



IRELAND

Statement by

Mr. John Gormley, T.D.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and
Local Government

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Thematic Plenary II – Mitigation: Reducing
emissions and stabilising the climate –
safeguarding our common future

Co-Chairs,

I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to express my whole-hearted support for all those parties who seek an urgent response to climate change.

The science is now incontrovertible. Climate change is the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced. And it is this sense of urgency, so evident here in this venue today, that we must collectively communicate, so that humanity is shaken out of its global comfort zone.

Business as usual is not an option. People across the world need to understand that our planet, far from being fragile as is often claimed, is immensely robust and adaptable. It will survive for thousands if not millions of years more. Whether human beings remain as a viable species in the biosphere is more doubtful. The window of opportunity to avert the worst consequences of climate change is fast closing.

We have ten years. Ten years to stabilise our greenhouse gas emissions: ten years to ensure that our planet remains habitable for human beings: ten years to act decisively. And we have squandered precious time. Surely, the unfulfilled promise of Rio will strengthen our resolve and determination to ensure that Bali is a success and a turning point.

I am proud that the European Union is leading the way, and I wish to fully endorse this morning's statement by the Prime Minister of Portugal on behalf of the European Union. In deciding to reduce its emissions by 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels, and by committing to increase that target up to 30% in the context of a comprehensive post-Kyoto agreement, the EU has provided a clear focus for the discussions at the meetings in Bali later in the year. The EU's proposal is ambitious for a very good reason – it reflects what we believe is a necessary next step in an effective global response to climate change.

By any standards, that is an enormous challenge, but we know it can be done, and we know it must be done. In Ireland, the decision of my party to enter Government as a coalition partner for the very first time was motivated by one primary concern – the need to bring climate change considerations to bear on all aspects of Government policy, and to accelerate our efforts to move to de-carbonise society. An increased determination by Government on mitigation is now expressed in a commitment to an annual target of reducing national greenhouse gas emissions by three per cent per year up to 2012.

Of course, our focus on mitigation does not stop there – the scale of the threat posed by climate change demands deeper emission reductions in the period beyond 2012. In line with the EU objective of limiting the increase in average global temperature to no more than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, we are prepared to make those further reductions and we will do so without compromising our economic or social development.

Co-Chairs,

Ireland is a relatively small western European country. Thanks to the warming effect of the Gulf Stream on the north Atlantic, we have a temperate climate all year round. We value our temperate climate, and we are determined to do everything possible to protect it in the interest of present and future generations of Irish people.

Of course, we cannot do it alone; greenhouse gas emissions do not respect national boundaries. As a consequence, responsibility for their negative effect on the climate system cannot be denied or dismissed on the grounds of domestic principles or expediency. A true global response – rooted in social justice and equality - demands strong political leadership from all countries, particularly the major emitters of the developed world. Because Ireland recognises that mitigation and adaptation are two sides of the same coin, we believe strongly that the international community should better address the needs of developing countries, especially the Small Island Developing States and the Least Developed Countries.

We commend the leadership of our Secretary General on improving prospects for sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We must get the global response right; if we fail, we will be judged to have ignored the single-greatest and deadliest environmental challenge of our time. It is not just a political imperative, but a moral imperative.

Cc-chairs, the time for talking is over; it is time for political leadership, for political consensus and, above all, for political action. Our credibility as the political leadership of our generation will be measured by the decisions and actions we take now to tackle climate change.

As one of the fathers of the American nation, Thomas Paine, said: "I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense . . ." It is in this spirit of constructive revolution, based on the purest common sense, that we must approach the meeting in Bali this coming December.

In conclusion Co-Chairs, I want to thank the Secretary General for organising this event and, through you, to assure him of Ireland's full support for his efforts to stimulate a major step forward, a milestone in the international climate change agenda, at the meetings of the Parties in Bali later this year.

Thank you Co-Chairs.