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Prime Minister

CHLOROFLUOROCARBONS: PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

I am now able to outline in more detail my proposal for an International Ministerial Conference next March on chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and other chemicals that affect the ozone layer.

Objectives and Content

Our political objective should be to gain credit for environmental leadership in controlling CFCs which are not only destroyers of the ozone layer, but are also major greenhouse gases. We should not concentrate on the science which is already well covered by international co-operation, although we might invite the Royal Society to mastermind a presentation. We should repeat our theme of calling for reductions of CFC emissions by at least 85%, or even for phasing them out altogether: but we must go further and show people how this can be achieved in practice.

I recommend two main aims for the Conference:

- (a) to convince non-OECD countries - and not simply by lecturing them - that they will not lose out if they agree to work towards a CFC free world, and that the new products and processes from industry can be made available to them in reasonable quantities and at affordable prices. Put simply, developing countries do not need to go through a CFC phase in realising their economic growth; and
- (b) to mount a showcase to demonstrate how world industry, but especially British industry, is working to reduce dependence on CFCs by more careful use, by developing substitutes or by adopting CFC-free technologies.



World leadership requires us to attract worldwide attendance, not only the parties to the Montreal Protocol but also those who have not signed up, especially the newly industrialised countries of the Third World. Non-signatory countries will of course look for tangible benefits from our Conference, and we shall be looking to British industry to join us in exerting world leadership in ways that will ultimately be profitable.

I envisage a 3-day Conference, with Ministers attending for about half that time. The outcome should be a political Declaration to give a boost to the first meeting of the Protocol parties in Finland in April 1989 where delegations will for the most part be experts.

Participation

As the Montreal Protocol is sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) we should invite all UN member states, suggesting that they send Environment and/or Economic/Industry Ministers. We can count on the interest of the major industrialised countries but we may have to target one or two eastern bloc states and certain developing countries like China, India and Korea which are potentially large consumers of CFCs. We should invite international organisations (the EC Commission, OECD) and financial institutions (the World Bank). We might also think of involving industry representatives and non-governmental organisations.

The willing co-operation of industry will be essential, not only British and European but also American and Japanese. The occasion will offer firms, particularly British, opportunities to show what they have to offer by putting on exhibitions during or after the Conference, possibly linked with open days or organised visits.



Timing and Venue

Although March 1989 will impose a tight timetable (and a heavy burden on resources), I believe we have to move quickly if we are to be seen as stimulating action before the meeting in Finland. Another reason for speed is that the Japanese have told the UN they are thinking of calling a meeting on the ozone layer in 1989. You are also aware of the at present rather vague French initiative on the environment which our own early invitation would help to defuse.

Precise dates will depend on the availability of conference facilities. I do not think that going outside London, eg to the Birmingham NEC, would be convenient or popular. Within London, Lancaster House is free for most of March but is too small for the 500 plus we need to attract. The International Maritime Organisation HQ can accommodate 600 delegates but is free only during the week beginning 20 March, which is not only immediately before Easter, but also the week of a UN Ministerial Conference in Basle on Toxic Wastes. The Churchill Auditorium in the QEII Centre can accommodate 750 delegates and seems preferable on grounds of size, convenience and security. But it is at present free only on 3 weekends in March (4 and 5, 10 to 12, 19 and 20). I realise that you would prefer to avoid a weekend and, if you wish, I will explore the possibility of shifting an existing mid-week booking.

Announcement

If you are content to proceed you will no doubt wish to announce the Conference yourself either to Parliament, in a speech, or even by a message to the UN General Assembly (since this would allow our Representative in New York to play a part in promoting the Conference). It would maintain our sense of commitment and urgency if the announcement also included an offer to host the second meeting of the Protocol parties at present planned for April 1990.



This is when stronger measures to control CFCs will be agreed and it will attract wide international attention.

Next Steps

If you endorse these proposals, I shall let you have a draft of an announcement in whatever form you wish, which would provide the basis of invitations to Governments via our posts overseas.

In order to convince the Finns that we are not trying to pre-empt their April meeting, I would recommend a personal letter from you to the Finnish Prime Minister. Similarly, as UNEP is the sponsor of work on the ozone layer, a letter to the Executive Director, Dr Tolba, would be prudent. I believe we should do both of these in advance of any public announcement as it is vital to have the Finns and Dr Tolba on board. Indeed, I think we have to find a way of inviting UNEP to be formally associated with the Conference that does not detract from it as a UK initiative.

As soon as we know your preferred dates, I will ask officials to make all possible speed ahead. I will also call in senior people from industry in order to gain their support.

I am copying this minute to Geoffrey Howe, David Young and Sir Robin Butler.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'N' and 'R' followed by a flourish.

N R

07 November 1988

07.XI. PM 88
E.N.W. Akhmedov
Acid Rain
P. 6

The document contains several paragraphs of text, which are extremely faint and difficult to read. The text appears to be a letter or a report, possibly related to the 'Acid Rain' topic mentioned in the header. The content is mostly illegible due to the low contrast and fading of the ink.