



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

This is my

revised draft, for
discussion tomorrow.

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As at 3 November

**PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH ON THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT
TO THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN NEW YORK
ON WEDNESDAY 8 NOVEMBER**

Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to return to the podium of this Assembly. When I last spoke here four years ago, on the 40th Anniversary of the United Nations, the message that I and others like me gave was one of encouragement to the Organisation to play the great role allotted to it. Of all the challenges faced by the world community in those four years, one has grown clearer than any other in both urgency and importance. I shall take the opportunity of addressing the General Assembly to speak on that subject alone.

INTRODUCTION

During his historic voyage through the South Seas on the Beagle, Charles Darwin landed one November morning in 1835 on the shore of Western Tahiti.

After breakfast he climbed a nearby hill to find a vantage point to survey the surrounding Pacific. The sight seemed to him like "a framed engraving", with blue sky, blue lagoon, and white breakers crashing against the encircling coral reef.

As he looked out from that hillside, he began to form his theory of the evolution of coral; 154 years after Darwin's visit to Tahiti we have added little to what he discovered then.

What if Charles Darwin had been able, not just to climb a foothill, but to soar through the heavens in one of the orbiting space shuttles?

What would he have learned as he surveyed our planet from that altitude? From a moon's eye view of that strange and beautiful anomaly in our solar system that is the Earth?

Of course, we have learned much detail about our environment as we have looked back at it from space, but nothing has made a more profound impact on us than these two facts.

First, as the British scientist Fred Hoyle wrote long before space travel was a reality, "once a photograph of the earth, taken from the outside is available ... a new idea as powerful as any other in history will be let loose".

That powerful idea is the recognition of our shared inheritance on this planet. We know more clearly than ever before that we carry common burdens, face common problems, and must respond with common action.

Second, as we travel through space, as we pass one dead planet after another, we look back on our earth, a speck of life in an infinite void. It is life itself, incomparably precious, that distinguishes us from the other stars.

It is life itself - human life, the innumerable species of our plant - that we wantonly destroy. It is life itself that we must battle to preserve.

For over 40 years, that has been the main task of this United Nations.

To bring peace where there was war.

Comfort where there was misery.

Life where there was death.

The struggle has not always been successful. There have been years of failure.

But recent events have brought the promise of a new dawn, of new hope. Relations between the Western nations and the Soviet Union and her allies, long frozen in suspicion and hostility, have begun to thaw.

In Europe, this year, freedom has been on the march.

In Southern Africa - Namibia and Angola - the United Nations has succeeded in holding out better prospects for an end to war and the beginning of prosperity.

And in South East Asia, too, we can dare to hope for the restoration of peace after decades of fighting.

While the conventional, political dangers - the threat of global

annihilation, the fact of regional war - appear to be receding we have all recently become aware of another insidious danger.

It is as menacing in its way as those more accustomed perils with which international diplomacy has concerned itself for centuries.

It is the prospect of irretrievable damage to the atmosphere, to the oceans, to Earth itself.

Of course major changes in the earth's climate and the environment have taken place in earlier centuries when the world's population was a fraction of its present size.

The causes are to be found in nature itself - changes in the Earth's orbit: changes in the amount of radiation given off by the sun: the consequential effects on the plankton in the ocean: volcanic processes.

Some we may be able
All these we can observe and possibly predict. But we do not have the

power to prevent or control them.

What we are now doing to the world, by degrading the land surfaces and by adding greenhouse gases to the air at an unprecedented rate is new in the experience of the earth. It is mankind and his activities which are changing the environment of our planet in damaging and dangerous ways.

We are seeing a vast increase in the amount of carbon dioxide reaching the atmosphere. The annual increase is three billion tonnes: and half the carbon emitted since the industrial revolution still remains in the atmosphere.

At the same time as this is happening we are seeing the destruction on a vast scale of tropical forests which are uniquely able to remove carbon dioxide from the air. Every year an area of forest equal to the whole surface of the United Kingdom is destroyed. At present rates of clearance we shall, by the year 2000, have removed 65 per cent of forests in the humid tropical zones. The consequences of this become

clearer when remembers that tropical forests fix more than ten times as much carbon dioxide as forests in the temperate zones.

We now know, too, that great damage is being done to the ozone layer by the production of halons and chlorofluorocarbons. But at least we have recognised that reducing and eventually stopping the emission of CFCs is (the) one positive thing we can do about the menacing accumulation of greenhouse gases.

It is of course true that none of us would be here but for the greenhouse effect. It gives us the moist atmosphere which sustains life on earth. We need the greenhouse effect - but only in the right proportions.

More than anything, our environment is threatened by the sheer numbers of people and the plants and animals which go with them. When I was born the world's population was some 2 billion. My grandson will grow up in a world of more than 6 billion. Put in its bluntest form: the main threat to our environment is more and more people, and their

activities:

- the land they cultivate ever more intensively;
- the forests they cut down and burn;
- the mountain sides they lay bare;
- the fossil fuels they burn;
- the rivers and seas they pollute.

The result is that change in future is likely to be more fundamental and more widespread than anything we have known hitherto. Change to the sea around us, change to the atmosphere above, leading in turn to change in the world's climate, which could alter ^{the way we live} ~~society~~ in the most fundamental way of all.

That prospect is a new factor in human affairs. It is comparable in its implications to discovery of how to split the atom. Indeed, its results could be even more far-reaching.

THE LATEST SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

We are constantly learning more about these changes affecting our environment, and scientists from the Polar Institute in Cambridge and the British Antarctic Survey have been at the leading edge of research in both the Arctic and the Antarctic, warning us of the greater dangers that lie ahead.

Let me quote from a letter I received only two weeks ago, from a British scientist at sea in the Antarctic Ocean on the ship

'Polarstern':

"In the polar regions today, we are seeing what may be early signs of man-induced climatic change. Data coming in from Halley Bay and from instruments aboard the ship on which I am sailing show that we are entering a spring ozone depletion which is as deep as, if not deeper than the depletion in the worst year to date. It completely reverses the recovery observed in 1988. The lowest recording aboard this ship is 150 Dobson units for ozone total content during September, compared with 300 for the same season in a normal year."

He also reports on a significant thinning of the sea ice. He writes

that, in the Antarctic, "our data confirm that the first-year ice which forms the bulk of sea ice cover, is remarkably thin and so is probably unable to sustain significant atmospheric warming without melting. Sea ice separates the ocean from the atmosphere over an area of more than 30 million square kilometres. It reflects most of the solar radiation falling on it, helping to cool the earth's surface. If this area were reduced, the warming of earth would be accelerated due to the extra absorption of radiation by the ocean".

"The lesson of these polar processes", he goes on, "is that an environmental or climatic change produced by man may take on a self-sustaining or 'runaway' quality ... and may be irreversible."

These are sobering indications of what may happen and they led my correspondent to put forward the interesting idea of a World Polar Watch to monitor climate-related processes and changes in the polar regions - an idea which I believe well worth pursuing.

We also have new scientific evidence from an entirely different area,

the tropical forests. Through their capacity to evaporate vast volumes of water vapour, and of gases and particles which assist the formation of clouds, the forests serve to keep their regions cool and moist by weaving a sunshade of white reflecting clouds and by bringing the rain that sustains them. A recent study by our meteorological office on the Amazon rainforest shows that large-scale deforestation may reduce rainfall and thus affect the climate directly. Past experience shows us that without trees there is no rain, and without rain there are no trees.

THE SCOPE FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Mr President, the evidence is there. The damage is being done. What do we, the international community, do about it?

In some areas, the action required is primarily for individual nations or groups of them to take. I am thinking of action to deal with pollution of rivers - and many of us now have fish back in rivers from which they had disappeared. I am thinking of action to improve agriculture methods: good husbandry which ploughs back nourishment

into the soil rather than the cut-and-burn which has damaged and degraded so much land in some parts of the world. I am thinking of more extensive use of nuclear power which - despite the attitude of so-called Greens - is the most environmentally safe form of energy.

But the problem of global climate change is one that affects us all and action will only be effective if it is taken at the international level. It is no good squabbling over who is responsible or who should pay. Whole areas of our planet could be subject to drought and starvation if the pattern of rains and monsoons were to change as a result of the destruction of forests and the accumulation of greenhouse gases. We have to look forward not backward. We should only succeed in dealing with the problems through a vast international, co-operative effort.

But ~~we must not leap into the dark.~~ Before we act, we need the best possible scientific assessment. *Otherwise we risk making matters worse* We must use science to cast a light ahead, so that we can move step by step in the right direction. The United Kingdom has taken on the task of co-ordinating such an

assessment within the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, an assessment which will be available to everyone by the time of the second World Climate Conference next year.

But that will take us only so far. The report will not be able to tell us where the hurricanes will strike; who will be flooded; or how often and severe the droughts will be. Yet we will need to know these things if we are to adapt to future climate change.

That means we ^{must} ~~need to~~ expand our capacity to model and predict climate change. We can test our skills and methods by seeing whether they would have successfully predicted past climate change for which historical records exist.

Britain has some of the leading experts in this field and I am pleased to be able to tell you that the United Kingdom will be establishing a new centre for climate change prediction. This centre will be based at our meteorological office and will lead the effort to improve our ^{prophetic} ~~predictive~~ capacity. It will also provide the advanced computing

facilities scientists need. And it will be open to experts from all over the world, and especially from the developing countries, who can come to the United Kingdom and contribute to this vital work.

But as well as the science, we need to get the economics right. That means first we must have continued economic growth in order to generate the wealth required to pay for the protection of the environment. But it must be growth which does not plunder the planet today and leave our children to deal with the consequences tomorrow. Second, we must resist the simplistic tendency to blame ^{modern} multinational industry for the damage which is being done to the environment. Far from being the villains, it is on them that we rely to do the research and find the solutions. It is industry which will develop safe alternative ^{chemicals} ~~refrigerants~~ ^{for refrigerators and air-conditioning.} It is industry which will devise bio-degradable

plastics. It is industry which will find the means to treat pollutants and make nuclear waste safe. ^{And many already have massive research programmes} ^{They have to take the long view - that} As people's consciousness of environmental needs rises, they will ^{all} turn increasingly to ozone-^{friendly} friendly and other environmentally safe products. ^{will be rather profit non} ^{subjected for ozone} ^{pollution} ^{contribute to} ^{destroy our} ^{planet} The market will act as a corrective: the new products ~~will~~ sell and those which caused

environmental damage will disappear from the shelves. And by making these new products and methods widely available, industry will make it possible for developing countries to avoid many of the mistakes which ^{we older} ~~the~~ industrialised countries have made.

We should always remember that free markets are a means to an end.

They would defeat their object if by their output they did more damage to the quality of life through pollution than the ^{welfare} ~~good~~ achieved by the production of goods and services.

On the basis of sound science and sound economics, we need to build a strong framework for international action. It is not new institutions that we need. We need rather to strengthen and improve those which already exist: in particular the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme. The United Kingdom has recently more than doubled its contribution to UNEP. We urge others, who have not done so and can afford it, to do the same.

The most pressing task which faces us at the international level is to

a sort of good conduct
guide for all nations

negotiate a framework convention on climate change. Fortunately we have a model in the action already taken to protect the ozone layer.

The Vienna Convention in 1985 and the Montreal Protocol in 1987

established landmarks in international law. They aimed to prevent

rathen than just cure a global environmental problem. I believe our

we should

aim ~~now should be~~ to have a convention on global climate change ready

~~for adoption~~ by the time of the world conference on environment and

meets ~~that~~

development in 1992, which will be among the most important conferences

the United Nations has ever held. I hope that ~~all of us will~~ ^{we shall all} accept a

responsibility to meet that timetable.

The 1992 conference is indeed already being discussed among many

countries in many places. I draw particular attention to the very

valuable discussion which members of the Commonwealth had under the

Prime Minister of Malaysia's chairmanship at our recent Commonwealth

Heads of Government meeting.

is not enough

But a framework ~~is no more than that.~~ ^{It} will need to be filled on

with specific ~~protocols~~ ^{instruments} - or - ^{the}

with specific ~~protocols~~ on different aspects of ~~the problem of~~ climate

in diplomatic language

change. These protocols must be binding and there must be an effective regime to supervise and monitor their application. Otherwise there will always be fears that those nations which accept and abide by environmental agreements will lose out competitively to those who do not. The negotiation of some of those protocols will undoubtedly be difficult. And no issue will be more contentious than the need to control emissions of carbon dioxide, the major contributor - apart from weather vapour - to the greenhouse effect.

But we must be sure that any action would really make sense.

We cannot just do nothing. *But before we act, we need sound scientific* analysis of the impact of emissions from different sources and the ways in which these can be reduced. The United Kingdom therefore proposes extending *to* and prolonging the role of the inter-governmental panel on global climate change after it submits its report next year. That would provide an authoritative scientific basis for the negotiation of this and other protocols.

This would open the way to agree global measures which could include targets for controlling emissions of greenhouse gases, and the way in

which individual countries should contribute to their achievement, without damage to their prospects for growth and sustainable development.

The challenge for our negotiators on ^{matters} issues like this is as great as ^{for} in any disarmament treaty, ~~and time is short~~. That makes it doubly essential to ensure that the Intergovernmental Panel's work remains on target, and that we do not allow ourselves to be diverted into fruitless and divisive arguments. ^{While not} ^{Time is too short for that}

Before leaving the area where international action is needed, I would make a plea for a further global convention, ^{to} ~~one on the~~ conservation of biological diversity. ^{the world's most species-rich and irreplaceable natural habitat on planet Earth. The} ~~The disappearance of tropical forests has led to~~ ^{contain 80% a half of the 5 million species on Earth. And their} the growing loss of genetic diversity on our planet. It is astonishing ^{disappearance would be doubly damaging} but true that our civilisation, whose imagination has reached the boundaries of the universe, does not know, to within a factor of ten, how many species the earth supports. What we do know is that we are ^{losing} ~~losing~~ ^{losing} species at a reckless rate - between three and fifty each day on some estimates - species which could perhaps be helping us to advance

the frontiers of medical science. We should act ~~to prevent that.~~

together to combat

this previous letter

BRITAIN'S CONTRIBUTION

Every nation will need to make its own contribution to the world effort. I want to tell you ^{how} ~~about six areas~~ in which Britain intends to contribute, either through improving ^{our} ~~its~~ own national performance ~~in~~ ~~protecting the environment~~, or through the help which it gives ^{to} ~~to~~ others.

First, we shall be introducing over the coming months a comprehensive and ~~integrated~~ system of pollution control to deal with all types of industrial ^{pollution} ~~emissions~~ whether to air, water or land.

Secondly, we will drawing up over the coming year our own environmental agenda for the decade ahead. This will cover energy, transport, agriculture, industry and ^{— everything} ~~all the aspects~~ of Government which affect the environment:

- We shall be looking at what further needs to be done to reduce air

pollution, in addition to the £2 billion programme of improvements to reduce emissions from our power stations.

- We will be promoting greater energy efficiency to reduce the fuel burnt in our homes and our offices, our factories and our power stations.

- We shall be looking at the role of non-fossil fuel sources in generating energy.

- We shall look for ways to strengthen controls over vehicle emissions.

and to develop other fuels by law

- We recognise that farmers are *not only* just food-producers but *also* conservers of the countryside. We shall therefore pay our farmers to enhance the environment, by reducing the intensity of their methods and by *to create* ~~creating~~ new wildlife habitats. *We are also*

- We aim to reduce chemical inputs to the soil and to develop

alternative non-chemical ways of controlling pests.

- We intend to plant new woods and forests, for example around some of our towns and cities. In the last ten years, there has already been a fifty per cent increase in tree planting in Britain.

- We are also bringing forward measures to deal with the complex problems of nitrates in water, setting up pilot nitrate sensitive areas where farmers will be encouraged to take steps to reduce nitrate leaching.

Third, we are looking at the implications of sustainable development for industrialised economies like our own.

Two things are clear:

- We need to use market-based incentives to promote good environmental practice. We have already done this to encourage greater use of lead-free petrol. We shall see whether there are

other areas where the same principle could be applied.

- We also have to reflect in our policies the impact on the environment of all our principal activities in Government and industry. And we need, as well, to see how our national statistics can better record environmental costs and benefits.

Fourth, we are ~~substantially~~ increasing our investment in research into global environmental problems. I have already mentioned the climate change centre that we are establishing. In addition we are supporting the British Antarctic Survey's crucial contribution to the world ocean climate programme and the voyages of our aptly-named research ship, the 'Charles Darwin'. We have also provided more money for the satellite monitoring programmes of the European Space Agency.

Fifth, we shall play our part in helping poorer countries cope with their environmental problems. And we shall do so on the basis of partnership, equality and encouragement. In part this is a question of the allocation of our aid programme, and we intend to redouble our efforts to help developing countries improve their energy efficiency.

We also need to ensure that the international aid agencies take full account of environmental problems when drawing up their programmes.

The growing priority which the World Bank are giving the environment is welcome, but I believe there is room for more and bolder innovation.

Sixth, we shall give special help to manage and preserve the tropical forests. Forests represent part of the natural capital of our planet, but they have been progressively degraded over centuries. They need investment to improve management and conservation. Degraded land should be reforested, and agro-forestry encouraged. We need to convince people that sustainable use of forests is more economically valuable than destroying them. In short, we need to recapitalise the world's forests. Britain is already assisting with the Tropical Forestry Action Plan in twenty countries and has recently signed agreements with India and Brazil. We welcome the World Bank's decision to triple its forestry lending over the next few years.

As a new pledge, I can announce today that we aim to commit a further £100 million bilaterally to tropical forestry activities over the next

three years, mostly within the framework of the Tropical Forestry Action Plan.

CONCLUSION

Mr President, the environmental challenge which confronts the whole world demands an equivalent response from the whole world. *Every*

country will be affected, - nature can get on

We should work through this great organisation and its agencies to secure world-wide agreements on the way to combat climate change, the *ways* thinning of the ozone layer, and the loss of precious species.

We need a realistic programme of action and an equally realistic timetable.

Each country has to contribute, and those countries who are industrialised must contribute more to help those who are not.

The work ahead will be long and *mad* ~~hard~~. We should embark on it hopeful of success, not fearful of failure.

I began with Charles Darwin. Darwin's voyages were among the high-points of scientific discovery. They were undertaken at a time when men and women felt with growing confidence that we could not only understand the natural world but master it, too.

and respect for the value of nature

Today, we have learned rather more humility. But another of the beliefs of Darwin's era should help to see us through - the belief in reason. *and the scientific method*

Reason is humanity's special gift. It allows us to understand the structure of the nucleus. *It helps us to conquer disease.* It enables us to explore the heavens. Now we must use our reason to find a way in which we can live with nature, not dominate nature.

At the end of a book which has helped many young people to shape their own sense of stewardship for our planet, its American author quotes one of our greatest English poems, Milton's "Paradise Lost".

When Adam in that poem asks about the movements of the heavens,
Raphael refuses to answer. "Let it speak", he says,

"The Maker's high magnificence, who built so spacious, and his
line stretcht out so far;
That man may know he dwells not in his own;
An edifice too large for him to fill,
Lodg'd in a small partition, and the rest ordain'd for uses to his
Lord best known."

We need our reason to teach us today that we are not, that we must not
try to be, the Lords of all we survey.

We are not the Lords, we are the Lord's creatures, the trustees of this
planet, charged today with preserving life itself - preserving life
with all its mystery and all its wonder.