



environment
& tourism

Department:
Environmental Affairs and Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

EMBARGO: TUESDAY 3 MARCH 2009, 15H00

SPEECH DELIVERED BY MARTHINUS VAN SCHALKWYK, MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS AND TOURISM, AT THE NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT, 3 MARCH 2009

When we met here in Midrand three and a half years ago for the first National Climate Change Summit, our understanding of the climate challenge was vastly different to what it is today.

Four years ago climate change was hardly discussed in Government, or internationally by Heads of State. Today, it is amongst the foremost priorities on our Government's agenda and that of nearly every major international meeting involving Heads of State.

Four years ago there were still a few climate sceptics in the corridors. There was no fourth assessment report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Today the scientific consensus resounds with one clear message: climate change is happening now and will get far worse unless we substantially reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and start doing it now.

Four years ago, there was no Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change. Today the economic case for the most comprehensive possible international cooperation is abundantly clear. And rather than falling into despair over the costs of action, we understand today that action on climate change is an investment in the future.

Four years ago, business and government were rather ignorant about finding new competitive advantages in clean and renewable technologies. Today we understand that the development of these technologies is imperative. Rather than viewing action on climate change as a burden in the current global financial crisis, we realise that it holds myriad opportunities for green investment and green jobs.

Four years ago, climate change did not feature prominently in the international trade arena. Today we know that if we continue to grow without a carbon constraint we face the threat of border tax adjustments or trade sanctions from key trading partners and the destruction of thousands of jobs in the high emitting trade exposed sectors.

Four years ago, the pressure was largely on developed countries to do more to mitigate climate change. Today strong leadership is coming from amongst the ranks of developing countries. Last year China published a White Paper on climate change, India published their National Plan, Brazil tabled a Climate Bill, and South Africa completed its Long Term Mitigation Scenario (LTMS) study.

Four years ago we did not have an LTMS to inform our climate policy framework. Today we understand that, in a 'do nothing' scenario, South Africa's emissions will quadruple by 2050, rendering our economy and society extremely vulnerable.

Four years ago it seemed as if the major negotiating blocks were so far apart that a fair, effective and inclusive climate regime was beyond reach. Today we have the Bali Roadmap and Bali Action Plan as a basis for negotiating a strengthened climate regime for the period after 2012.

And finally, four years ago we were still in the middle of eight dark years of the Bush Administration. Today we are witnessing the emergence of new voices of reason in Washington.

Chairperson,

As we meet here today some four years later, I am encouraged by what I believe is a common understanding, namely that no nation has a plausible excuse for not doing its fair share.

That "fair share" is inextricably linked to questions of global equity. No one disputes that the developed countries carry the bulk of the responsibility for cumulative historical emissions since the industrial revolution. Similarly, no one disputes that emissions from developing countries are growing rapidly. The key challenge is to balance the sharing of the carbon space with affording developing countries a fair chance in the development space.

Where we draw a line is when some developed countries argue that the developing world should help them carry a part of their burden. The fact of the matter is that the carbon space is finite and 70% of the "safe" carbon space has already been used up, largely by industrialised countries. Any attempt to place an absolute cap on the access of developing countries to the little remaining "safe" carbon space will therefore be counter-productive in the current negotiations.

Turning to December 2009 in Copenhagen: the agreement in Copenhagen must mobilise political will on the basis of a shared vision. It must balance the international adaptation and mitigation responses, it must balance climate stabilization and sustainable development, and it must address the means for developing countries to implement effective policies and measures.

On adaptation, the Copenhagen agreement must provide massively scaled-up and predictable support for implementation.

The global mitigation effort should be informed by the most ambitious IPCC scenario for climate stabilization. For developed countries this means a cut in emissions of at least 80%-95% below 1990 levels by 2050, underpinned by credible mid-term targets towards the upper end of the 25%-40% range below 1990 by 2020.

From the USA we expect comparability of efforts, captured in a legally binding manner under the Convention. The US must negotiate its commitment together with all nations, and these commitments must be encoded in US domestic legislation. We cannot accept anything that suggests that, because the US has done so little for so long, we must allow them to do less than required-by-science in future.

The signals from President Obama have been encouraging, even though in substance the new Administration is still on a ZERO reduction below 1990 levels by 2020 – a level that is clearly not acceptable. And although this is an opening bid, the USA would need to come forward with a meaningful negative percentage soon. The same applies to Japan, Russia and Canada, and to the very disappointing announcements by Australia.

For developing countries the Copenhagen agreement could set up a register of nationally-appropriate mitigation actions in a new legal instrument under the Convention. As a developing country we are saying that we take our responsibilities seriously and that we are already making a meaningful contribution. We are willing to do more and to substantially deviate from business-as-usual emission trajectories. But the trigger must come from the North.

Therefore we also need a legally binding instrument for measurable, reportable and verifiable finance, technology and capacity support from developed to developing countries. Predictable funding holds the potential to trigger matching mitigation actions. In fact, I do not foresee an ambitious agreement by Copenhagen without an agreement on predictable, stable and adequate financial flows from developed countries.

Chair, we have noted with concern that a few developed countries continue to raise the issue of “further differentiation between developing countries”. This is simply not open to negotiation. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change creates two categories of Parties: Annex I (developed countries and economies in transition) and Non-Annex I (developing countries). There is no mezzanine level.

From our perspective, any attempt to redefine the categories of countries in the UNFCCC or to dilute the founding principles of equity and “common but differentiated responsibilities” raises the broader political question of graduation of countries between categories within the whole United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions. It therefore becomes a much larger geo-political issue than just climate change.

Our approach is that the application of the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” has changed since 1997 when the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated, but the concept remains valid. In 1997 these principles practically translated into quantified mitigation targets for developed countries, and none for developing countries. What has changed - informed by the science - is that we must all do more.

Therefore, in the mid-term, developing countries such as South Africa are saying that we are willing to enhance our actions and to differentiate voluntarily between ourselves through the actions that we take. But this entails differentiation through actions, not through the top down creation of new legal categories.

Finally, let me briefly turn to an immediate challenge for our own industry. Business is a key partner and it is engaging pro-actively. For the most part, it is repositioning itself to face the changing economic landscape in a carbon-constrained world.

But I do get the impression that in some quarters, business does not yet fully appreciate the implications of the developing world’s commitment to a substantial deviation below baseline emission trajectories in a measurable, reportable and verifiable way.

Not only do proper tracking, reporting and managing of emissions make business sense, it is also an indicator of good corporate governance and of taking co-ownership for the future.

I therefore wish to reiterate that industry must prepare itself for a new era in which mandatory reporting of greenhouse gas emissions will become part of the regulatory landscape. DEAT has initiated a process of developing greenhouse gas measurement, monitoring and reporting regulations that will shift our work in this regard from a voluntary to a mandatory level.

Chair, I started off today by reflecting on how far we have come in the last four years, what progress has been made, how the challenges have become more urgent, and how this unlocks opportunities for green growth and development. Let me conclude by posing a challenge: When this Summit meets again in four years from now, our reflections should be on how our country has met the challenge of implementation.

We cannot allow ourselves to dither at the point when action and implementation are most critical. The decisions we have to take are tough, but I have never been more convinced that they are right and necessary.

I thank you

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