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OZONE LAYER CONFERENCE: US REACTION
SUMMARY

1. CONFERENCE CONSIDERED A GREAT SUCCESS. WELL-ORGANISED AND TIMELY.

DETAIL

2. WE HAVE SPOKEN WITH NITZE (STATE DEPARTMENT), KOEHLER (AIDE TO REILLY, EPA) AND ADCOCK (AIDE TO SENATOR GORE). ALL CONSIDERED THE CONFERENCE TO HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN INCREASING PUBLIC AND POLITICAL AWARENESS OF THE ISSUES. COMPLIMENTS WERE PAID TO THE EXCELLENT ORGANISATION OF THE MEETING.

3. NITZE SAID THAT WHEN THE MEETING WAS FIRST ANNOUNCED LATE LAST YEAR HE HAD DOUBTS ABOUT THE NEED FOR SUCH A CONFERENCE. HOWEVER THE PACE OF DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THAT TIME AND THE RECENT CALLS FOR FURTHER REDUCTIONS OF CFCS BY BOTH EUROPE AND USA, MADE THE MEETING PARTICULARLY TIMELY AND A VALUABLE INPUT INTO THE MONTREAL PROCESS. HE SAID THE US SUPPORTED THE UK'S LINE OF WORKING THROUGH EXISTING INSTITUTIONS RATHER THAN CREATING NEW BODIES.

4. KOEHLER REPORTED THAT REILLY HAD BEEN DELIGHTED AT THE AMOUNT OF TIME THE PRIME MINISTER HAD MADE AVAILABLE FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH HIM. REILLY WAS REPORTING TO PRESIDENT BUSH ON THE CONFERENCE IN GLOWING TERMS.

5. ADCOCK REPORTED THAT SENATOR GORE HAD FOUND THE MEETING VERY USEFUL AND HAD PARTICULARLY WELCOMED THE REMARKS MADE BY THE PRINCE OF WALES.

6. THE CONFERENCE HAS BEEN REPORTED EXTENSIVELY IN NEWSPAPERS AND FEATURED DAILY IN NETWORK NEWS PROGRAMMES CULMINATING IN THE NIGHTLINE PROGRAMME ON TUESDAY EVENING BEING DEDICATED TO THE OZONE ISSUE WITH EXTENSIVE INTERVIEWS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND SENATOR GORE. NEWSPAPER REPORTS FOLLOW BY BAG.

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SAVING THE OZONE LAYER

Note by the Conference Rapporteur, Dr Martin Holdgate

The National and international responses to environmental concerns have often gone through three stages:

First, the reluctant acceptance that there is a problem;

Second, the development of an action plan or measures, which go no further than the minimum needed to achieve credibility and which are commonly limited by the perceptions and economics of the developed countries;

Third, the slow, and often partial, supplementation of this action while the environment continues to deteriorate.

This Conference has, wisely, turned its back on this obsolete and dangerous pattern. As the Prime Minister said in her opening statement, we have a real problem that demands effective action. as President Moi said, conclusions that are left on the shelf are useless. The outstanding feature of this Conference has been the almost universal commitment of the delegations to action. And the predominance of delegations from the developing world is a practical demonstration that the depletion of the earth's stratospheric ozone layer is recognised as a truly global threat to human health, to crops, and to the balance of living systems.

Their presence and statements have reminded us, also, that the problem must be solved in a way that does not jeopardise the development of the many nations that still experience what, twenty years ago, we were calling "the pollution of poverty".

Our first technical session reviewed the scientific evidence. It has been summarised by Dr Lang and Dr Apling so that I need only rehearse a few key facts here. I suggest that there are five such points:

First, that the depletion of stratospheric ozone is a proven phenomenon, with a 50% reduction in springtime concentrations over Antarctica since 1974 and a 5% to 7% depletion in medium to high northern latitudes in winter:

Second, that this depletion is due to the chlorine, and very probably the bromine, released from Chlorofluorocarbons and halons in the stratosphere when their molecules are bombarded by solar ultra-violet radiation - each chlorine or bromine having the power to break down thousands of ozone molecules:

Third, that there is 6 times as much chlorine in the upper atmosphere now as in 1900 and that because the substances releasing it are so persistent, the Antarctic ozone hole will remain for 50 years:

Fourth, that any long-lived chlorine or bromine containing substances, including carbon tetrachloride or methyl chloroform, can have the same damaging effect:

Fifth, that CFCs in particular are also a threat because they are greenhouse gases.

Our second technical session, just summarised by Sonny Ramphal, emphasised the other limb of the problem. These substances are prevalent because they are useful. Refrigerants, insulating materials and electronic products are valuable and vital ingredients of contemporary life in the developed countries and must be provided within the development process of the Third World. We cannot just get rid of CFCs, halons, and other ozone depleters without substitutes - and those substitutes must themselves be environmentally safe.

This last point demands emphasis. When they were introduced, chlorofluorocarbons were thought of as the ideal materials because they were so unreactive. They surprised us. The appearance of the Antarctic ozone hole surprised us. The history of science is full of surprises. That is why so many delegates were wise to emphasise the need for research, testing, care in the introduction of new substances, and thorough monitoring afterwards. But it is clear that industry is rising to the challenge: and from that second session I note three key points:

First, not all uses of CFCs are equally easy to replace. Aerosols present fewest problems, so long as people do not put butane-filled cans on the garden bonfire. Already there are refrigerants that are far less ozone depleting than the CFCs currently in use, and safe refrigerants are in sight. Substitutes in insulating foams are a little more difficult, but attainable. The electronics industry has most problems, but can at least halve its 1986 consumption by 1993. Halons remain the best materials for fighting certain kinds of fire, although they do not need to be used in training exercises.

Second, industry needs a dependable context within which to develop substitutes. It faces major investment in science, development, and application in manufacture. Suppliers and users must be able to work together in confidence that their investment will not suddenly be invalidated by a change of mind and of time scale by the world's political community. They must also have safe outlets so as to be able to dispose of the materials we are seeking to withdraw from use.

Third, industry accepts the need to go further than the Montreal Protocol and the need for ultimate elimination of ozone-depleting chemicals.

All this is encouraging. And from these analyses it is clear that the burden of decision rests, as it should, on the responsible Ministers and Governments - on you. And the most heartening feature of this Conference has been the unanimous acceptance of that responsibility by delegates.

The debate in the third Session today on "Shared Awareness" and in the four general discussions made this clear. I will summarise these statements under three main headings:

First, there was no dissent from the proposition that we confront a global problem that must be dealt with urgently. The response must involve, as Mr Palmer said in introducing his session, a two-pronged attack involving Government on the one hand and citizens on the other. Concrete actions were urged by many delegations. They need to be focussed and defined - for as Mr Palmer also said, this is a clear problem with clear solutions. However, many delegations have stressed that action to safeguard the ozone layer has to be viewed as one element in a larger effort to protect the atmosphere. Trans-frontier pollution and climatic changes induced by greenhouse gases pose threats as great as or greater than those from ozone depletion. Delegates of several states, including Kiribas, the Maldives and Bangladesh reminded us of their vulnerability to sea-level rise and to increasingly violent tropical storms. Action to implement an international legal instrument to safeguard the ozone layer today is clearly seen by many delegates as one step in wider action to protect the atmosphere as a common concern of all nations.

Second, it seems universally agreed that we have to secure the worldwide acceptance of - and implementation of - the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol. Many delegations urged those nations who had not yet signed or ratified to do so and more than one urged that an awareness campaign, promoting the Convention and Protocol be mounted. We were gratified to learn from some 20 nations at this Conference that they were in the process of accession to the Convention and/or the Protocol. Many of these countries are not themselves major producers or consumers of ozone depleting substances, but they emphasised that they were motivated by a feeling of the need for global solidarity, and by the strong feeling that the action needed to protect all humanity should not be taken by a minority of nations, even if the production and consumption of damaging substances does rest in the hands of such a minority.

The first policy conclusion I draw from this conference is that all nations represented here who have not acceded to the Convention and Protocol should give serious consideration to doing so.

But there was an overwhelming view that the Protocol as it now stands is not enough. More than half the delegates who spoke announced that they were themselves committed to going further. The spokesmen from industry have confirmed this is feasible. The scientists tell us that the problem will not be solved unless we do.

The second policy conclusion I draw from the Conference is that the scope and time frame of the Montreal Protocol should be reviewed, and an ultimate end set to the production and consumption of ozone-depleting substances.

The Montreal Protocol is not, however, just about setting targets for withdrawal. As Minister Barlund, who will preside over its next Conference, emphasised; it is a wider instrument dealing with assistance and with active measures to discourage trade in damaging materials. Several delegations emphasised that these aspects of the Protocol also needed review. And this takes me to my third theme.

The actions we seek cannot happen without several kinds of supportive action, stressed by many delegations. Research is essential. Research both on the stratosphere and its behaviour and on the effects of the increased ultra-violet radiation at the earth's surface which ozone depletion will cause: monitoring of trends and effects; research by industry on substitute materials; research by independent environment protection agencies on the safety of substitutes; monitoring also of the manufacture, movement and use of ozone depleting substances. Governments have a responsibility to see that this research, monitoring, and testing is thoroughly done.

Another condition for success is coherent industrial planning, within the context of well-defined, stable, national and international policy, so that industry knows what is expected of it, by when.

A third condition is assistance. It is clear that the developing countries wish to adopt technology that will by-pass the ozone-depleting processes of today. They will need help of three kinds. They will need technical information - and it is encouraging that so many delegates have clearly found the technical surgeries at this meeting so useful. They will need financial aid to switch from present chlorofluorocarbon uses. And they will need technology transfer as a start to new and sounder pathways of development.

Some delegations have made it clear that this could be the essential condition for success - if we measure success by the universality of international response, as we should. The assistance elements in the Montreal Protocol were criticised as unduly vague. To ensure that new technology is introduced in the Third World, and obsolete and damaging practices are phased out, finance will be required. Some delegates believe a new special fund should be created. Mention has been made of the possible role of debt swaps. Many have emphasised that the developed countries had been fortunate in being able to accumulate capital through the timing of their development when resources were cheap and environmental concerns minimal. Now that the world had changed, the rich countries have an obligation to help the poor. Assistance is a more appropriate approach than any mention of sanctions against those who have real difficulty in complying with the Convention and Protocol. The solutions we seek have to be both technically and economically balanced, and equitable between nations.

Which comes back, in conclusion, to the simple fact that in this Conference we face a global problem which needs the concerted approach of the whole world. We have called for all nations to take the positive step of signing and ratifying the Montreal Protocol. We have asked them to consider strengthening that Protocol to eliminate CFCs and other ozone-depleting substances. We have asked for firm implementation. We have recognised the need for assistance so that the developing nations - who appear, from scientific analyses, to be most at risk of increasing radiation damage as a result of ozone depletion - can obtain the technology and resources they need if they are to join this worldwide movement. We clearly expect that no nation and no industry will move against the trend by seeking to expand any residual markets for CFCs or for the equipment to manufacture them. And - as the Citizen's Symposium which preceded our meeting stressed - we recognise the need for campaigns to inform all our citizens about why these actions are needed, why they are sufficient, and why they require the co-operation and support of everyone.

This has been a remarkable Conference. I do not recall seeing so many Ministers gathered together to address a major environmental concept since many of us met in Stockholm in 1972. It has been remarkable for its positive commitment. And I suggest that it is in a real sense the shape of things to come. Conferences, not to bemoan problems or discuss how to discuss how to work together, but practical Conferences, drawing North and South together, to discuss Our Common Future on Our Only One Earth, on which as President Moi reminded us, we are the guardians of the Creation.