

Registry Document Leadership in Environment and Development – Islamabad
Consultation

Speech by Robert Brinkley, CMG, British High Commissioner to Pakistan, at the
inaugural session

Thursday 13 March 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen

It's a real pleasure for me to be here today at the launch of Leadership in Environment and Development's Islamabad consultation on Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Options in Pakistan. This is the culmination of a series of consultations across Pakistan over the last few weeks, and marks, I hope, a sea-change in the debate on climate change in Pakistan.

Climate change is now recognised as one of the major threats to the security and prosperity of the world in the twenty-first century. For example, this week, of course, is Commonwealth Week, and the theme is that of climate change. It is very appropriate: there is no other issue that affects every single member of this 53-nation family so profoundly, and where it is so important that countries work together, in groups like the Commonwealth or European Union, or globally in the United Nations, to tackle it effectively.

Much has happened in the last few years to bring us to this point. The G8 leaders, meeting in Germany last summer, agreed on the need for substantial cuts in greenhouse gases, and signed up to work together on a global post-Kyoto agreement on climate change. The UN Security Council, under the UK's presidency, held its first ever debate on climate change as a threat to global security last April. The European Union is committing itself to a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and 20% of total energy consumption to come from renewable sources, both by 2020. It has also introduced an emissions trading scheme – the first scheme of its kind in the world – that sets a cap on the amount of emissions heavy industry is allowed to create, puts a price on those emissions and creates a market for them.

And there is much, of course, still to be done. At the end of next year there will be a conference in Copenhagen to decide upon a global climate deal for the years after 2012. The Bali Summit in December was a good beginning on the basis of which we can begin negotiations – although there is much work to be done between now and 2009.

The reason for this increased acceptance of climate change as a threat to security, of course, is a heightened realisation of its impact. Right across the world, people are now starkly aware of the prospects for all of us if we do not tackle this issue now. Perhaps the first major wake-up call – for us in the

developed world, that is – was the terrible impact of Hurricane Katrina, during an extraordinarily violent hurricane season in the summer of 2005, which destroyed large parts of New Orleans. Next week, the European Union heads of government will debate a report that explicitly links climate change to future political instability and security threats.

Of course, the developing world has been well aware of the dangers of a changing climate for a lot longer. The people of Bangladesh have been exposed to devastating flooding for many years; last year, the same phenomenon hit Baluchistan and Sindh, too, killing more than 500 people and causing untold amounts of damage. But it's not only natural disasters that threaten our security. Much more serious, in the long run, is the potential for shortages of water as glaciers melt and rivers dry up. People will face new health problems. Farmers in arid regions, like this one, will lack the irrigation they need to grow their crops; food prices will rise even further. Conflict will break out as countries dispute scarce resources.

This is the sad irony of climate change. It was the developed world that created this problem; but the impact of that problem will be felt most acutely by the world's poorest people.

Many people used to see climate change as a scientific or technical issue, an issue that concerns people who are interested in complex computer models and the like. They wondered how a rise in temperature of only a couple of degrees Celsius could possibly affect them. No longer.

The problem of climate change affects us all. It is not something that can be left to the scientists or even to governments to solve while the rest of us go on with our lives. It needs all of us to play our part, and to get involved in finding solutions.

The major burden of tackling the crisis, of course, lies on the shoulders of the developed world, which largely created the problem in the first place.

The UK has already gone beyond the EU's requirements in committing itself to reduce its CO₂ emissions by 60% by 2050; Prime Minister Gordon Brown is considering raising this further still, perhaps even to 80%. We have also become the first country to introduce a Climate Change Bill which will include legally binding limits on carbon emissions. It will involve 5-year "carbon budgets" designed to help map out a clear path to the achievement of our targets. It will also give greater clarity to the private sector to inform their investment decisions. There is no prospect of success unless we harness the energy and innovation of private industry to help us all address this huge challenge.

We are clear that all developed countries, which together created the problem, and in particular the US, need to make similar commitments.

But developing countries also have a role to play as their economies grow. The need to bring people's living standards up to international levels through economic growth is often overwhelming. In Pakistan, of course, annual GDP growth rates have hit 7% regularly for the past few years, and the Government is rightly seeking to encourage that growth to continue. It is sometimes difficult to reconcile the immediate imperative for fast economic growth with the longer term need to make sure such growth is environmentally sustainable, so that countries don't store up problems for themselves, and their neighbours, in the future. But reconcile them we must: for without action on climate change, the sustainable economic development that Pakistan needs will not be possible.

That is why this consultation is so important. In inviting us to consider options for mitigating the effects of climate change, LEAD have recognised that it is for all of us to work together to come up with solutions that strike the best balance between the need to create economic prosperity and the need to preserve our environment for the next generation.

As I said earlier, this session in Islamabad is the culmination of a series of similar consultations around the country, in Lahore, Karachi, and Peshawar. I'm looking forward to hearing more about the outcomes of those consultations in a minute.

The important part of this consultation is not to listen to me, but to get on and get stuck into the debate. So I will finish by offering my thanks and congratulations to the organisers of this series of consultations, LEAD, and in particular their national programme director Mr Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, and to all the delegates who have participated in all four consultations. I wish you every success for a creative and fruitful dialogue today, and ongoing discussion – and, most importantly, action – in the days to come.