



**The Climate Challenge: A call to action
Birmingham 7 June 2008**

**Lord Hannay of Chiswick, Chair of UNA-UK
Speaking Notes**

It is good to be back in Birmingham again. I was a frequent visitor between 1998 and 2005 when I served on and then chaired for more than five years the council of the University of Birmingham, one of Britain's best. Where better to start that UN Association's series of conferences on climate change which, with the support and assistance of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, we are organising in different parts of the United Kingdom. It was high time for climate change to move away from the metropolitan complexities of Whitehall and Westminster and from the international bargaining of Kyoto, Bali and Copenhagen and set up a proper dialogue on the issues at stake among those who in our modern democracy will finally determine the policies this country pursues.

The international debate on climate change has now reached the end of its beginning, not the beginning of its end. The scientists have made a compelling case demonstrating the largely man-made nature of climate change and the disastrous consequences of ignoring it; the economists have demonstrated that acting now will be less costly than acting later when those disastrous consequences have really begun to bite; but the politicians have yet to make the hard choices needed if action is to be effective; and the diplomats are still fumbling with the hot potato of burden sharing, in particular, burden sharing between developed and developing countries. Eighteen months from now, at the Copenhagen conference called last December in Bali, we will find out whether those hard choices have been made and whether that diplomatic Rubik's cube has been squared.

No challenge we face is more self-evidently global than that of climate change. No single country or regional grouping can, on its own, find solution and, on its own, achieve protection from the down-side risks of climate change. The relative ineffectiveness of Kyoto, even though it was a first and good step in the right direction, has demonstrated why any approach in which the largest economy in the world, that of the United States, does not participate and in which the rising economies of China, India and Brazil do not participate will be doomed from the outset, indeed will probably not be agreed. But equally no challenge we face is more obviously local, in that meeting it will involve decision about the way our living conditions develop, the taxes we pay and many other matters hitherto to consider as outside the realm of

international negotiation. So there from the outset is a paradox which, in a modest way, this conference is designed to address.

There are plenty of other paradoxes too. What attitude to take towards the further redevelopment of civil nuclear power generation, one of the most carbon free sources of electricity, but one with unanswered questions of waste disposal and risks of proliferation? What attitude to take over bio-fuels given that some of them – Brazil's use of sugar cane for example, would seem to be genuinely positive in its overall environmental impacts whilst others, the conversion of corn in the US and some aspects of the EU's bio fuel production, would seem to be less so? What role can technology take in handling the climate change challenge; and how can we ensure that technological improvements are transferred, speedily and equitably, to developing countries, thus enabling their use of energy per unit of production to be reduced and the current huge gap between energy use per unit in developing and developed countries be narrowed?

And we will meet plenty of false prophets and distractions along the way. Those who contest the science of climate change despite the overwhelming balance of evidence. Those who for their own different reasons hotly contest this or that measure designed to combat climate change so that, at the end, there is cumulatively no effective response left. Those who follow an Augustinian path – you may remember that St Augustine prayed for chastity today, not tomorrow – there are plenty of them raising their voices in the current debate over fuel prices. Those who will use climate change as a cover for pursuing other policies such as protectionist trade measure against other countries which might be deemed as having done too little on climate change. Those who argue that developing countries should simply be given a pass on climate change measures since they are responsible for such a small part of previous carbon emissions and irrespective of how high a proportion they are likely to be responsible for in the future. Those who peddle one single nostrum – wind power or solar power, there are plenty of others – as the full answer to a challenge which can in fact can only be managed with whole sheaf of policies. Those who exaggerate the dangers in order to shock but end up by driving many less partisan observers into denial.

Well that's quite enough for what is intended as a brief introduction to our main speakers and to the discussions which will follow. Now over to our speakers.