

Editorial



Dr. Hans-Joachim Ziesing,
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"Protecting the Earth's Climate: The
First UN Follow-Up Conference to the
Rio Earth Summit in Berlin"

The UN Conference on the Environment and Development held in Rio in June 1992 culminated in the signing of a framework convention on climate change which created a foundation, binding under international law, for international cooperation to avert the danger of climate change. The aim of the framework agreement is to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations so as to reduce the danger of an anthropogenic change in the earth's climate.

According to the Commission of Enquiry set by the German Bundestag (Lower House) to investigate climate change, this requires a global reduction in CO₂ emissions of at least 50% by the year 2050. Indeed, for the industrialised countries a cut of 80% by that date is considered necessary, and by 2005 the leading industrialised nations – such as Germany – are to reduce their emission level by at least 30%.

At the end of March the first follow-up conference is to be held in Berlin, at which discussions are to take place on how to specify and implement the framework agreement signed at Rio. In view of the unabated global trend towards higher CO₂ emissions and the fact that virtually all the prognoses predict further increases, the tasks ahead can only be described as Herculean.

There is little cause for optimism regarding a successful conclusion to the conference. In the light of the preparatory negotiations, the participating states are not expected to agree on a concrete plan to reduce emissions. Thus hopes are dwindling of at least being able to stabilise CO₂ emissions.

The industrialised countries bear special responsibility for protecting the earth's climate. The only way for them to face up to such responsibility is to change their energy and environmental policies. It is only then that the Third World can be expected to make corresponding efforts.

As host of the first follow-up conference, Germany is called upon to play a leading role in this area. This is all the more so given that the Federal Government must still live up to its commitment, made back in 1990, to reduce the level of German CO₂ emissions by between 25 and 30% by the year 2005 (compared with their 1987 values). Gathered in Berlin, the international community will expect from the host country, in particular, concrete statements as to which measures are to be deployed to realise these aims. One thing is certain: the commitment announced by German industry prior to the Conference voluntarily to reduce energy consumption and CO₂ emissions is far from adequate.