

## **Climate Change**

*(on the United Nations conference on climate change in Copenhagen, 2009)*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With all the problems facing Europe in the last few years, we have tended to forget about climate change. But then, along comes an announcement of another set of data, the results of another research project, to remind us that the temperature of the earth is rising, and we still haven't done much to stop that.

What is it that is causing this rising temperature? Most scientists blame the so-called "greenhouse gases". Greenhouse gases are the gases that we produce by burning fossil fuels, such as coal and oil. These greenhouse gases create a kind of cloud around the earth that traps heat and doesn't allow it to evaporate into space. The result is that the temperature of the earth has been slowly rising.

We don't really know for certain what the results of this global warming will be. But scientists are predicting that, at the very least, it will cause more unpredictable weather. In some areas, it may cause drought – the Sahara desert, for example, seems to be spreading southward. In other cases, it may cause more violent storms. And it is almost certainly responsible for the melting of the polar icecaps, which are growing smaller both at the North and at the South Poles. Some scientists say that the level of the oceans could rise, and low-lying islands and coastal areas might be flooded.

The trouble is, because no one really knows what will happen, some countries – notably the United States – have been unwilling to commit themselves to doing anything about the greenhouse gases that they emit. Some, such as Russia, have even said that it might be a good thing if the weather got a little warmer.

Unfortunately, global warming takes a very long time to stop. Even if we were able to start lowering our emissions of greenhouse gases tomorrow, it would take half a century before the temperature of the earth stops rising. And violent weather can be very expensive. Big storms cause enormous damage that costs enormous amounts of money to repair.

So the thing is, we really cannot afford to just wait and see if anything is going to happen. Modern society, because of our heavy reliance on technology, is in many ways more vulnerable to extreme weather phenomena than we were in the past. Even if we try to forget about climate change, it is not going to go away. And every once in a while, a new natural disaster will happen that reminds us of that.

Thank you.

(415 words)