

Presentation of the Paris Conference on the Environment (2-3 February 2007)

Last September French President Jacques Chirac announced before the United Nations General Assembly in New York:

“We all know that uncontrolled human activity is bringing about a sort of slow collective suicide. Disaster can only be averted if nations can come together to support jointly agreed commitments. Let us create a United Nations Environment Organization, the expression of the world's ecological conscience, with the means to assume this responsibility, the forum in which we take common action for future generations. France will be hosting an international conference next year to bring together all those who want to make progress on this project, which is crucial to the future.”

The Paris Conference on the Environment will be held on 2-3 February 2007, the day after the IPCC Working Group I Session on the Science of Climate Change, which will also be held in Paris. It will bring together some 150 prominent personalities from every region of the world including scientists, economists, business leaders, heads of NGOs, media personalities, members of governments and heads of international organizations, all of whom share a personal commitment to the environment and have shown their determination to take action. The fact that those attending are from such diverse, open and international backgrounds shows that only a joint effort on all our parts can change people's ways of thinking and patterns of production and consumption.

A Committee of Honour chaired by Alain Juppé, a former Prime Minister of France and Mayor of Bordeaux and including such prominent members of French society as Hubert Védrine, former French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicolas Hulot, President of the Nicolas Hulot Foundation, Jean Jouzel, climatologist, Bertrand Collomb, Chairman of Lafarge, Edgar Morin, philosopher and writer, and Laurent Stéfani, French Ambassador in charge of the Environment, officially began preparations for this Conference at a meeting with French President Jacques Chirac at the Elysée Palace on 12 December 2006.

The Conference will provide a forum for jointly reviewing major threats to our planet that jeopardize the harmony of our societies. It also aims to determine priorities for action, including through the strengthening of international environmental governance. The current system of agreements is fragmented and weak with its 500 international agreements, 18 agencies, relevant programmes and international financial institutions. It is therefore essential to transform the United Nations Environment Programme into an Environment Organization thereby making it an actual United Nations agency in its own right with the necessary means to fulfil its mission.

PROGRAMME

On late Friday morning of 2 February 2007, President Chirac will open the Conference. The opening session will be followed by a lunch hosted jointly by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and the French Minister for the Ecology and Sustainable Development.

In the afternoon, several experts in the following fields will give presentations at six workshops to be held at the International Conference Centre, avenue Kléber, and co-chaired by two participants (one from France and the other from another country):

- 1) Climate disruption

This workshop will deal with the seriousness and the consequences of climate change. Building on the latest IPCC conclusions, it will study the impact of climate change and cost of international inaction and propose measures, particularly in the energy and transport sectors, which are commensurate with the challenges we are facing.

2) Acting together for biodiversity

This workshop will describe the loss of biological diversity and its impact on human societies. On the basis of action already carried out, it will provide the outline for a new mode of governance to better withstand this loss. It will focus on such emerging issues as high seas marine biodiversity and the need for international scientific expertise on biodiversity.

3) Pollution and health

This workshop will focus its work on monitoring transfers of hazardous substances and waste and the threats that they pose on the one hand, and both the global and local effects of air pollution, including in terms of public health on the other. It will study ways to implement the polluter pays principle more effectively.

4) Water, a shared issue

In the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), this workshop will deal with governance of shared water resources, sanitation issues, especially in developing countries, and action to adapt water management to climate change.

5) Revolutionizing how we address ecological challenges

This workshop will deal with the human dimension of the ecological crisis. Individual behaviour and patterns of production and consumption must change if we are to cope with the challenges of the contemporary world, the population explosion, uncontrolled urbanization and mass poverty.

6) Strengthening international environmental governance

This workshop will draft a critical report on the way international cooperative efforts are currently organized reflecting the fragmented and weak nature of the United Nations system in particular. It will call for a strengthening of international environmental governance through ambitious institutional reform, transforming the UNEP into a full-fledged United Nations agency – the United Nations Environment Organization (UNEO).

Saturday 3 February, a summary of the workshops will be given, followed by the closing session. President Chirac will draw conclusions from the work calling for international action to preserve ecological balances, particularly through more effective international environmental governance. A pioneer group will thereby be formed to work towards achieving a consensus for the UNEO in the international arena.

