

Newsroom

02/05/2009

Senator Kerry's Remarks to the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit

Hello everyone, this is Senator John Kerry. I had hoped to be with you in person today, standing alongside my dear friend Dr. Pachauri. Votes in the Senate on our economic recovery package may be keeping me in Washington, but nothing can keep me from standing in solidarity with all of you in our fight for to deal with the reality of global climate change.

And this morning I address you with a simple message: America is back. After years on the sidelines, the United States is determined to address climate change. Our new President and our new Congress will actively reengage with the global community to solve this challenge. But make no mistake – global climate change waits for no man and respects no border, and we cannot solve this crisis without the committed participation of all the nations of the world.

Today we are ten months from negotiating the follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol, and people everywhere have high expectations --- and they should. Delegates will meet in March and June to prepare language to be finalized in Copenhagen this December as the basis of a new global treaty. There is no time to waste.

Don't take my word for it, just look at the science: the most critical trends and facts all point in the wrong direction. CO2 emissions grew four times faster during the last eight years than they did in the 1990s. Two years ago the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued a series of projections for global emissions, based on likely energy and land use patterns. Well, today emissions have actually moved beyond the worst case scenarios predicted by all of the IPCC's models! Our oceans and forests are losing their natural ability soak up and store greenhouse gases, and we are seeing a climate forcing signal arriving stronger and faster than expected.

The perverse reality of this crisis is that the nations that have done the least to bring about climate change will be among the most affected – and that includes India. Already, “wild weather” has brought to South Asia the worst floods in modern memory and displaced 20 million people. Scientists are now warning that the Himalayan glaciers, which supply water to almost a billion people, could disappear completely by 2035. This would reduce the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmaputra – rivers that once were the cradles of civilization– to cracked earth at the mercy of seasonal rainfall. Meanwhile, rising sea levels are forcing salt water into the Ganges, with the potential to destroy millions of acres of fertile Indian soil. In fact, farming output in India is projected to fall as much as 30-40% by 2080. Quite simply, these conditions would result in a landscape and a world we don't recognize – a ravaged planet where all of us would be in crisis.

The maxim of America's own Revolution – that we must all hang together, or we will all hang separately – applies today on a global scale: the nations of the world must join together to address these dire threats. But as an American, I can share with you my confidence that the United States will now lead by example. We understand that we contribute 25% of global

emissions, and we have an obligation to make major reductions – and we will. You might not know it, but already over 800 American cities have pledged to meet or beat the Kyoto targets, and over half of the U.S. economy has voluntarily adopted mandatory emission reduction goals. At the national level, President Obama has promised to develop—and the Congress will work to rapidly pass—a domestic cap-and-trade program to reduce emissions 80% by 2050.

But the story cannot and must not end there. If America's emissions went to zero tomorrow, we would still face a global catastrophe. We share a world today of shared consequences, and we all have a shared stake in getting this right.

Many countries around the world are already taking action. Mexico, South Africa, Brazil, the EU and others have made meaningful domestic climate change policy commitments in recent months. India last year announced its own National Action Plan on climate change, which sets out important policy priorities – but is notably lacking any fixed commitments or timetables. The Indian government has also set out important goals regarding energy intensity and renewable electricity development.

But the inescapable truth is that we are collectively falling far short of what the science tells us must be done. A partnership led by some of America's top universities and think tanks, including the University of Pennsylvania, MIT, and The Heinz Center, recently summed up the impact of all of these domestic policy proposals – including President Obama's proposal of 80% reductions by 2050.

They discovered something that none of us can afford to ignore: If every nation were to make good on its existing promises, we would still see atmospheric carbon dioxide levels well above 600 parts per million—50% above where we are now. This translates into global temperatures at least 4 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. No one disputes that this would be catastrophic.

That is why we must enlist the entire world to do more—and no country, not America and not India, can be exempt. Worldwide, we need more than just a policy shift. We need a transformation in public policy thinking to embrace the reality of what science is telling us, take responsibility for its implications, and then act in accordance with the full scope and urgency of the problem.

We must finally give life and full meaning to the idea of “common but differentiated responsibilities” among nations. In Kyoto people stiff-armed that discussion. But the landscape has shifted over the past decade. China is now the world's largest emitter and India the fourth-largest – and with its energy consumption projected to quadruple over the next 25 years, India will overtake Russia as the third largest emitter by 2015. In fact, developing countries will account for three-quarters of increases in global energy use over the next two decades.

These facts aren't lost on American politicians who are skeptical about a global climate change agreement. In the Senate, I chair the Committee that is responsible for ratifying all international treaties. And no matter how hard some of us fight, the Senate will not ratify one that exempts the developing world from playing some role in solving this problem. While the format, structure

and timeline of these commitments will vary based on development level and capabilities, all nations must contribute. We cannot repeat the mistake of Kyoto.

Our debate must move beyond the old uncompromising positions. To allow the developing world to repeat the mistakes of those who came before is to sentence all of us to environmental catastrophe—but to deny them the right to the prosperity and possibilities they seek is obviously unjust and equally unacceptable. Fortunately there's a third choice—there must be growth, opportunity and development -- and we all must work together to ensure that it is sustainable.

This does not have to be frightening. In fact, the opportunity for India is tremendous. You have some of the best engineers in the world, and your innovations in wireless technology have allowed India to do extraordinary things and reach rural communities in ways that just a generation ago would have been unimaginable. Your energy technology can similarly “leapfrog” so you never have to build another dirty coal-fired power plant – instead, you can build them to burn clean, and apply an exciting new technology that would capture the carbon dioxide emissions and convert them into a carbonate that can be reused as a construction material.

India already has the world's fourth-largest installed wind capacity, and companies like Suzlon and Reliance Solar are global leaders. Already, India is the second-largest destination for clean tech venture capital—and India's share is projected to total \$150 billion over the next decade. I am personally excited about the tremendous opportunities to supply secure, affordable and reliable power to tens of millions of rural households using off-grid solar and other renewables.

I know in this economy, people are going to sit there and say we can't afford to do this. Well – they're wrong. We can't afford *not* to do this.

The question is not whether or not we pay for climate change. The real question is whether we pay it now in a way that also helps us break humanity's addiction to oil, strengthens our global system and cleans up our environment—or we can pay for it later on a massive, unpredictable scale in the currency of environmental devastation, war, human misery, and reduced economic growth for decades to come. And while I am very aware of the unique perils of this economic moment, I believe the choice we cannot afford is the second one.

This is a conversation we need to be having among ourselves and across our cultures. Although I can now miraculously address your conference from thousands of miles away, the lines of communication between our nations and civilizations are nowhere near as strong or as clear as they need to be. We need to learn to speak across the barriers that divide us—especially the developed and developing worlds. It is in that spirit that I speak to you today.

Hinduism teaches that there is a divine presence in rivers, mountains, and all of nature. The verses of the Muslim Quran say that Allah “spread [the earth] out like a carpet; set thereon mountains firm and immobile; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance.” As the Sikh scripture *Guru Granth Sahib* says, “Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all.” And Christianity calls mankind the stewards of God's creation.

So let us continue to look for common ground and never forget humanity's shared bottom line. The task ahead of us is a tall order, but your help brings us one step closer. Thank you and good luck.