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Press Release  
U.S. Delegation  
COP-4  
Buenos Aires  
November 2, 1998

Support for Item Six on the COP-4 Agenda  
Intervention by the United States of America  
Monday, November 2, 1998  
Acting Assistant Secretary of State Melinda L. Kimble

Thank you, Madame President:

Please permit me to begin by joining other colleagues in offering to you our warmest congratulations on your election as President of the Fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. You can be assured, Mme. President, that my delegation will work with a cooperative and earnest spirit to ensure that our work proceeds in a way that is supportive of the overall objectives of the Convention and of the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted last December in Japan.

In this regard, we regret that divisions among the various Parties represented in this chamber may prevent us from elaborating the issues related to Agenda Item Six of the agenda which was transparently entitled "voluntary commitments by non-Annex I Parties." We support inclusion of this item, although we recognize that no quick decision on this issue is likely. While we fully recognize that this issue is controversial, we believe it is important to discuss all issues of relevance even when they are controversial. Locking doors to discussion cannot build consensus or advance our efforts. Rather, any meeting of the COP should open doors. Such closure threatens our joint ability to further the implementation of the Convention and build on the progress that we achieved at Kyoto.

Mme. President, in our effort to cooperate with other Parties, we do not wish to prolong debate on this topic, despite its relevance. We welcome the leadership of the Government of Argentina in highlighting the significance of this issue. We believe that ultimately all Parties must explore and develop more consensus on how to secure global action on this problem of climate change. To pursue effectively the overall objectives of the Convention, we will need ~~our~~ time to strengthen progressively all commitments by all Parties to the Convention. 'uvv'

To say the least, we are disappointed that it appears that countries will not have an opportunity to explore this matter in any detail. We had hoped that, together, we could have worked to address many legitimate questions on what is meant by the words "voluntary commitments."

Making progress on implementation of the Convention and completing the “unfinished” business of the Kyoto Protocol requires much discussion -- technical and political -- of all issues, including controversial ones. Making progress requires not only an understanding of the problems but also awareness of the options that are available for solving them. Kyoto potentially created new options for all Parties and we believe they need to be discussed and understood. Among the questions that need to be considered include:

- How do we provide for a dynamic process? What provisions can be made to allow those countries that wish to do so to join the Protocol as Annex B Parties? And, on what basis can Parties – either singly or collectively – reject the stated desire of any individual sovereign country to join Annex B?
- Must any Party interested in taking on a quantitative commitment to abate the increase in its greenhouse gas emissions use 1990 as its base year, as would seem to be required under Article 3 of the Protocol?
  - If so, this would constitute a stricter requirement than that now faced by some Annex I Parties which are given a “certain degree of flexibility” in choosing different base years.
  - If so, this would also seem to run counter to the guidelines for Initial Communications of Parties not included in Annex I, which the COP adopted two years ago in its decision 10/CP.2 and which allows these Parties to use 1994 as their base year.
- In addition, must any Party interested in taking on a quantitative commitment to abate the increase in its greenhouse gas emissions assume the commitments in Article 4.2(a) and (b) of the Convention as a pre-condition to taking on a target?
  - This would ensure that sufficient information would be provided to review and verify national programs, but there may be other ways to achieve this result.
- If a Party were to take on the commitments in Article 4.2(a) and (b) of the Convention in order to qualify as an Annex I Party under the Protocol’s definition, so that it could engage in emissions trading under Article 17, would that Party have any obligations **after** the end of the present decade with respect to the “aim” in Article 4.2(a) and (b)?
- How would a Party interested in taking on a quantitative commitment to abate the increase in its greenhouse gas emissions develop a target that would achieve the full range of its environmental and economic goals in support of sustainable development?
- How would such a Party continue to be eligible to host projects under the Clean Development Mechanism until the beginning of the first commitment period?

These are only a few of the many questions that we believe could -- and should -- be usefully explored by the Conference of the Parties. Answers to them would be helpful to any country -- including a country that decides that its circumstances are consistent with, and its interests are served by, seeking a way to establish a formal quantitative commitment. It will be difficult to make progress on the broader aims of the Convention if we do not soon begin to address these questions.

Mme. President, my delegation is fully prepared to engage on all the issues facing this Conference of the Parties and is ready to proceed in a positive and forthright manner. We look forward to advancing implementation of the Climate Convention by all Parties and to elaborating, as appropriate, elements of the Kyoto Protocol.

Thank you, Mme. President.