

Climate Change: Ten Years After Rio
Remarks of Elliot Diringer
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at the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit
New Delhi, India
February 11, 2002

I'd like to thank TERI for providing me the opportunity to speak here today. The concerns we are addressing at this summit reach across the globe. But too often, I am afraid, we understand them only from a single vantage point. I am very grateful to be here in New Delhi to share my perspective and, more importantly, to learn from the perspectives of others.

I represent the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, a US-based NGO dedicated to achieving fair and effective action against climate change. The Pew Center brings together expert analysis and a progressive business perspective. We work with scientists, economists and other experts to examine and explain the many dimensions of climate change. And we work with major corporations to develop and promote practical, cost-effective strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Our goal is a smooth transition to a clean energy economy that ensures both a stable climate and strong, sustainable growth. We have two overriding policy objectives: the establishment of flexible, mandatory measures to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the United States; and the creation over time of a global framework that helps put all countries on the path to climate protection and sustainable development.

One of the signature achievements of the Earth Summit in 1992 was the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which commits nations to the long-term goal of a safe and stable climate. Ten years after Rio, we are at last in a position to report some measure of progress toward that goal. Despite the withdrawal of the United States, or perhaps in part because of it, other industrialized nations have resolved to push forward with the Kyoto Protocol. The recent agreements in Bonn and in Marrakech, while imperfect, establish a sound, workable framework for cost-effective emissions reduction. They represent a triumph not only for multilateralism, but also for the principle of harnessing the global market to protect our global environment. Having made the hard compromises, nations must now move forward with ratification, and implementation, so they can begin to deliver on Kyoto's promise.

Whether or not it is party to Kyoto, the United States must also commit itself to concrete action to reduce emissions. In time, the United States must again become a full partner in the international effort. But it does not appear that time will come soon. There is virtually no chance the present administration will reverse its opposition to Kyoto. Nor does it appear the administration is prepared to advance serious domestic measures to curb emissions. Yet there are signs that the United States is in fact moving closer to recognizing and beginning to meet its responsibilities as the world's largest greenhouse gas polluter. Just as President Bush's rejection of Kyoto helped galvanize international

support for the Protocol, it has helped stir support for domestic measures as well. It has elevated the issue in the press, and in Washington. And it has spurred bipartisan interest in Congress, where leading lawmakers from both parties have introduced measures that could start the United States on the path to emissions reduction. It may be years still before the United States launches the kinds of efforts that ultimately are needed. But I believe public support, and the prospects for action, will continue to build.

Support is growing, as well, within the U.S. business community. Many in the private sector, it is true, are pleased with the present administration's approach. But a growing number of companies – including the 37 major corporations that are members of the Pew Center's Business Environmental Leadership Council – are taking concrete steps to reduce their emissions. What's more, these companies favor government action mandating broader efforts. Many, particularly the multinationals, may be disadvantaged by the U.S. withdrawal from Kyoto. They will not be able to manage their emissions reductions as cost-effectively and they may miss important market opportunities. We believe it is important that any domestic regime in the United States provide opportunities for international trading and emissions offsets, and that it be as compatible as possible with the international regime to help pave the way for their ultimate convergence.

We must of course recognize that Kyoto's entry into force, and any U.S. effort that may emerge in parallel, will represent only first steps. And while the road from Rio to Marrakech was difficult, the road ahead will be more difficult still. If we are to construct the full global framework needed to achieve the objective of the Framework Convention, we must begin focusing right now on the next set of critical challenges. One challenge is deciding whether the Convention's long-term objective must be translated into an agreed, quantifiable target – and if so, how. Others include devising medium-term emissions targets that can most effectively mobilize investment in climate-friendly technologies; and creating stronger mechanisms to ensure that these technologies are widely shared.

But the most critical – and most difficult – challenge ahead is reaching consensus on an equitable sharing of responsibility for addressing climate change. Ultimately, we can achieve the objective set in Rio only if all nations are assured that each is contributing its fair share to this collective effort. And this can happen, I believe, only if we understand climate change – both the challenges it presents, and the opportunities – in the broader context of sustainable development. In the efforts they are already undertaking, developing countries themselves are providing powerful evidence of the linkages between climate and sustainable development. Through actions to protect their local environments, reform their energy markets, strengthen their economies and create a more promising future for their people, many developing countries are at the same time achieving extraordinary progress in reducing or avoiding greenhouse gas emissions. The very impressive efforts underway here in India to improve energy efficiency and expand the use of renewable power are prime examples. These efforts by developing countries must be more broadly recognized. And they must be nurtured. Strengthening the incentives for investment and technology flows, and the capacity to fruitfully absorb

them, will better enable developing countries to meet their critical development needs while contributing further to the effort against climate change. Developing countries are understandably reluctant to consider taking on binding commitments until developed countries demonstrate real progress in meeting their own. But we must begin now to open a new dialogue – a dialogue grounded in a deeper understanding of the links between climate and sustainable development – so we may in time arrive at an equitable sharing of our “common but differentiated” responsibilities.

In closing, I'd like to offer some brief thoughts on the opportunities presented by the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Translating the vision of sustainable development into tangible benefits for the millions around the world who have yet to share in the fruits of globalization requires action on many fronts – action to protect freshwater resources, improve basic health services, enhance agricultural productivity, and grow new industries. Each of these, in turn, depends at least in part on the availability of adequate energy resources. This new energy must be not only affordable and reliable – it must also be clean. A major aim for Johannesburg, one that would address both climate and sustainable development, should be the launch of substantial new efforts to deliver clean energy in developing countries. The need, the benefits, and the barriers are well understood. What is needed now is for governments and the private sector to commit additional resources.

Ten years after nations pledged themselves to the fight against climate change, we can at last report some progress. A real and sustained commitment to clean energy development would help build on this progress, and would help ensure future generations a fairer, safer, more prosperous world.

Thank you very much.