

WILLIAM REILLY

Chairman of the Climate Works foundation, former Administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency

Narendra Taneja, Energy CEO and Convener, World Oil & Gas Assembly (WOGA)

I would like to ask William a question. When you look at the link today between population and health, you can look at it especially from the viewpoint of where the majority of people live on this planet: Asia, Latin America and Africa. How do you look at this and how crucial is this as far as the global governance is concerned? Or do you think we need global governance when it comes to these issues. At times, this is looked at more locally, even in the context of countries like India and China, for instance. How can global governance become relevant or play some role in order to bring the world a little bit closer on these issues like health and population?

William Reilly

I think that the organisers of the conference are to be complimented for putting these issues together. Climate change is thus far rarely discussed with an emphasis on the huge consequences for these very questions. With respect to global governance, there is no question that the climate issue will only be addressed with some kind of governmental mechanism. This could be an international treaty of the sort that has been sought unsuccessfully for going on 20 years now.

However, the reality of Copenhagen and its failure, as it was a failure in terms of the broad goal that had been set for it, should teach us a couple of lessons. First of all, the process was flawed; the accord was blocked by Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela and Saudi Arabia, which says something about the process that requires unanimity in such a negotiation. Secondly, the countries which were most forthcoming there and most prepared to make commitments had, within their own domestic conversation, built a support. They had an understanding of the way in which their economic growth and development could be fostered by going towards more fuel efficiency in automobiles, better appliances. They had some protection against deforestation. Those countries were prepared to make commitments. Most of them were not prepared to make internationally-binding legal treaty commitments.

However, there are countries like China, which is very exemplary in making a 45% improvement in its energy economy. They had taken so many measures at home to make that possible that they made it clear that they did not want to make this commitment internationally. They were simply going to do what they were going to do, irrespective of the international situation. Mexico itself made some very strong commitments; I think it is the first developing country to have made a specific numerical commitment, a binding commitment, with respect to its intentions. They too have had this dialogue, under the leadership of a very active, involved and informed President.

The lesson that I take away from that is that there is one thing we will require in the path to future global governance. I was told by my scientists, when I took my job at the Environmental Protection Agency, that climate change was one of the four great threats to our system. The path lies in developing domestic policies which reinforce economic development and energy efficiency together. I think that will be easier, as some of the consequences of some of the climate change manifest themselves. They will not be attractive consequences.

**Jean-Pierre Elkabbach, President, Lagardère News**

William Reilly, I know that you've been involved in all these fights for a very long time, since the administration of George Bush senior. You knew most of the American presidents up close. Do you sense any progress in knowledge and general awareness? In 2008, you said, "There will be no law on global warming before 2010". Do you remember? Two years later, what do you think now? Were you too optimistic or do you tell yourself that there's still a long way to go?

William Reilly

The one basis for optimism on this subject in America right now is that there is a growing consensus that we cannot even govern ourselves and therefore, maybe international governance would be friendlier and more welcome than it might have been. The reality is that any kind of international governance to which the United States would aspire is probably more remote now than it was a few years ago. One might have thought that the Obama administration, given how popular the President was in his control of the Congress, could have moved towards that. It proved impossible; the economic situation explains some of that. However, I have to say that I do not foresee that.

Jean-Pierre Elkabbach, President, Lagardère News

Do you mean that the hope inspired by Obama's election has been completely or just temporarily dashed?

William Reilly

I think that ultimately, the United States is going to become conscious of the consequences of a sea-level rise. This will particularly make itself felt in Florida, Alaska, California and other states. However, I do not see a near-term political consensus that will bring us anything like a treaty commitment any time soon.