

Friday 27 November 2015

How To Turn Our Embassies Green?

Introductory remarks by H.E. the Ambassador

Dear guests,

I am delighted to welcome you to the Residence to host this inter-embassy meeting on environmental issues.

This meeting could not be more timely: as you know, on Sunday, France will begin hosting the twenty-first United Nations Climate Conference or COP Twenty-One. The President has confirmed that this major summit will go ahead despite the deadly terrorist attacks a fortnight ago. Unfortunately, concerts and other festive events are likely to be called off. But no country has asked France to postpone the summit.

The whole nation is mobilized in the run-up to this landmark meeting for our civilization, and France – which will co-chair the conference with the UNFCCC – is determined to reach an agreement in Paris: we believe that COP Twenty-One is on course to become a turning point in the history of climate change.

Of course, nothing should be taken for granted, until the very end. One of the reasons for the relative failure of the Copenhagen meeting was the lack of involvement by the key political leaders. This is why the French presidency has chosen a different path: we have invited the heads of state and government to attend a special opening session, and more than a hundred and forty of them will be present.

In the run-up to COP Twenty-One, French diplomacy has of course been fully mobilized to reach out to as many public and private stakeholders as possible, but also to set an example! So on the twenty-second of February, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius sent an instruction to the whole French diplomatic and consular network, calling for a “greening” plan to be launched at every embassy, as part of preparations for the Paris summit.

First of all, here are a few figures to put in perspective the work of COP Twenty-One and the specific goals which justify efforts like those we're making at the level of our embassies.

The planet's average temperature rose by nought-point-six degrees Celsius in the twentieth century; it could increase by between one-point-four and five-point-eight degrees by twenty-one-hundred. These phenomena, mainly caused by rising greenhouse gas emissions, are already having a visible impact: melting ice caps, decreasing reserves of drinking water, rising sea levels, the movement of people and the advent of violent natural disasters (storms, heatwaves etc.).

Now, we know today that:

- in the countries of Western Europe, buildings (tertiary and residential) are responsible for twenty-five percent of greenhouse gas emissions;
- a French person emits the equivalent of two-point-two tonnes of carbon a year on average,
- and an embassy car more than four tonnes;
- in Europe, transport is responsible for twenty-six percent of greenhouse gas emissions.

Government departments contribute to environmental imbalances through their activities and their daily operations.

For all these reasons, the French government is urging them to make environmentally responsible efforts, through the Exemplary Administration Plan. The aim, among other things, is to reduce water and energy consumption, limit greenhouse gas emissions, recycle paper, choose less polluting vehicles and build with tested techniques to protect the environment.

In London, the Embassy and the French Consulate have drawn up and put in place an Environmental Charter which Olivier Lacroix will present to you in a few minutes' time.

But we thought it would be useful to devote a few hours, together with other diplomatic posts and representatives of the private sector, to sharing

experiences and good practice, in order to help ourselves implement this approach here in London.

After the presentation of the Charter, Bruno Aguesse will briefly outline the actions taken by other embassies in London which have embarked on greening activities to reduce their carbon footprint.

Then Nick Baker (from Nick Baker Architects) and David Gadsdon (consultant engineer), both involved in the green transformation of the Austrian Embassy, will make a presentation. The green energy firm Ecotricity will take the floor, as will representatives of the Canadian and US embassies.

I hope we can contribute, on our modest scale, to the ambitious but vital success of COP Twenty-One, and I wish you an excellent morning.