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- Environmental Information Center • Friends of the Earth • Izaak Walton League •
- League of Conservation Voters • National Parks and Conservation Association •
- National Wildlife Federation • Natural Resources Defense Council • Physicians for Social Responsibility • Population Action International • Rails to Trails Conservancy •
- Sierra Club • Union of Concerned Scientists • United States Public Interest Research Group • The Wilderness Society •

October 8, 1997

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We want to thank you for your continuing efforts to focus the attention of the American people on the most serious environmental threat facing the planet, global warming. We especially want to commend you for convening Monday's White House Conference on Climate Change. We are encouraged by your opening statement that the United States "must show leadership" on the global warming issue and that we need "to do the responsible thing...to avoid leaving our children and grandchildren with a catastrophe."

We are, however, increasingly concerned by reports that the policy options being assembled for your consideration will, at best, do no more than stabilize US emissions of greenhouse gases at 1990 levels, and may even include a target-busting escape clause. Such policies would be totally inconsistent with the gravity and urgency of the global warming threat, as was so forcefully presented by the science panel at Monday's conference. In addition, a stabilization-only approach would deny the United States the global leadership role that you committed to at Monday's conference.

We are gravely concerned by indications the administration is even considering ill-conceived proposals for a "relief mechanism" that would allow nations to abandon the emissions reduction commitments made in Kyoto if costs exceeded some pre-set level. This escape-clause scheme would be a direct repudiation of your principled statement on Monday that the US "must be prepared to commit to realistic and binding goals on our emissions of greenhouse gases." Such a mechanism would undermine the credibility of the entire treaty process, and would frustrate our shared goal of engaging the meaningful participation of developing countries in a global emissions reduction regime. Finally, this proposal would weaken, if not eliminate, any incentive for private sector innovation and investment in clean technologies that, as you acknowledged on Monday, is the key to successfully addressing the global warming problem.

As you know, it is our strong view that the United States must support a treaty that ensures substantial industrialized country emissions reductions below 1990 levels starting no later than the year 2005, in order to make meaningful progress towards addressing the global warming problem. Numerous studies indicate that such reductions are achievable with current and near-term technologies at very reasonable costs. Moreover, recent polling by the World Wildlife Fund demonstrates that such measures would enjoy the overwhelming support of the American people.

We want to assure you that the environmental community will mobilize a massive grassroots campaign in support of an agreement committing industrialized countries to achieve substantial emissions reductions below 1990 levels before 2010. However, we also want to make it very clear that none of our groups will be able to mobilize grassroots support for, and indeed will be compelled to oppose, a position that simply seeks to freeze emissions at 1990 levels by 2010 or later, or that includes a treaty-busting escape clause.

We respectfully urge, in the strongest possible terms, that you assume international leadership by supporting an agreement in Kyoto that commits industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions well below 1990 levels, starting no later than 2005, with no escape clauses. If we do less, future generations will wonder why, having acknowledged that this is the most significant environmental threat of the next century, we failed to take more meaningful action.