

United States Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Robert Menendez
Opening Statement for Hearing on International Climate Change Negotiations
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
January 24, 2008

Welcome to today's hearing regarding the Bali conference and international climate change negotiations. We will hear from two panels – the first will focus on the Administration's efforts to secure a climate change treaty and the second will provide important perspectives on the main issues that will have to be resolved for a post-2012 climate change treaty to become a reality.

I would like to thank Chairman Biden and Ranking Member Lugar for allowing me to chair this important hearing. This issue promises to be one of the most important our committee grapples with over the next two years.

Climate change is not just a potentially devastating phenomenon, but it is also a chance for the United States to stand in solidarity with people around the world in a struggle to protect people's homes, their land, and their well-being. It is an opportunity to show leadership and improve how the world views our country.

Of course leadership is also necessary because the effects of climate change will be felt acutely here at home as well. For instance, millions of people see the Jersey Shore and its 127 miles of beautiful, white, sandy beaches as the only place to spend the summer. The Jersey Shore is an irreplaceable treasure for my home state but faces an uncertain future in light of climate change.

This treasure literally may not exist by the end of this century. Because much of the shore is subsiding while sea level is rising, some studies have projected erosion on the scale of 300 feet inland. In addition, the barrier islands which front our coast could be completely eroded away -- that includes Atlantic City which is itself built on a barrier island.¹

Not only does global warming mean relocating millions of people and facing the potential of billions of dollars in property damage, but it would mean the end of an invaluable resource treasured by generations. We can't wait until people start vacationing at the "Pennsylvania Shore."

We can't wait for hurricanes to creep northward and rip through New Jersey homes like Katrina ripped through New Orleans. Waiting as increased temperatures cause savage droughts means farmers will face barren fields and American families could face shortages of food. Five years ago a heat wave killed an estimated 35,000 people in Europe. It would be foolish to wait to act against global warming until a heat wave of that

¹ From Reports by Environment NJ and the Union of Concerned Scientists.

magnitude strikes us here. We can't wait till the oven dings before turning down the heat.

But coming up with a solution to global climate change is not just about avoiding catastrophe; it's about seizing opportunity. A climate treaty could and should be one of the biggest driving forces of new high-paying, high-tech jobs that this country needs. Finding new sources of power and improving efficiency—for the average American this would mean lower gas prices, lower electric bills, and higher-paying high-tech jobs in the growing field of green energy. It's all part of the same equation, all part of a comprehensive effort.

The centerpiece of a comprehensive effort has to be an effective international treaty that will be in force post-2012. It has to be a treaty that is strong enough to avert disaster, but one flexible enough to be ratified by the United States Senate.

We cannot have another situation like the Kyoto treaty where a treaty was negotiated, but could not be ratified by our country. That means that the United States Senate and this committee in particular is perhaps the *most* important place in the world for the post-2012 climate treaty to be negotiated. Bali has provided a very sparse framework for these negotiations to begin, and it is essential that we stay actively engaged with the process so that negotiators from other nations understand the kind of treaty that can receive 67 votes here in the Senate.

Right now given the many challenges facing such a treaty, it certainly seems like a daunting task. But if we as a committee are willing to be fully engaged in the climate treaty negotiation process, I think we can resolve these issues and help form an agreement that can be ratified.

Probably the most important issue for this committee to resolve is whether the United States is willing to commit itself to mandatory emissions targets. As Mr. Connaughton [Pronounced Con-a-ton] may address in a moment, this Administration has firmly opposed mandatory emissions cuts. Going forward, this committee will need to be engaged on this issue and try to determine which targets we can realistically commit ourselves to. Without such a commitment it is unclear how we as a planet can reduce our emissions to avert the most dangerous effects of climate change.

Another substantive issue that will need to be addressed for a successful climate change treaty is China's willingness to be part of the solution. Some are convinced that China is focused on growth at any cost and at any level of pollution. But others feel China is willing to embrace policies that will commit them to lower their emissions. We will need to resolve whether China is willing to entertain firm policy commitments that will reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

It is not just the major emitting nations that a climate treaty must concern itself with of course. There will also need to be mechanisms to require developing nations to protect tropical rainforests which serve as an essential carbon sink, allowing enormous

amounts of carbon dioxide to be scrubbed from the atmosphere. And vulnerable developing nations will also need funds to adapt to climate change. Such funds could be used to acquire drought resistant crops, build sea walls, restore wetlands, or even resettle those displaced by the effects of climate change. The next climate treaty must not just be about mitigating climate change and reducing emissions, but also about dealing with the inevitable effects of climate change.

In conclusion, the conference at Bali was a promising start that set the framework for international climate change negotiations, but the bulk of the substantive work remains ahead of us. I am hopeful that today's hearing will begin a process whereby this committee can be in active communication with the White House, the State Department and other nations to help shape a successful climate change treaty. This issue is simply too important to risk failure.

It is up to us, not only as policy-makers, but as human beings, to stand in solidarity with people around the world who stand to lose their homes, their land, their ways of life, because of a problem to which America significantly contributes. The sooner we throw our weight behind real solutions, the better off we all will be.

Thank you.