



At the 10th December Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) received the 2007 Nobel Prize for peace in Oslo. Below you find the main part of the Presentation Speech by Professor Ole Danbolt Mjøs, Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

[..] There was for a long time great doubt about whether global warming was man-made. Thanks to the IPCC there is very little such doubt today. Then there are those who doubt that there is any connection between the environment and the climate on the one hand and war and conflict on the other. Why have the IPCC and Al Gore been awarded a Nobel Prize for peace? The Norwegian Nobel Committee has always had a broad approach to peace. Its opinion has been that there are many different paths to peace. A number of these paths have been contentious, not so much among ordinary people, who are inclined to believe that any good cause deserves the Peace Prize, as among scholars, whose task it is to study interrelations between phenomena. When the Nobel Committee handed out human rights prizes, scholars queried the connection between democracy and peace. Today they no longer ask. The connection is now regarded as among the most "robust" in modern political science.

The traditional concept of peace and security emphasises war between states. In order to protect all the individuals of which states consist, it is of course important to prevent any attack from outside. But wars between states have become increasingly rare. Wars within states, on the other hand, have grown more frequent. Many more people are killed today in civil wars than in wars between states. Those who attach importance to "human security" argue that the main thing is to protect individuals. The chief threats may be direct violence, but deaths may also have less direct sources in starvation, disease, or natural disasters. A goal in our modern world must be to maintain "human security" in the broadest sense.

Environmental problems certainly affect human security in this broad sense. When low-lying areas are flooded, their inhabitants will no longer have any form of security. In the words of last year's Laureate, Muhammad Yunus, "My country Bangladesh is already paying a very high price for global warming and stands to face even greater challenges in the future. As natural calamities intensify year on year, climate change has already become a question of survival". We can already see how millions of refugees from Bangladesh are creating social and political tensions in India. Melting glaciers, and rivers, which first overflow and then have their rate of flow reduced or dry out, mean dramatic changes in people's everyday lives. In many places, such events are coinciding with rapid increases in population. Such cities as Quito, La Paz and Lima are affected by the melting of glaciers in the Andes; the rivers from the glaciers in the Himalayas supply half of the fresh water needed by 40 per cent of the world's population. Desertification in China and Africa is threatening vast land areas.

In some parts of the world global warming can be beneficial. We see farming being undertaken in northern regions where it has hitherto been difficult or impossible. Nevertheless, Inuit and Sami people are worried. Sheila Watt-Cloutier has said that this year it was planet earth that got the Peace Prize. The overall effect is negative. In the south the picture is even clearer. The effect will be particularly damaging for those who are already in the greatest difficulty, the weak states and vulnerable people who are least well-equipped to meet the new challenges. They are paying a high price for a problem largely brought about by the wealthy countries to the north.

Unfortunately we can already establish that global warming not only has negative consequences for "human security", but can also fuel violence and conflict within and between states. It can be argued that the melt-down in the Arctic is giving a sharper edge to the new series of sovereignty claims that we are seeing in this northernmost part of the world. The consequences are most obvious, however, among the poorest of the poor, in Darfur and in large sectors of the Sahel belt, where we have already had the first "climate war". The wind that blows the sand off the Sahara sets people and camels moving towards more fertile areas. The outcome is that nomads and peasants, Arabs and Africans, Christians and Muslims from many different tribes clash in a series of conflicts. There are many dimensions to this, but it is growing increasingly obvious that desertification is a central underlying factor. The pattern from Darfur has now spread to Chad and the Central African Republic. Large parts of the Sahel belt, from the Sudan to Senegal, are coming under threat.

It is not only the Norwegian Nobel Committee that sees interrelations between nature and the environment, war and conflict. So does the UN Security Council. In April this year, on Britain's initiative, the Security Council held its first debate on the effect of climate on war and conflict. The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, said in his careful way that "when resources are scarce – whether energy, water or arable land – our fragile ecosystems become strained, as do the coping mechanisms of groups and individuals. This can lead to a breakdown of established codes of conduct, and even outright conflict". Climate and the environment have thus become one of the threats "to international peace and security" which the UN Security Council is meant to deal with. A committee of prominent American military officers recently stated that climate changes are "a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world".

The Norwegian Nobel Committee rarely raises its voice. Our style is largely sober. But it is a

long time since the committee was concerned with such fundamental questions as this year. Desmond Tutu, Peace Prize Laureate in 1984, put it as follows in Tromsø's Arctic Cathedral in connection with World Environment Day on the 5th of June: "To ignore the challenge of global warming may be criminal. It certainly is disobeying God. It is sin. The future of our fragile, beautiful planet is in our hands. We are stewards of God's creation".

We congratulate the IPCC and Al Gore on receiving this year's Peace Prize. We thank you for what you have done for mother earth, and wish you further success in a task that is so vital to us all. Action is needed now. Climate changes are already moving beyond human control.

For the complete speech, please see the Homepage of the Norwegian Nobel Committee:

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2007/presentation-speech.html