected to multiple dangers. The only way to act as men worthy of the principle of humanity is to provide our world, to provide our planet, with authoritative international instruments, areas of law, areas of dialogue and discussion in which we can build the future together. This responsibility is bigger than we are. This is addressed to the generations to come. It requires all our mobilization. The planet deserves authoritative world organization to ensure peace, trade and also the protection of our environment.

Thank you.

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