



# World Chronicle

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**GUEST:** Mr. Mohammad Reza Salamat  
UN Advisor on Climate Change

**JOURNALISTS:** Bill Reilly, United Press International  
Philippe Bolopion, Radio France Internationale

**MODERATOR:** Tony Jenkins

## Climate Change

February 2005 marks the date the Kyoto Protocol comes into effect. Will it help to reduce the threat of climate change?

In this edition of World Chronicle, Mohammad Reza Salamat, UN Advisor on Climate Change, discusses what the Kyoto Protocol will mean in practical terms, what benefits it will bring to people in both industrialized and developing countries and to what extent the treaty will help to stem the effects of rapid global warming.

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Director: Dave Woodie  
Production Assistant: Sheila Poinsette

**ANNOUNCER:** From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

**JENKINS:** Hello, I'm Tony Jenkins.

More than a decade ago, most countries joined the international treaty, "the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change". Its goal: to consider means to reduce global warming. In 1997 governments added the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement that provides more powerful and legally binding measures. February 2005 marks the date the Kyoto Protocol comes into effect.

What does it mean in practical terms? What benefit will this bring to people? Can we stop worrying about climate change?

Our guest today is Mohammad Reza Salamat, an Advisor on Climate Change for the United Nations.

Joining me to talk to Mr. Salamat are Philippe Boloignon of Radio France Internationale...and Bill Reilly of United Press International.

**JENKINS:** Mr. Salamat – Reza if I may...

**SALAMAT:** Yes.

**JENKINS:** Welcome. I can't tell you how anxious I've been to talk to you or somebody like you because I have to tell you - - in recent months I have become very concerned about climate change. I saw a documentary on the BBC the other day, in which they talked about the very real possibility of a new ice age hitting the Northern American continent and Northern Europe in the not too distant future. The reason they were worried about this, is because they said there was so much water melting from the Arctic and the Greenland that it would interfere with the Gulf Stream. We had a report from scientists the other day saying there will be no ice left in the Arctic or in Greenland – and the ice cap in Greenland is two miles thick – there will be no ice left in sixty-six years. Am I right to be that concerned? How cataclysmic are the predictions now about climate change?

**SALAMAT:** Thank you. It is also a pleasure for me to participate in this discussion today. Climate change is indeed a serious problem; I think it is now what the experts agreed throughout the world that climate change is going to be the most challenging problem during the twenty-first century.

**JENKINS:** British Prime-Minister Tony Blair said just the other day that he thinks that climate change is the major long-term threat to Britain. When you have somebody like that saying it – then it must be true – presumably....no?

**SALAMAT:** Yeah, I think that could be one reason why it could be true. Climate change as I was just saying is really a serious problem. There is very strong scientific evidence now – mostly provided by the IPCC, which is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,

a scientific body that makes scientific assessment of the available information on the trends of climate change and global environment, and submits the results of its findings to the intergovernmental process, which is the convention on Climate Change Process. And the decision makers in that political process look at the scientific data and the options and the policies proposed, and discuss and decide on which way to go to mitigate climate change. So the evidence in fact supported by that group of scientists on the IPCC is telling us very clearly that there is very strong evidence now that global warming has been taking place. In fact, since 1860's, from since when we have as you know the instrument of that record, global warming has been going up.

**JENKINS:** You want to give us a number? Average temperatures, how much have they risen?

**SALAMAT:** Particularly during the twentieth century, I can give you which is more – in fact – relevant to our time. Although the twentieth century the climate has been warmed by zero point six degrees Celsius.

**JENKINS:** That doesn't sound like very much.

**SALAMAT:** It is. If you look at the trend, you will notice that it's going up and up. So the speed of the global warming and the trend is very in fact – frightening. And the IPCC is also telling us that by the year 2100, if no measure is taken to mitigate climate change, there would be a global warming of up to between one point four and five point eight degrees Celsius, which is very alarming I would say, and you have to be worried for yourself and for your sons. And I would say also, particularly for yourself. So it is going to happen in fact, from now. The other thing is the sea level rise – which is going to be the most adverse impact of climate change. Again, according to the scientific assessment provided by the IPCC, between the year two thousand and two thousand one hundred, there would be sea level rise of between zero point zero nine, and zero point eighty eight meters.

**JENKINS:** That's about three feet...

**SALAMAT:** Yeah, about three feet, which will mean a lot of adverse impacts on the coastal zone regions and on the agriculture and food availability and displacement of the people, and many other things that we can discuss as the adverse impact.

**REILLY:** But what about the argument that the sea rises – what you're talking about – the level of the sea – the argument that the water is already there in ice, in the Arctic, so it's not going to be an increase of water, it's more the expansion of the sea because of the heat.

**SALAMAT:** That's correct. Because the carbon dioxide content of the water is going to be increased, as a result of in-fact the de-forestation and too much emissions by the energy

use and consumption and production – particularly fossil fuels – the carbon content of the oceans would increase, and as a result, the thermal – in fact volume of the oceans would go up and as a result in fact, it would be a serious rise.

**REILLY:** But, and at the same time, if the ice melts in the North - in the Arctic - especially over land over tundra, we'll have forestry, which will cool.

**JENKINS:** In other words you're saying the tundra would be able to start growing forests and therefore it will grab carbon out of the air and therefore it'll mitigate the effects, is that what you are saying?

**REILLY:** It will grab some, and the point of bringing up these two diametrically opposed ideas is that there are so many of these yings and yangs.

**JENKINS:** Right. The idea that global warming can produce an ice age. But you know what Reza, we really should be talking about the political aspect of this, because that's what we are here to discuss – the fact that the Kyoto Treaty is coming into effect and whether it's actually going to have any effect? Is the Kyoto Treaty going to be able to do anything to prevent the things you have just been describing? Will it stop the seas rising by three feet in a hundred years?

**SALAMAT:** I think the Kyoto Protocol is a first step, but a very significant step I would say to move toward that end. But it's not enough in itself.

**JENKINS:** Why not?

**SALAMAT:** Because, as you know the Kyoto Protocol envisions only commitments for industrialized countries, first. Secondly, the commitments will just cover the first commitment period, which is the years between 2008 and 2012, during which time the aggregate global emissions of industrialist countries, or what is referred to as annexment parties in the Protocol, have to be reduced by five point two percent. So what you have now....

**JENKINS:** Five point two percent from?....When?...From what?

**SALAMAT:** ...from the '90 levels as a base here.

**JENKINS:** So between...from the 1990 level they've got to reduce their emissions by five percent by the year two thousand...

**SALAMAT:** ...Yeah, between the years 2008 and 2012.

**JENKINS:** Are they on track?

**SALAMAT:** Not yet. But they...

**JENKINS:** Philippe....sorry, why don't you jump in..

**BOLOPION:** One of the biggest problems obviously of the Kyoto Agreement is that the United States, one of the biggest polluters is not a part of it. And the reason why they are not a

part of it they say is because the science is still debatable. So my question to you is – is the science still debatable on climate change?

**SALAMAT:** Of course, science is always evolving. Science is never perfect. It's always evolving and moves toward perfection. But I think we have to build on the best scientific information that we have available at our hand, and we have to use it. As I was just saying at the beginning, we have a very good...wealth of scientific information available now, which is telling us that there is strong evidence that climate change is happening and global warming is taking place, most of which is attributable to human activities.

**JENKINS:** ..As I understand it, the American National Academy of Sciences has recently said that global climate warming is irrefutable, the science is irrefutable. Isn't that correct Reza?

**SALAMAT:** Yes...

**JENKINS:** And tell me, does the White House accept the conclusions of its own National Academy of Sciences?

**SALAMAT:** Yeah, I just come back to you. But let me complete what I was just saying about this incompleteness of the science. So the science will never be complete or perfect but it moves towards perfection. But as I said, the most available scientific information is telling us that there is high likelihood that climate change is happening, and that it is mostly attributable to human activities. So I think this provides us with enough evidence that you have to do something about it. Plus the fact that there's some measures that if we do, will be useful anyway for the welfare of the humanities like energy efficiency and promotion of the renewable energies and things like that. These are all good for sustainable development.

**BOLOPION:** Have you seen the movie THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW, which portrays a new ice age and especially here in New York?

**SALAMAT:** Yes, I have seen that...

**BOLOPION:** There is the Vice President of the United States saying that the science is still debatable; and then comes that ice age. Could you explain to people how we can be talking about a new ice age when the problem is suppose to be global warming? Can you just quickly? I don't think it is very clear for most of the people.

**SALAMAT:** Of course you cannot expect that all scientists come to the same conclusion at the same time. There might still be some scientific views by some scientists here and there that say climate change might not be that serious. But as I was just saying, there is wide spread recognition now by most of the scientists throughout the world that climate change is happening, and it's mostly attributable to the human activities. Ah... about the position of the

Vice President of the United States or other administration officials, I have to say that any government who is in fact selected by its people, elected by its people to defend its national interest. Why the U.S. and its current administration is following this policy – of course – depends on which interests you are representing?

**JENKINS:** By this policy - what you mean is - - refusing to join the Kyoto Protocol?

**SALAMAT:** Yeah, I'm coming to that point. So, I don't want to go into the details, but I think it is pretty clear that the scientific information could be used in either way, and also the scientific research can be advanced based on, again, political interest. For instance, if the U.S. administration decides politically to join the Kyoto Protocol, they would have every reason to provide sufficient financing for more research on climate change and for adaptation and other things, and energy efficiency and renewable energies to achieve the objective of the Protocol. So, but for any reason, the current administration has decided not to make the climate change a high priority issue. So, I think the prioritization of the issue is a political issue - it's not a scientific issue; so this is how the administration has decided to argue.

**BOLOPION:** So, is it a global warming or is it an ice age that we are facing?

**SALAMAT:** I can't tell you for sure - - or predict which one will be, but most of the scientists are telling us that there will be global warming, and overall in fact, global - meaning temperature – will tend to rise and I can give you one – I gave you already one figure.

**JENKINS:** I think the answer to Philippe's question is that the possibility of an ice age is something that may be sparked by global warming. The idea being that this water coming down from the Arctic will block the Gulf Stream. As I understand it, the Gulf Stream carries the heat, that's equivalent to what's produced by about a million power plants to Northern Europe and to North America, and if you cut the Gulf Stream, then that leaves Northern Europe and North America in a bit of a mess. I think that's where the idea of an ice age comes in. It's sparked by global warming. But as you have been putting out that scientists are debating that – that science is not that good yet – but that is where the idea for the film came from. But I want to get back to the politics of this. The United States produces how much of the emissions that are causing global warming? What percentage?

**SALAMAT:** The United States is emitting twenty-five percent of global emissions and thirty-six percent of the emissions of the industrialized countries or what is referred to -- as I said – the group of annexment parties, which includes the EU countries, and the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand – basically members of OECD – and economies in transition of course.

**JENKINS:** So that's a huge amount – and presumably – that would cost a huge amount of money to deal with. Let me just say, this is World Chronicle and we are talking about climate change with UN Advisor, Mr. Mohammad Reza Salamat. Bill.

**REILLY:** I wanted to get back to the US administration. Are you aware of active opposition from the White House, amongst governments, to Kyoto?

**SALAMAT:** Opposition from the White House to the Kyoto? I think that most people now know the position of the current administration towards the Kyoto Protocol. When the Bush administration came to power in Washington in early 2000 and won, I think it was in March 2001 two or three months after the new administration came to power, when Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor then said that the Kyoto Protocol is fatally flawed and that it is a dead agreement from our perspective; and that we are not going to join.

**REILLY:** Are they actively opposing – are they taking moves? Are they talking to governments?.....

**SALAMAT:** To the extent that I know, I have been involved in all discussions of the conference of the parties since the Climate Change Convention came into force. I haven't noticed any conspicuous or visible effort by the delegation of the United States to oppose the Kyoto Protocol. They didn't in fact to the best of my knowledge. They said, we don't - - we let the world go if they so wish to move on the Kyoto Protocol, but we are not going to join it. So, there might be some other efforts that I am not aware of, behind the scenes; but as far as I know, there hasn't been any conspicuous.....

**REILLY:** Are they trying to ah....excuse me – trying to keep India and China out of it as well - - as an example?

**SALAMAT:** As I said - - again the current administration has not been trying to block the Kyoto Protocol. They said we will let them go – move forward if they so wish. So I don't think they have tried much to really influence India or China not to join.

**BOLOPION:** What about India and China? How important do you think it is for these two big countries to be also part of it? How can Kyoto go ahead without these huge countries?

**JENKINS:** We should explain first that China and India are not a part of the Kyoto Protocol. Presumably, that's the reason that Washington says that the Kyoto Protocol is fatally flawed because those are the two countries that are industrializing the fastest and I think the Americans are saying well if we do something to stop emitting these global warming gasses as fast we stop emitting them, China and India are going to be putting those into the atmosphere. So what's the point? It's a no win strategy. Are they right to argue that?

**SALAMAT:** That is the second reason why the current administration of the United States...in fact, decided not to join the Kyoto Protocol.

**JENKINS:** What is the first reason?

**SALAMAT:** The first reason was - as he was raising -that the science is not complete. The second one is that while some big developing countries like China and India and others, that are doing a lot of emissions, and they will produce more than the US perhaps in the future, do not have any targets, any quantified reduction commitments. So, as you said, what would be the use of doing some implementation measures by us without having their engagement? I think, in response to your question, climate change, in principle, is a global problem, and thus it requires a global response. Okay, that is the first, I think, principle that we have to take in account. These other principles that we also have to bear in mind, one of which is that looking at the history, we will see that it has been mostly in industrialist countries, who have contributed emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. If you look at the total level of emissions at the pre-industrial era, you will see that it was about two hundred and eighty what they call parts per million at the atmosphere. While it increased to more than three hundred fifty parts per million, in fact, by the year 2000, which means during these two hundred and fifty years, during which the industrial revolution has been taking place. So it mostly happened due to the huge amount of consumption of fossil fuels by the industrialized countries. So developing countries practically contributed less; but they will contribute more in the future as their economic growths proceeds – like China and India that you mentioned. Yes, the daily emissions will increase quite substantially mostly because of the high population and the economic growth and.....

**JENKINS:** So the Bush administration is right? Kyoto is fatally flawed.

**SALAMAT:** Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that as I said, since it's a global problem all in fact, major contributors who participate. But no in the sense that there has been a strict emission, mostly by the industrialized countries; and in particular, the United States, and developing countries such as China...

**JENKINS:** But who knew two hundred years ago in the industrializing... in Northern Europe where the industrial revolution started – nobody knew that this was going to have an effect. We know now....there's no....we were ignorant then, we're not ignorant now. There is no excuse surely for China and India to say we're not going to join in the solution.

**SALAMAT:** That's fine, but I am just trying to explain that they are arguing that – in order for them to do something about it – first, those who have contributed the most should do something, and then we will follow suit, plus the fact that they are arguing that we don't have

the resources to tackle climate change. So we need your support financially and technically, to address climate change; and I think they are also right. So this is why they say - - o.k. you do something during the first commitment period – which is 2008 and 2012, during which only industrialized countries have targets, have quantified emission reduction targets. And they say, after you do something, then we will follow suit, for perhaps for the next commitment period. But then the question is – whether they will accept commitments for the next commitment period, coming after 2012?

**JENKINS:** Your point presumably would be – they're not going to make a commitment if the world's largest polluter and emitter of these gases is not doing anything.

**SALAMAT:** I think that's most probably the case.

**JENKINS:** So where.... Sorry Bill....

**REILLY:** I wanted to know about the possibility of, of climate...of countries implementing efforts to...well, to take up the Kyoto Protocol, which is now convention. They want to...it will cost fifteen to twenty percent some think tanks had said to economic growth, it would cost jobs by curbing pollution and for industrial countries...Have you heard anything about this, have you heard concerns raised?

**SALAMAT:** Of course, there are some consensus... in fact, now we come to the third reason why the Bush administration argued that they would not join the Kyoto Protocol. They say that the Kyoto Protocol will harm our economy. So the Bush administration basically raised three reasons. One was the incomplete science, the second one was the non-participation of big developing countries like China and India, and the third one was that it will damage the US economy. Of course, if you do something to curb the emissions you have to make some changes to your lifestyle and to your economic activities. However, particularly in the short term, if you look at the longer term – the issue – you will notice that the costs of inaction in the longer term will be much higher than the cost of action in the short term. So in the longer term, global warming and climate change will impact the agricultural production, it will impact the water resources, it will impact in fact the weather patterns – there will be extreme weather events, like floods and droughts which will practically damage the economy.

**JENKINS:** But so are the consequences are actually potentially quite good. Aren't you going to have a longer growing season in Canada? Isn't Canada going to be able to grow more crops?

**SALAMAT:** That is another argument that is being said. Climate change, it's very interesting. Climate change will have different impacts from region to region. For some regions,

it might have some – even as you said – benefit impacts. There might be increased food supply and production in some regions and there might be reduced in fact agricultural yields.

**REILLY:** Desertification?

**SALAMAT:** Desertification of course. There might be storms and... and floods in some places, there might be droughts in some other places. So it's very mixed adverse impacts. Overall, the impacts...the predominant impacts would be adverse than the positive.

**BOLOPION:** We've see this year in Florida lots of hurricanes for example, do you think that is part of the global warming trend?

**SALAMAT:** That is one of the arguments that is being made. There is not full certainty that it is related directly to climate change. But one of the – in fact – scientific likelihoods that the scientists are discussing now in the IPCC is that it might well be related to climate change.

**JENKINS:** You've said that Kyoto is essentially the first step and its major provision is suppose to have been going into effect by the year 2012, which is just eight years away. What then? What are you hoping to do? Now that it is in force in February, what does that do for you? You are one of "the" world experts on the Kyoto Protocol. What can you do with it now that it is coming into effect? You've got eight years to play with. What's the next step?

**SALAMAT:** I think, first, we have to ensure that the Kyoto Protocol will be implemented in full. As you may know, there are new and innovative and market-based mechanisms envisioned in the Kyoto Protocol, what is referred to mostly by industrialized countries as flexibility mechanisms – like the CDM - which is Clean Develop Mechanism and the Joint Implementation Mechanism and the Emission Trading Mechanism. So there are three market-based mechanisms created, by the way mostly by the American negotiators, in the process of negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol. And, I think, most industrialized countries –excluding the US and Australia, who are not going to join, are already preparing themselves to, in fact, implement fully to the extent that benefits them, the three market-based mechanisms; particularly the emissions trading. There is now a lot of discussion about how the carbon trading would look like and how much investment would be made by the private sector. The Kyoto Protocol...

**BOLOPION:** ...Could you just explain a bit that mechanism - carbon trading and....

**SALAMAT:** Yeah...The three new and market-based mechanisms envisioned in the Kyoto Protocol. The first one is CDM, which stands for Clean Development Mechanism. This is a partnership in fact between developing countries and developed countries, in the sense that developed countries - industrialized countries – in doing their emission in fact reductions - they can implement some projects in a developing country, like for instance, establishing renewable

energy power plant or energy efficiency project or waste management project, whereby emissions of greenhouse gasses would be reduced in that country. By doing this that developed country will comply with some of its commitments. So this Kyoto Protocol is also important, coming back to your first question, in the sense that it's really providing some flexibility mechanisms, some innovative mechanisms to the developed countries, whereby they can reduce the costs of action. Okay? So practically.....

**JENKINS:** Mister Salamat. We have barely scratched the surface and I'm afraid we have run out of time. Thank you for being with us.

**SALAMAT:** Thank you.

**JENKINS:** Our guest today has been Mohammad Reza Salamat, UN Advisor on Climate Change. He was interviewed by Philippe Bolopion of Radio France Internationale... and Bill Reilly of UPI.

I'm Tony Jenkins. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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World Chronicle

United Nations, Room S-827

New York, N.Y., 10017.

Or by email at: [poinesette@un.org](mailto:poinesette@un.org)

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