



UNEP

Opening Address by

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at the

Workshop on "The Ozone Treaties and Their Influence
on the Building of Environmental Regimes" on the Occasion
of the 10th Anniversary of the Vienna Convention
for the Protection of the Ozone Layer

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Two pillars of the post-Vienna Convention and Montreal Protocol order are now firmly in place.

The first one concerns the welfare of the future generations. The world has a special responsibility of bequeathing to them natural endowments as well as capital and technology in sufficient measure.

The second one relates to differentiated obligations. While all countries have responsibilities towards the global environment, the industrialized countries must take the lead in committing financial and technological resources, both on account of their greater historical and current levels of use of global environmental resources as well as their greater present capabilities.

The debate on the ozone layer has not ebbed. Achievements of the ozone regime since 1990 have been considerable. But the underlying issues are far from resolved. While earlier efforts focussed on defining a general approach on protecting the ozone layer, we now face numerous difficulties of implementation.

Industry faces the challenge of rapid rate of shifting to less damaging processes and products while simultaneously minimizing emissions from existing equipment. Developing countries face the challenge of quickly gaining experience in identifying, financing and implementing phase-out projects.

And negotiators are faced with real problems of maintaining cooperation and confidence among nations.

With political backlash in a few pockets against the protection effort, with the steady growth in the complexity of obligations under the protocol, with the wide divergence in the effectiveness of national programs. We must be constantly alert to avoid difficulties in implementation of the provisions of the ozone treaties. Continuation of the extraordinary cooperative spirit displayed by all nations so far is a must.

We look forward to pragmatic suggestions from this group of luminaries on ways and means of overcoming these difficulties.

Credit for the achievements under these ozone treaties must also go to the good sense of ordinary people, whose aspirations and hopes Non-Governmental Organizations have sought to articulate. Millions across the globe have perceived the incompatibility between the use of ozone depleting substances and the safety of the ozone layer. The Vienna Convention and Montreal Protocol have given voice to their perceptions.

The ozone treaties were a historic beginning, historic, certainly, but equally certainly just a beginning. It is clear that there can be no relapsing into comfortable complacency. What has been achieved through these ozone treaties will prove a Pyrrhic victory unless they lead irreversibly and without interruption to the complete elimination of ozone-depleting substances.

Therefore, even as we congratulate ourselves, we seek assurances that the Protocol that has been ratified by so many countries constitutes the commencement of a time bound process of phasing out ozone depleting substances.

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It is a great honour for me to be invited to address this distinguished audience today. We thank the Government of Austria for giving us an opportunity, in this beautiful city, to reflect upon the distance we have covered in the implementation of our commitments to protect the ozone layer and the horizons that lie ahead. As Dag Hammarskjold rightly said "Only he who keeps his eye fixed on the horizon will find his right road". Indeed, for all of us, the events connected with the tenth anniversary celebrations of the epochal Vienna Convention symbolize a breath of hope for the survival of life upon our planet.

The Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol were the fruits of a truly collaborative global effort. Although the United Nations Environment Programme provided the initial impetus, it was the contributions of many others -- in defining the issues and bringing to bear a wealth of information, research experience and seasoned judgment in their fields of expertise that finally clinched the issue.

We are honoured by the presence, in our midst, of many distinguished personalities who contributed to the success of this global endeavour. Their contributions are too well known to require any detailed elaboration. Let me assure you, your excellencies, that your words are always listened to with respect, carrying as they do the imprint of keen intellects and vast experience.

Here, I must particularly acknowledge the significant role played by Professor Winfried Lang in the negotiation of the Vienna Convention. We greatly value his close association with UNEP in the field of international law and more recently in discussions on environment and trade.

Future historians will view the ozone treaties as the beginning of a long global swing to sustainable development. At Vienna and then at Montreal, the global community finally garnered the political courage to alter the course of one aspect of its economic growth to avoid potential future catastrophe.

Indeed, the success of the ozone treaties need not be judged narrowly in terms of success of the implementation of their provisions.

Their achievements have to be evaluated in terms of the process that they signified and those they have set into motion.

Taken together, the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol accelerated the evolution of the concept of sustainable development by establishing the linkage between environment and development with due consideration for future generations. They proved the importance of the precautionary approach to global environmental issues -- a major precedent for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on Climate Change. They led to the establishment of international institutional frameworks to address global environmental issues. They influenced the adoption of the principle of differentiated obligations.

Certain innovative provisions of the Convention and the Protocol have influenced the formulation of other global environmental treaties. I refer to the financial mechanism under Article 10, non-compliance procedure under Article 8, assessment and review control measures under Article 6, special situation of developing countries under Article 5 of the Protocol and Research and Systematic observation under Article 3 of the Vienna Convention.