

Climate Change and the Environment- An Indian Perspective

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Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be here at this Conference organised by the Monash University on "Kyoto- The Impact on Australia". I might, at the outset, mention that we cherish our links and cooperation with the Monash University. There are now an increasing number of Indian students who are coming here for their higher studies and enjoying the benefits of your commitment to academic excellence. The Monash Faculty has also taken a keen interest in promoting understanding and cooperation between India and Australia. We particularly enjoyed the opportunity of being able to welcome academics from the University, like Professor John Mckay and Professor Marika Vicziany in the recent Conference in New Delhi, on cooperation between India and Australia in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific Regions.

The question of how best we can contribute to the preservation of our environment and safeguard succeeding generations against the dangers posed by environmental degradation and its consequent fallout on climatic conditions and even our very existence and progress has been an issue of growing global concern in recent decades. It was in the wake of these concerns that world leaders met at the Plenary Session of the United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972. I think I can do no better to articulate the dilemmas, difficulties and difficult choices faced by India and other developing countries in dealing with issues of environmental degradation than to allude to some of the salient points that our then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi made at this Conference. I do so primarily to draw attention to the reasons which have motivated our approach to the Rio Earth Summit and the subsequent conferences on climate change in Berlin and Kyoto.

Mrs Gandhi had then spelt out the challenges and difficulties that developing countries face in the quest for economic development designed to provide their peoples with basic necessities like food, clothing and shelter. She noted that the wealth of the labour and resources of the colonised countries had contributed to the economic affluence of the West, which went through the Industrial Revolution with scant regard for issues like the environment or economic rights of the toiler. The developing countries, which were then under colonial rule, commenced their quest for economic progress over a century later. But, the struggle for freedom itself had enshrined a commitment to charters of International Organisations owing allegiance to the rights of workers and a commitment, above all, to our own peoples. In these circumstances, we obviously could not adopt the same practices as those adopted by the affluent countries when they commenced the process of industrialisation.

It was in this context that Mrs Gandhi said: "On the one hand the rich look askance at our continuing poverty. On the other they warn us against their own methods. We do not wish to impoverish the environment any further and yet we cannot for a moment forget the grim poverty of large numbers of people. Are not poverty and need the greatest polluters? For instance, unless we are in a position to provide employment and

purchasing power for the daily necessities of tribal people and those who live in and around our jungles, we cannot prevent them from poaching or despoiling our vegetation..... How can we speak to those who live in villages and slums about keeping the Oceans, the rivers and the air clean when their own lives are contaminated at the source? The environment cannot be improved in conditions of poverty. Nor can poverty be eradicated without the use of Science and Technology."

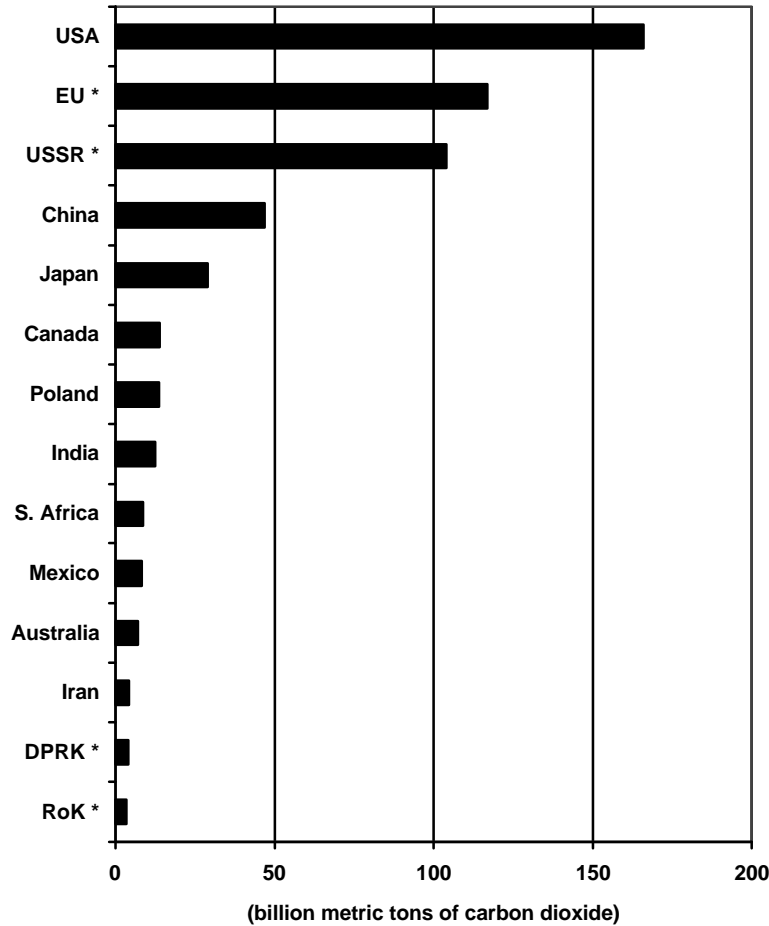
Despite the problems and dilemmas outlined by Mrs Gandhi in her address to the Stockholm Conference she and subsequent Indian Prime Ministers have spared no effort to see that we proceed towards our goal of sustainable development with due regard for environmental considerations, as we believe that there should basically be no conflict between the environment and development. It is now obligatory for all developmental projects, small and large to conduct an environmental assessment, which has to be evaluated by experts and environmental clearance obtained, before the project is approved. We are now convinced that if we are to achieve the goal of eradicating poverty in the coming decade by setting our country on the road to accelerated economic growth, our economy will have to grow at a rate of around 7% per annum. It is imperative that power production will have to grow by around 12% to 15% per annum if we are to achieve this target. I would like to stress here that when we talk of the consumption of electrical power in India and other developing countries, we are talking of its need for essential developmental requirements like in agricultural pump sets, industry and in rural areas which are yet to receive electrical power. It will take us many years for electrical power to be consumed in any substantial measure, in what we regard as luxuries, like heating and air conditioning, as is now the case in many developed countries. Thus, our developmental needs render it imperative for us to step up our energy consumption which, in per capita terms, is a miniscule proportion of the energy consumption in the affluent, developed countries.

There has naturally been increasing global concern about the growing atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases. We do, however, believe that the entire issue needs to be viewed from a proper historical perspective, which takes in to account the extent to which countries of the world have each contributed to this problem and how we can deal with this problem in an equitable manner. Countries like India which are only now set on the road to sustainable development cannot obviously be asked to take measures which would adversely affect their efforts to provide food, clothing and shelter to their people within the shortest possible time. It is, after all, the countries of the developed world which have created a problem for the world's environment by what many would regard as being conspicuous consumption and luxurious living. The needs of a man yearning for a second meal in a developing country, in our view, require to be more urgently addressed than the passion of a youth for a second sports car in an affluent country.

Given the present patterns of energy production there is a logical co-relation between the cumulative carbon dioxide emissions of various countries on the one hand and the extent to which these countries have contributed to degradation of the environment on the other. A cursory glance at the graphics (shown below, which are based on United Nations Energy Statistics) clearly establish, that in reaching their present level of economic development it is the developed countries which have overwhelmingly contributed to the present level atmospheric pollution caused by greenhouse gases. Till 1992, the United States had released 164 billion tons, the European Union 118 billion tons and the former Soviet Union 108 billion tons of Carbon Dioxide Emissions into the atmosphere. The

total release of Carbon Dioxide from a large developing country like India with a population exceeding the combined population of the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation was, however barely around 10 billion tons. Should the peoples of the developing countries like India be asked to forego their quest for their basic necessities and needs, merely because the developed and affluent countries have over the years degraded the atmosphere in pursuit of affluence and luxury?

Cumulative Carbon Dioxide Emissions, 1992

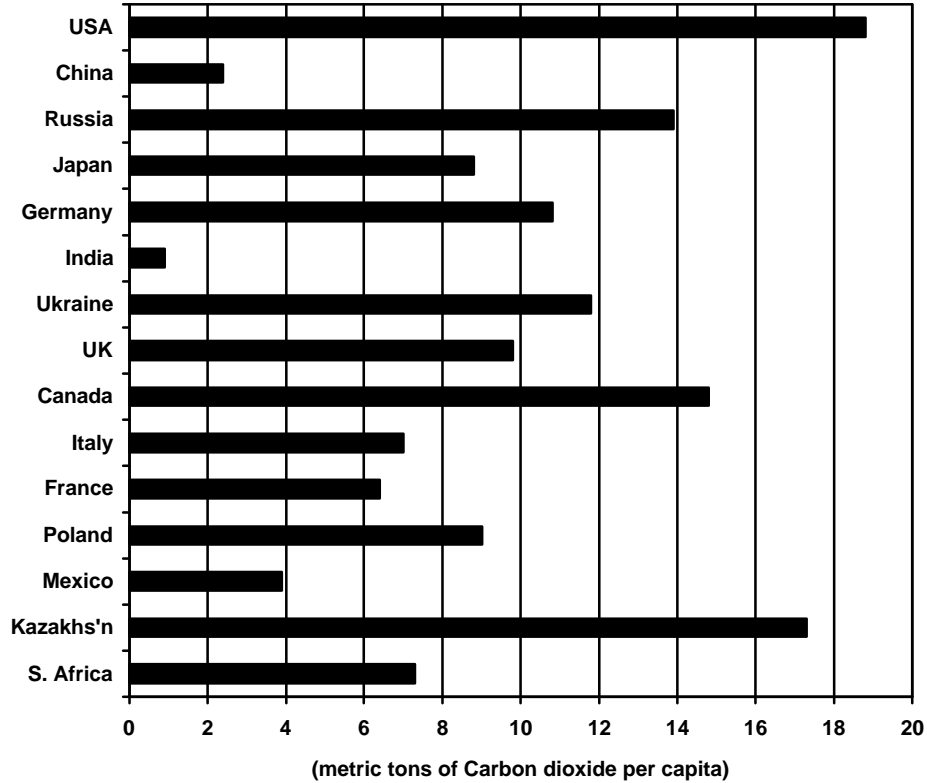


(Source: United Nations Energy Statistics and the US Bureau of Mines Cement Manufacturing Data)

One of the indicators of the level of development in any country is its per capita consumption of energy. Given the close correlation between energy consumption and the emission of carbon dioxide, it would be relevant to analyse the per capita emission of carbon dioxide by various countries. This is depicted graphically in the Chart shown below, which, in turn, is based on United Nations Energy Statistics. It would be seen that while the per capita emission of Carbon Dioxide in 1992 was around 19 tons in the United States, 15 tons in Canada, 11.8 tons in Germany and 9.5 tons in the United Kingdom it was barely one ton in India. It is, therefore, evident that while the developed countries which have attained levels of per capita income which are over 50 times that of developing countries like India have the resources to pay for measures to control and reduce the ill

effects of greenhouse emissions, developing countries like India would need to be assisted substantially in financial and technological terms, if the world is to avoid a situation in which their economic development causes atmospheric damage akin to what the developed countries have already caused in their efforts to attain affluence.

Per Capita Carbon Dioxide Releases, 1992



Source: United Nations Energy Statistics and the US Bureau of Mines Cement Manufacturing Data.)

Recognising the imperative need for global cooperation and understanding to deal with environmental issues the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had called for the establishment of a "Planet Protection Fund" for accessing environment friendly technologies, to protect our planet against environmental degradation and consequent climate change in 1989. We contributed positively towards the evolution of a consensus on crucial issues in Rio in June 1992. We were particularly happy that developed countries recognised that calls for "harmonisation" and "coordination" on a global basis were unrealistic and inequitable in the context of the right and imperative need of developing countries to eradicate poverty and meet the basic needs of their peoples. India was amongst the first to sign both the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted at Rio. We were particularly pleased that the Rio Summit acknowledged new and additional funding would be required for developing countries for sustainable development and implementation of Agenda 21. It was also heartening that the developed countries reaffirmed their commitment to the accepted UN target of providing Developmental Assistance of 0.7% of GNP and to augment their aid

programmes in order to reach that target as soon as possible. Some developed countries like France agreed to reach this target by the year 2000.

While the Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted at Rio did not set any specific targets for reduction in greenhouse emissions it did contain some important provisions for developing countries. It was agreed that the Convention would be based on equity and, therefore, would differentiate responsibilities based on relative economic capacities. Hence, developed countries would take the lead in combating climate change. The developed countries were also required to promote, finance and facilitate the access to and transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries. The Berlin Mandate recognises that: "The largest share of historical and current global emissions of greenhouse gases has emanated in developed countries, that the per capita emissions in developing countries are still relatively low and that the share of global emissions originating in developing countries will grow to meet their social and development needs". The Berlin Mandate also agreed to set targets to limit greenhouse gas emissions in developed countries and pledged not to introduce any new commitments for developing countries which were Parties to the Framework Convention.

Just prior to the Kyoto Conference it became clear to us that there were industrial, mining and other lobbies in some developed countries which felt that their interests and profits would be threatened if firm commitments for greenhouse reductions were to be made, as envisaged in the Berlin Mandate. Hence, for the first time we heard calls that the developing countries should also be included in targets for reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases. These were, we believe, conscious efforts to divert attention away from solemn agreements and undertakings which had been arrived at after due deliberations first in Stockholm in 1972 and thereafter, in Rio and Berlin. I hope I would not be misunderstood if I state that there is a wide cross section of public opinion in India and other developing countries that perceives these developments as both cynical and insensitive to the developmental imperatives and needs of developing countries, which have been recognised, acknowledged and accepted for over three decades.

The Kyoto Conference did have to resolve a number of issues that had been raised principally involving emission targets and time frames, transparency in accounting procedures and closing of loopholes, flexibility measures to enable countries to meet their commitments and so called new commitments by developing countries for emission limitation. I have already dwelt at length on why the last point was inequitable and violative of the letter and spirit of the solemn agreements, conventions and undertakings in Rio and Berlin. We are gratified that this attempt to revise and rewrite past agreements was not accepted at Kyoto. We have noted that Agreement was reached in Kyoto that there would be differentiated targets for developed countries, averaging 5.2% below 1990 levels during the period 2008-2012. Under this arrangement the US, EU and Japan would be required to reduce their emissions by 7%, 8% and 6% respectively. While there has been disappointment expressed at these targets as being too low, one would have to nevertheless have to acknowledge that what has been agreed to is unprecedented and, therefore, a good first step.

The Kyoto Conference was also marked by lively discussions and even controversy on the issue of "emissions trading" between developed countries, as a so called "flexibility measure". Developing countries, including India and China had serious misgivings on the proposal. Eventual agreement was reached to have the principles and modalities of emission trading studied by subsidiary bodies of the Convention. There is, however, a

strong feeling that emission trading among developed countries, based on emission entitlements calculated as a percentage of current emission levels would adversely affect the long-term developmental needs of the developing countries. It would go to the very heart of the principle of common, but differentiated responsibilities, on which the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is based. The Indian position on the need for equity in entitlements was made clear when our Minister for Environment declared in Kyoto: "Any idea, which seeks to further deprive us of our equitable entitlement to grow, can never be allowed to take root". We had, in fact proposed in Kyoto that the proposal for "emission trading" should include "relevant rules for equitable allocation of initial entitlements for emissions trading". The head of China's delegation also made his country's view clear when he said: "All men are created equal, whether in rich or poor countries. Just like people in developed countries, the people in poor, developing countries too, have the basic rights to survival and to pursue a better life".

Discussions are now scheduled to continue on issues like emissions trading at the next meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Climate change at Buenos Aires in November, 1998. There is, however, growing concern in developing countries that while the developed countries are seeking to impose new and inequitable obligations on them, the developed countries themselves are not living up to their professions in Rio involving a greater transfer of financial resources and technology to developing countries. While the commitment to the UN target of transferring 0.7% of GDP by developed countries was reaffirmed in Rio, we are finding that the actual transfer from the OECD is substantially less. While Scandinavian countries have shown a very positive and farsighted approach on this issue with countries like Norway, Sweden and Denmark taking the lead, the overall transfer from the developed world was barely 0.27% of GDP in 1994-95. It may be of interest for you to note that the net inflow of external assistance to India fell from \$2.2 billion in 1990-91 to around 1.13 billion in 1996-97- a fall of nearly 50% in absolute terms. In these circumstances there is naturally a measure of scepticism in India on whether the developed countries will fulfil the provisions of agreements and undertakings in Rio on the transfer of resources and technology.

I have dealt, thus far, with the serious concerns that India and other developing countries still have on crucial issues like rules for the allocation of equitable entitlements for emissions trading. I have also referred to what we believe is the lack of political will in the developed countries to fulfil commitments on the transfer of resources and technology. I would, however, like to stress that the developing countries also realise that they too have a distinct contribution to make and responsibilities to assume in protecting and preserving the environment and all creation on our planet earth. It was as a manifestation of this commitment that even before the Rio Summit our then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi proposed the need to establish a Planet Protection Fund, at the Non-Aligned Summit in 1989. India then urged the need for a global effort through such a fund, to provide easy access to all existing and newly developed technologies, to combat environmental degradation and pollution, to both developed and developing countries. Mr. Gandhi proposed that all countries, both developing and developed, with the exception of the least developed countries contribute 0.1% of their GDP to this Fund, which would then provide all countries with free access to technologies to protect and preserve the environment of Planet Earth. We had estimated in 1989, that such an effort would provide an annual contribution of \$18 billion and reflect a common commitment to combat environmental pollution and degradation. We have reiterated our commitment to this proposal.

The quest for giving future generations a better quality of life in which the resources of our planet are equitably shared is, in our view, a task that all countries—developed and developing, need to tackle with sensitivity and understanding. As I have already mentioned, the primary cause for the depletion of the ozone layer, for global warming and for other developments like the dumping of hazardous wastes has been the policies which were designed to facilitate the increasingly high levels of consumption that their peoples aspired for, with scant regard for environmental considerations. The main responsibility for combating pollution, therefore, rests with the developed countries on the Polluter Pays Principle. We do, however, recognise that the industrialised countries now acknowledge these facts. There is also now, a greater measure of awareness about their responsibilities. We also recognise that for sustainable development at home, we would have to make every effort for conservation. If we do not do so today, our own future generations will have to pay the price. We would not like the environment to become an issue of North-South controversies. We would, however, have to safeguard our legitimate interests and concerns as environmental issues cannot be delinked from our quest to provide our peoples with the basic necessities of life and a better quality of life, within a reasonable time frame. We would hope that Australia and other developed countries would show due regard and sensitivity for our needs, concerns and developmental imperatives, so that the quest for protecting the climate and environment of the planet that we all share and inhabit will be a cooperative endeavour, for the benefit and well-being of humankind as a whole.