



ITALY

STATEMENT BY
THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY

THE HONORABLE
ROMANO PRODI

TO THE HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE
THEMATIC PLENARY ON ADAPTATION

NEW YORK, 24 SEPTEMBER 2007

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The planet is warming up. There are still some doubters, but it is a proven fact that the world is overheating due to uncontrolled gas emissions generated by humanity, primarily CO₂.

Instead of resigning ourselves to it, we must act. We cannot run the risk of doing nothing about it, because apart from anything else we have a moral obligation towards future generations. Fatalism has never benefited anyone. In this case the consequences could be devastating to millions of human beings and to the planet.

We have consulted at length before deciding to act. We have studied and analysed the problems. But now that we have the diagnosis, we have to apply the treatment. We can wait no longer. We must hasten the pace if we wish to establish a new covenant with nature before it is too late. We shall benefit greatly by it, also because respect for the environment can act as a powerful development driver.

In June this year the Summit of the most industrialised countries at Heiligendamm sent out a very powerful political signal, and a clear framework of reference which we must now flash out. The forthcoming Washington and Berlin meetings will therefore be important steps in preparing for the Bali World Conference in December on climate change.

It is essential for us to realise that global problems of the kind we are discussing here also demand global solutions. Solutions agreed by all. The United Nations alone can therefore provide the framework within which we must act.

An approach in which *climate change, energy security and economic development* are all facets of the same problem can offer new opportunities. For a system to contain harmful gas emissions is also a system which not only improves the quality of life for each one of us, but also weakens energy dependency, narrows the gap between the rich and the poor countries, and discourages migration...

Many more years of research and technological development lie ahead. But those who only concentrate on the costs of an environmental policy which can address the challenges of our age fail to consider another equally

important element: the fact that the demand for clean products will soon sharply reduce the costs of the new technologies. We only need to think of what mobile telephones or the Internet were only 15 years ago...

Europe took important decisions at the Spring Summit of the Heads of State and Government: the unilateral 20% reduction of greenhouse gases by 2020 and a series of equally ambitious measures on energy efficiency, renewable energy sources and biofuels. But it is obvious that any post-Kyoto agreement can only be achieved within the United Nations.

Italy will continue to play her part in this process. And she could hardly do otherwise. Ever since the National Climate Change Conference in Rome a few days ago clearly showed that Italy is a country of enormous value for its biodiversity, its environmental and landscape quality, and the widespread presence of cultural, archaeological and historical property. It is a unique environment in the world, a fundamental resource for the purposes of the debate we are holding here, which requires us, in a sense, to set an example.

And Rome will also be the venue, in November, for the World Energy Congress attending by representatives of industry, governments, international organisations and research establishments, as well as scholars and experts. It will be an opportunity for a worldwide debate at the highest level on energy issues.

2009, when Italy takes over the Presidency of the G8, will be a crucial year for setting out the post-2012 picture. And it is with this clearly in mind that we are preparing for it.

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I would now like briefly to raise four points on the specific issue of adaptation. This is a crucial issue together with the issue of mitigation, because it has to do with living as well as possible in a new climate, which is irreversible in the short to medium term.

The first point is planning. Adaptation measures have to be incorporated into national development plans. For planning costs less than implementing remedial measures, and is the best possible way of underpinning public and private investment to strengthen the response capacity and avoid investments which only increase the vulnerability of the system. The private sector is

essential here.

My second point is predictability. The ability to know things in advance is one of the essential elements in drawing up adaptation plans. We have to encourage the scientific community and the monitoring agencies to play their full part, to prevent inaction due to a lack of knowledge, or mistaken information from irreversibly damaging the environment, with extremely serious consequences on the population.

The third point has to do with development aid policies. The role of development aid policies in the field of adaptation is decisive because climate change often thwarts poverty alleviation programmes, for example in the fields of agriculture or tourism. This also applies to bilateral and multilateral assistance, whether European, or from the United Nations or the international financial institutions. The situation in the Caribbean and the small island states - to mention just one example - is becoming increasingly dramatic. This is why Italy has set in motion regional renewable energy programmes in the small island states.

I have left until last one point to which I attach particular importance. Water. Traditionally considered to be a plentiful resource, water is now seen for what it really is: an extremely valuable, and limited, resource. It was quite rightly taken up among the Millennium Goals because - according to FAO - by 2025 there will be 1.8 billion people living in area with no water at all, and two-thirds of the world's population will perhaps have to cope with serious water shortages. The problems connected with water access and management, aggravated by climate change, are a serious threat to growth and stability in many countries. Adaptation measures are therefore top priorities. We have the know-how, but we have to act on it at once. This is why the Italian government - as one of the largest donors to the international institutions for water programmes and combating desertification - has asked for water to be internationally acknowledged to be a common good, such that water access is declared to be inalienable human right.

Thank you.