

Translation

Climate change – a global challenge

Speech by

Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier,
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs,
at the conference

"Climate Change as a Security Threat – Strategies for Policy-Makers,
Science and Business"

in Freiburg on Thursday, 6 November 2008

Dr Pachauri,
Mayor Salomon,
Minister of State, Gernot Erler,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking the City of Freiburg and our other partners for enabling us to work together to plan and organize today's conference.

We couldn't, I think, have chosen a better time for it.

24 hours after the election in the US, 24 hours after the election of a President who has made climate change his own political focus, we have gathered here over 1000 participants from across the globe, representatives of politics as well as of business and academia. Together they want to reflect and consider which are the best joint responses to this challenge to humanity, the fight against climate change. This gives grounds for hope. But it is also a spur not to slacken in our own endeavours.

We want to bring the world's attention to a progressive climate policy. Which means, not least, a forward-looking foreign policy taking account of all dimensions of climate change: the ecological and the technological, the security dimensions and the questions of horizontal international cooperation between states, as well as vertical international cooperation with the cities and regions as new foreign-policy actors.

This is necessary. For we are well aware that national answers are no longer enough, whether it is a matter of restructuring the international financial system, creating a security architecture for the 21st century, or fighting climate change.

Rather, we have to engage in international cooperation.

Today's conference gives us a tremendous opportunity to do so. Thank you very much!

But the success of this gathering is guaranteed not only by the opportune timing and distinguished participants, but also by the City of Freiburg itself: Freiburg and the surrounding region, at the intersection of three countries, has become something of a byword in Germany for ecological progress, technological innovation, political determination and, last but by no means least, civil engagement in the major tasks for the future.

That too can give us courage.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Courage also comes, indeed perhaps most particularly so, from your presence, Dr Pachauri. Virtually no other institution has worked so constantly and successfully in recent years to raise a broad awareness of the dangers of climate change, or has been so energetic in warning of its dangers or proposing solutions, than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Without the IPCC, the necessary international community of responsibility would still be a long way off. It is a great honour for me to join you, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, in opening this Federal Foreign Office conference. Allow me to extend a warm welcome to you.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I said at the outset that today's conference seems to me to be destined for success. For every one of us here in this room hopes that the election of the new American President will get things moving more in the right direction again. And I personally believe that a joint transatlantic climate initiative, a climate bridge, such as we proposed to the US a few weeks ago, must be part and parcel of this.

The world needs "A Green New Deal", as the Secretary-General of the United Nations put it. It has to switch to a climate-friendly way of doing business, of achieving prosperity and managing its resources.

That is why, even when the economy is in difficulties, we should not regard climate protection as ballast. Instead, we should see its potential for driving technological development and releasing fresh economic impetus.

In my view, we should tackle the climate crisis in such a way that it creates and opens up new political and economic prospects!

That is why, in its package of measures to support the economy, the Federal Government yesterday laid a clear emphasis on precisely this field. Let me give you just one example: extending the building renovation programme not only brings savings for tenants and secures jobs in the crafts and SME sectors, but also results in a greater number of renovated buildings – in other words, in increased climate protection. We want to continue along this path and to use political incentives to speed up technological progress. We don't just want to preserve the 200,000-plus valuable jobs in the field of renewable energies – we want to create more!

The transformation of our economies needs impulses like these. And it needs the courage of proactive entrepreneurs who have recognized that green and clean tech are two of the biggest markets for the future worldwide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We also need a bigger community of shared responsibility in foreign policy.

That applies not only to the financial crisis. Rather, it applies very particularly also to the security-policy challenges posed by climate change: although natural disasters, water shortages and desertification may not be the actual reason for crises in many parts of the world, they are certainly a deeper contributing factor, they exacerbate existing conflicts and trigger others.

All of us here are aware that dramatic declines in harvests as a result of increasing water shortages, as well as desertification and a drop in prosperity are already causing considerable social and political tensions – both domestically and in relations between countries.

What is to be done in such a situation?

In my view, in a situation as this, a forward-looking foreign policy quite definitely sets great store by international cooperation. It must help to build up a global community of shared responsibility.

Let me say it again: this applies both to the current financial crisis and to the dangers of climate change.

Last week I was travelling on the Arabian peninsula. In Saudi Arabia and in the United Arab Emirates I was vociferous in urging those countries to meet their new responsibility for stabilizing the international economy, but also for managing natural resources in a sustainable way.

But let me also say this: this will not work if we do not adapt the current architecture of international forces to the new circumstances. When it comes down to it, the only people who will be willing to take on responsibility are those who can also participate in decision-making. The emerging economies belong at the conference table, not at a little side table, during international negotiations.

The negotiating delegations for the next global climate conference start meeting in Poznan in just under a month. We are fighting to make the necessary progress here. We want to conclude an ambitious agreement in Copenhagen next year.

As a basis for global emissions reductions as of 2012.

As a framework for the necessary long-term adjustments. As a response to questions as to how the necessary funding is to be raised and used worldwide.

And as a sign of support for those countries which need modern technology but cannot afford it.

Our American partners play a key role for the success of the negotiations. The announcements during the election campaign make us hopeful. We need the "change"; we need new impulses from the US!

And we have already done some work in advance. As I said at the outset, a transatlantic climate bridge has been and remains the core of my endeavours. In recent years, during my trips to the US, we have taken a step forwards on this at regional level.

For instance, with regard to emissions trading. In the US, the East and West coast states are the main pioneers when it comes to developing emissions trading systems, and during my visit to California in the summer of 2007 I agreed with Governor Schwarzenegger that the American states and the EU should cooperate closely on developing and linking their trading systems. The concrete result of these talks is the International Carbon Action Partnership, or ICAP. In addition to some US states, this Partnership now includes several Canadian provinces, Australia and New Zealand.

Stipulating a price for polluting the atmosphere with greenhouse gases – economists speak of internalizing these costs – is the most efficient way to reduce emissions in the long term. The cheapest way is to link this with a market. That's what emissions trading systems do.

ICAP aims to harmonize the rules of existing and developing emissions trading systems around the world in order to combine them in one global market.

Our aim is to expand this approach.

A few weeks ago, together with the Federal Environment Minister, US states and German Länder, cities and municipalities, academia, business and civil society, we presented our proposal for a transatlantic climate bridge. We want to continue building this bridge, and I am delighted to see some transatlantic bridge-builders here today. Welcome!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate protection makes it especially clear that a new world order cannot be created if the world is splitting into new camps. Here the US and Europe shoulder a special responsibility.

We all need to work together on the global climate. We must breathe new life into the concept of multilateral cooperation. Joint problems need joint responses!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Part of our agenda and that of the EU is to stem the security risks inherent in climate change. We must recognize nascent conflicts at an early stage, tackle them with far-sightedness and find a peaceful joint solution.

This means a far-sighted foreign and security policy must pay special attention to regions where the consequences of climate change are already clearly visible.

That is also one of the key concerns of the report on climate change and international security which was drawn up at German initiative and presented by Javier Solana and Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner at the EU Summit in March.

These are important steps on the way to a joint response by the EU. The EU's strategy on Central Asia provides a helpful illustration of how we can feed climate security into EU regional policy. Trans-boundary water management is an important pillar within this strategy.

With the aim of promoting the implementation of this strategy, I launched a Central Asia water initiative in Berlin in April. It seeks to enhance the skills of the local populations and to promote regional dialogue. We are endeavouring to create a more efficient water infrastructure in the region and will be meeting our Central Asian partners again on 17/18 November to agree further steps.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This example, too, shows that a forward-looking foreign policy is not merely policy against climate change. It is at the same time a policy for greater security and stability. Resources policy must be peace policy!

For this we need strong partners, both national and international, and new alliances. This explicitly includes the cities and regions, which can often serve as "early warning systems" for emerging tensions, but also for successful problem-solving approaches.

With the transatlantic climate bridge we have taken the first step, but we have also convinced one of the 21st century's megacities, Chengdu in China, of the merits of this approach. Let us continue along this path. Freiburg seems to me to be the right place from which to start. Let's make use of this impulse!

Thank you very much for your attention.