

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

TEXT OF A SPEECH

MADE BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION

ARNOLD KOLLER

AT THE SECOND WORLD CLIMATE CONFERENCE

IN GENEVA

ON

TUESDAY 6 NOVEMBER 1990

Mr. Chairman  
Your Majesty  
Mrs. and Messrs. Prime Ministers  
Mr. Secretary General  
Mr. Executive Director  
Messrs. Heads of Agencies and Organisations  
Your Excellencies  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for Switzerland to welcome you all here today in Geneva for the Second World Climate Conference. And it is a privilege for me to have the opportunity to address this distinguished assembly on a most important problem which affects humanity as a whole.

Since we have come to realise that the impacts of human activities on our planet are reaching unprecedented levels, we have also become more and more aware that ours is a finite and unique world, whose capacity to sustain life depends on subtle natural equilibria.

As the international scientific community convened here last week aptly reminded us, we have also realised our profound ignorance of the complex processes and mechanisms which regulate our climate and all living systems.

First of all, therefore, we must endeavour to improve our understanding of these mechanisms, through continued study and analysis of the processes at work in our climate system and of the factors affecting it. This will require unprecedented interdisciplinary co-operation; national, regional, and international scientific programmes must direct their future efforts towards this end.

Next, at the decisional level, we must act firmly and within a global perspective to curb the multiple pollutions which are upsetting natural equilibria, to arrest the pillage of natural resources and to preserve them for future generations.

Finally, in spite of the sometimes diverging interests and particular situations, we must lay the foundations of a new international solidarity. Only in this way can we succeed in finding lasting and effective solutions to global environmental problems in the long term.

It is undoubtedly true that we are not tackling a global environmental problem for the first time. The Conference on the Protection of the Ozone Layer, held in London last June, serves to illustrate our firm commitment to taking concrete measures in response to a global threat. However, for all its severity, the ozone problem is comparatively easy to address.

In contrast climate change, which scientists - to whom I wish to pay homage - have been predicting for long, is a much broader and more complex problem. Undoubtedly, modern technology must and can provide solutions. However, the root cause of the problem lies in our very attitudes, in our domineering view of the world and nature, which is why true and lasting solutions can only be found through radical changes in our societies. We shall have to learn to bow to the reality of a finite world and to the immutable laws of nature. We shall have to redefine our development. This Conference and the resulting Declaration are a first decisive step in this direction.

Our action must be guided by three principles: the precautionary principle, equity and solidarity.

Mr. Chairman, I am fully aware of the magnitude of the task to be accomplished and of its far-reaching implications.

We have already stressed on numerous occasions the need to obtain the most exhaustive and accurate scientific data so that we can take sensible and rational decisions in the area of climate change. We have entrusted the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change with the task of producing these data.

The scientists who participated in this effort have now convinced us that, in spite of the complexity of the issues and the remaining uncertainties, what we know now is more than enough to warrant no further delay in making specific and concrete commitments in what we regard as priority areas.

Thus, the industrialised countries, which bear the chief responsibility for the problem, not to mention other forms of pollution, must reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases, in particular carbon dioxide.

In this respect, it seems to us essential that all industrialised countries participate fully in this effort in a spirit of solidarity, and that the largest emitters commit themselves to reductions in proportion to their emissions.

Switzerland is determined to assume its share of the responsibility and take the measures necessary to reduce its emissions of carbon dioxide. Our minimal objective is to stabilise these emissions at their 1990 level by the year 2000. Priority will be given to energy saving measures and improvements in energy efficiency.

Moreover, the Swiss Federal Council intends to introduce a tax on carbon dioxide emissions, a measure which should contribute significantly to stabilising fossil fuel consumption.

Our experts are presently studying the feasibility and costs of 20% and 50% cuts in carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2005 and 2025 respectively. On the basis of the results, the Federal Council will decide on a future course of action to reduce these emissions.

Mr. Chairman, we consider measures to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases as a vital element of the global strategy to curb global warming. However, it is also essential to realise that the global warming problem will not be solved by these measures alone.

Industrialised countries must also intensify their co-operation with developing countries. It is imperative that we support their efforts to combat poverty, malnutrition and all the other factors which contribute to the multiple aggressions against their ecological base. In this respect we must clearly provide developing countries with additional financial resources so that they too are in a position to participate in the global effort to combat climate change.

This effort should include in particular the efficient use of natural and energy resources and the sustainable management of forests. To this end, we industrialised countries must promote the transfer of the most efficient technologies to developing countries and countries of Central and Eastern Europe, so that these countries can secure their economic development while controlling their greenhouse gas emissions.

The convention on climate change, which the international community is ready to negotiate and will adopt in conjunction with the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, will provide a novel and essential impetus for this co-operation.

Switzerland regards the widest possible participation by developing countries in this negotiation as essential. We intend to contribute significantly to the trust fund that UNEP and WMO will establish to support such participation, and will also make contributions to the secretariat of the Negotiating Committee.

Mr. Chairman, we shall have to show responsibility and solidarity at all levels - global, regional, local, and also individual - in order to rise to the formidable challenge of global warming.

To this end, all actors must be able to benefit from adequate, accurate and accessible information. Establishing the mechanisms which will be able to disseminate this much needed information is imperative and urgent.

Switzerland intends to contribute to such an endeavour and is presently examining the possibility of creating, in collaboration with UNEP, an international climate information centre in Geneva. The vocation and purpose of this centre will be to collect and disseminate pertinent information on climate change issues, in particular for the benefit of developing countries.

In addition, the Swiss Federal Government is supporting an initiative by the University of Geneva to create an International Academy of the Environment. The Academy will provide continued education in the field of environment to decision makers worldwide.

Finally, at the national level, my country will see to it that courses on environmental matters, and in particular climate change, be incorporated in school and university curricula.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to conclude by saying how honoured and pleased I am that Switzerland was able to contribute to the organisation of this Conference, and to the elaboration of the Ministerial Declaration. I can assure you of our firm intention to continue to participate actively in this process, in particular within the framework of the upcoming negotiations.

May I also congratulate, in the name of my country, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organisation for their outstanding achievements. I sincerely hope that their efforts will result in the adoption of an effective convention on climate change and protocols, in conjunction with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which will be hosted by Brazil in June 1992.

We are less than twenty months away from that historic moment when, for the first time ever, Heads of State from around the world will come together to draft an action plan for an intelligent stewardship of our planet. It is my sincere hope that this Second World Climate Conference will be a significant step towards the success of that most important event.

Thank you.