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SPEECH TO BE MADE BY THE PRINCE OF WALES AT A DINNER
FOR HEADS OF DELEGATION ATTENDING THE WORLD CONFERENCE
"SAVING THE OZONE LAYER"
AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON

MONDAY 6TH MARCH 1989

I am delighted to have been invited to this dinner this evening and to have been asked to speak to all the distinguished delegates to this Conference. If I may say so, it makes an interesting change from talking to the multitude of different trees and plants in my garden and in my hothouse which, for those of you who don't have the pleasure of reading certain organs of the British press, is a serious occupation that is reputed to fill a substantial proportion of my time As a result I can assure you that there is absolutely nothing I don't know about the greenhouse effect!

On behalf of all those people who share my concern about the problems you are addressing, let me assure you of our gratitude and delight that you have come so far for this Conference and have, I hope, progressed so far during it. I am not entirely sure if I represent the man in the street in this matter, but part of the problem has been to convince the man in the street that unless the ozone layer is protected he won't be able to stand in the street without wearing sunglasses and a thick coating of no. 16 sun blocker (and that will just be in winter).

By now the man in the street has begun to get the message. Things have begun to move and this week they are moving further. Not long ago, the man in the street thought that the initials C.F.C. stood for the Canadian Flying Corps or the Cricklewood Football Club. Now he knows what a chlorofluorocarbon is, and what it does. It eats ozone. And we know what ozone does. It stops the sun from eating us. We now know that we are all in this together, unlike anything else before.

This problem, which you are addressing, does increasingly concern a great number of people in the street - especially young people - as they become more aware of the potentially catastrophic implications for life on this Earth. Those individuals who warned of the impending problems were dismissed at best as cranks and at worst as extremists. I know what that feels like! Her Majesty's Government is therefore to be congratulated for its initiative in organising this

international Conference. The Prime Minister and her Ministers at the Department of the Environment have taken a firm lead on this issue, and have won considerable respect both here in the United Kingdom and abroad for their determination. The fact that the United Kingdom will meet the Montreal Protocol target of a 50% reduction in CFC use 10 years ahead of the 1999 deadline is something about which this country can be justifiably proud. But that achievement has actually been made possible by the thousands of ordinary consumers and environmentalists whose concerted pressure persuaded the aerosol manufacturers to phase out their use of ozone-depleting CFC's by the end of this year.

Now, along with many of the world's politicians I am not a scientist. Nor am I a lawyer or an economist. I am a historian. I may also be naive, but I like to think I have a modicum of common sense which informs me that as far as we can tell at present ours is the only planet in the Universe able to sustain life as we know it. Until we have managed to discover somewhere else in some other galaxy which has a comparable set of atmospheric conditions it makes absolutely no sense to me to mess about unnecessarily with the fragile and delicate chemical compositions which perpetuate life on this globe as it hurtles mysteriously and harmoniously through space. It certainly makes no sense to destroy the ozone layer, which is what enabled life to develop on land away from the protection afforded by water in the oceans some 600 million years ago. We can't pretend that we aren't aware of the potential long term dangers to the intricate balance of Nature. Since the Industrial Revolution human beings have been upsetting that balance, persistently choosing the short term options and to hell with the long term repercussions. It seems to me that countless numbers of people are looking to their leaders and representatives to take bold decisions now - decisions which our descendants, yet unborn, will thank us for - and not to put off those critical decisions that will ultimately cause our grandchildren to curse us.

We have reached the stage now when it is no longer possible to dismiss such things as ozone depletion as just another environmental scare. It is gratifying to know that ICI and other companies are now beginning to invest millions in CFC substitutes. Have we not also reached the stage where we can resolutely challenge the power of any industrial lobby which seeks to ignore or disprove such matters of global environmental concern?

We are now aware of the problems facing us. Like the sorcerer's apprentice causing havoc in his master's home when he couldn't control the spell which he had released, mankind runs a similar risk of laying waste his earthly home by thinking that he is in control of things when he's clearly not. What, then, do we do about it? There is no doubt that the Montreal Protocol, signed last September, represents a major step forward in global cooperation, but it is essential to realise that the provisions of the Montreal agreement, calling for a 50% cut in CFC's by the industrialised countries were reached, firstly, before conclusive proof that chlorine was responsible for the hole in the Antarctic ozone layer; secondly, before last summer's satellite data revealed that worldwide ozone loss is as large as it is; thirdly, before the discovery of similar chemistry in the Arctic revealed the danger to that region; and, fourthly, without reference to CFCs' role as greenhouse gases. When these facts are added to the equation there is surely an overwhelming scientific case to change the treaty from a reduction to complete elimination. Rapid technological progress on CFC alternatives and substitutes since the treaty-signing tends to support this option. In this regard the recent European Community decision to eliminate CFC's by the year 2000 is encouraging, but I fear even that will be 10 years too late.

I suspect that not many people are aware that over and above their ozone-depleting impact CFC's are also highly significant greenhouse gases. They currently account for 20% of the greenhouse forcing. Moreover they have a century-long lifetime in the atmosphere, so that what we do or don't do now will certainly affect our great grandchildren. These facts have largely been ignored in the ozone debate. CFC's do not just mean ozone depletion - they mean sea level rises, floods, heat waves, droughts, changing monsoons and all the other effects of greenhouse warming. Therefore the two phenomena are tightly linked. The greenhouse properties of potential CFC substitutes must always be considered in the equation.

Nobody can pretend that these problems have an easy solution - especially when the whole world is so indivisibly involved. The Montreal treaty, and the steps that will follow to control global change, demand an international community that actually works together to protect an environment to whose fate it is inextricably tied. In this regard Mexico should be warmly congratulated for being the first country to sign the treaty and for pointing the way towards a new era in which North and South work together in this effort. It is particularly welcome that this Conference has been the occasion for 6 more countries to sign, because the need for worldwide participation is crucial. For example, if the industrialised countries cut back production by 50% as required by the treaty, it would only need 4 of the largest developing countries to produce CFC's up to the allowed treaty limit of 0.3 Kg. per person and global CFC production would not fall, but would increase by 50%!

Having said all this, I realise only too well the dilemma that developing countries find themselves in. While we simply must eliminate CFC's and Halons, we must not do so by forcing developing nations to forego some of the benefits of industrialisation which developed countries have enjoyed for so long. If, as I hope, the international community is prepared to adopt the precautionary, preventive approach it will require a major readjustment of conventional thinking as far as international relations and the world's economic structures are concerned. Given that the developed world is responsible for the vast proportion of the damage so far done to the ozone layer, it is surely incumbent upon our governments to accelerate the phase out of CFC's by all reasonable means available to them. In this regard, the call by the developing nations to the developed ones to provide tangible assistance, for instance through appropriate technology transfer, is a powerful one - and I suspect that increasing numbers of people living in developed countries would be happy to see such assistance if they knew it was designed to enable this vital issue to be tackled sensibly and in such a way as to permit the developing countries to achieve their major aspirations.

The terrible part about these global environmental challenges is that they tend to fill our hearts with gloom. Most people feel powerless when confronted by them and wonder what on earth they can do about them. There are constructive things that can be done, and I have tried to show what could be done internationally. As individual consumers we can also play a very significant role. After all, perhaps the single most important thing about the ozone story is the way it has reminded each one of us of our direct responsibility for protecting the environment. The revolt of the consumer against the use of CFC's in aerosols was dramatic. Since that revolt supermarkets have been falling over themselves to prove that they are the greenest of the green and, in order to meet the consumer pressure, the supermarkets are having to put pressure on their suppliers to meet higher environmental standards. Many people are still unaware of how widely used CFC's are in our household appliances and in the buildings around us. That is why it is so important, I believe, to stress the vital role industry itself can play - particularly in the construction industry (where CFC's form a major component in air-conditioning systems and in insulation foam), the microelectronics industry (where a recent survey in this country very disturbingly showed that around 65% of the companies questioned had no intention of taking any action on phasing out CFC's, which demonstrates the scale of the problem) and in refrigeration. While the construction and refrigeration industries would seem to be more alert to the problem, and genuinely intent on introducing substitutes and reducing wastage, the microelectronics industry seems to be labouring under the illusion that the decision of the aerosol industry has let their industry off the hook.

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As far as the contribution governments can make is concerned, I do not believe it is enough to rely on voluntary action alone. There should be an obligation to intervene as and when appropriate to accelerate or enforce environmental measures. I can't help feeling that many more people than one imagines would be pleased to see this happen if they could see that the results would be beneficial to the environment. Such measures as the requirement for all cars to have catalytic converters and to run on unleaded petrol, have been in existence in some countries for a considerable number of years and the result of ensuring that all manufacturers have to comply with measures of this kind has been to stimulate an inventive capacity to create alternatives. Necessity is very much the mother of invention, but sometimes the necessity has to be engineered by governments as a sensible precaution. From that point of view it is heartening to learn of the Prime Minister's recent statement that CFC's ~~are to~~ ^{should} be replaced in refrigerators on a progressive basis.

As this historic Conference nears its end, there is good reason for pride. If it was human ingenuity that got our remarkable planet into this mess, it will be human ingenuity that gets it out - a new kind of human ingenuity; co-operative, responsible, global. In the last few days we have seen a good example.

We know what we need to do about the ozone layer. Thanks to you, some of it is already being done. At this rate we might cope with the disaster before it happens.

So much having been made so clear, it seems almost churlish to conclude by saying that the ozone layer is only one environmental question among many. The seas are fast becoming sewers. We make poisons so powerful we don't know where to put them. The rain forests are being turned into deserts. If we can stop the sky turning into a microwave oven, we will still face the prospect of living in a garbage dump.

Human beings can be rightly proud of their inventiveness. We thought the world belonged to us. Now we are beginning to realise that we belong to the world. We are responsible to it, and to each other.

Our creativity is a blessing, but unless we control it, it will be our destruction.

Unless we realise that all these problems hang together, so will we.

But thanks to you, we are realising it. Something is being done. And I pray that your deliberations, taken together with the Montreal Protocol, will provide both a foundation on which future solutions can be built and a model for future agreements in other areas of environmental concern.