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A North American Labor Assembly on Climate Crisis
UFT, New York City

I want to give thanks to the terrific leader of the New York Labor Central Body, Ed Ott, and thanks especially to those 40-plus members of the global trade union movement who have joined us here today from five continents around the world. It's terrific to have you here. (Applause.)

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the important role that the Cornell Global Labor Institute has played in bringing together such an important cross-section of the world labor movement, to discuss the subject of climate change with North American trade unionists and environmentalists at a critical time in our country's debate on this subject. There's no question that the Cornell Global Labor Institute's efforts in this regard are visionary, and we all appreciate your support. Dean Katz, we thank you *especially*, for the support of Cornell in organizing this gathering. (Applause.)

Before introducing our first keynote speaker, I want to take a moment to outline some of the goals of this conference on behalf of the many of the sponsoring organizations. For the first half of this decade there was a puzzling and alarming silence in the United States on the subject of climate change. Not from our scientists of course, who have been clear and unequivocal on the subject for many years. Not even from the environmental movement of course, which has spoken repeatedly and prophetically on the subject. Not even from some unions, and I count my own union the Steelworkers Union as one of them. I'm glad of course to see such terrific representation from the Steelworkers Union here today. Our Secretary-Treasurer Jim English is somewhere in the room; Leo Gerard, our International President will be joining us later in the morning and speaking this afternoon.

These unions have spoken rightly about Climate Change as the most important environmental issue of our lifetime. But there has been silence from our political establishment, from the business community, and from the broad range of social and political organizations that make up the fabric of our society. Suddenly that silence has broken, in the last eighteen months really. I

think we all admit this since the hurricane season of 2005 there's been an accompanying "storm search" of debate about global warming. Then quite quickly, wide-scale acceptance that global warming is *real*. That it's caused by human activities. That it must be halted and reversed.

Public poll after public poll acknowledges this new reality. A dozen corporate CEOs from General Electric, to British Petroleum from Alcoa to DuPont, and even our best friend Wal-Mart have suddenly called for dramatic action on climate change. As a result, the US public at least, if not its President and Congress, is finally willing to take up the challenge and becoming as it should have decades ago, a global leader on climate change solutions.

This sudden change in opinion has created I think, an even greater urgency for the labor movement to come to a consensus, and the need for bold leadership on climate change that insists on a more equitable economy as one of its central goals.

In addition to Katrina, another cause of this new reality is the hard work that many of you have put into forging a movement for local solutions in opposition to a federal government that ignored sound science for so many years. Almost 500 US cities representing 64 million Americans, have signed the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. From Seattle in the west to New York City here, to even Mountain Iron, a Steelworker town on the iron range of Minnesota. Thirteen states have passed laws in limiting global warming emissions and twenty three states have passed renewable energy standards.

From this experience, the labor movement in the US has started to see the contours of a new economy taking shape and new opportunities for a social movement that is not only good for the environment, but is fundamental to creating an economy that is more equitable, more stable and more responsive to the needs of all the inhabitants of the earth.

What we hope to accomplish at this conference is three-fold. First, we want to establish, without equivocation, that the best scientific evidence will guide us as a labor movement in crafting our solutions to the climate change challenge. Our obligation is to steer the global economy toward a future for our children that is more equitable than the one we were born into.

We can't do that if we fudge the truth about climate change, nor if we bend it to protect some aspect of the status quo. We'll need to make tough choices in the years to come. Unlike other social movements who've had to make choices based on the injustice and passion of the moment, we are extraordinarily lucky to be able to base our movement for change informed by the advice of real science.

When I was a child and had just learned to read, I remember being fascinated by a book on my parents' shelves that had a cover picture on it. It was an old Victorian novel called *The Last Days of Pompeii* about the eruption of Mount Vesuvius that resulted in the city of Pompeii being covered in lava and ash and almost 4000 people dying. As a child I could never understand why the citizens of Pompeii hadn't packed their bags and fled at the first sign of smoke. It took me a long time to understand that if you live and act without the benefit of science, you're going to be surprised by what are perfectly predictable results. We in the labor movement have *no* stake in being surprised by predictable results. To lead us in this discussion of science and climate change, we're lucky to have with us today one of the pre-eminent climate scientists in our country [Dr. Robert Socolow].

The second goal of this conference is that based on that science we want to explore how we shape solutions to global warming that will in fact make the global economy fair and more responsive to the needs of all the planet's six billion people.

We all know that in spite of the enormous out-growth, economic output in the world in the last two decades, the disparities of wealth have grown even faster. In this country for instance, in 2005 the top 300,000 wage earners collectively earned almost as much as the bottom 150 million [wage earners]. Yet we know that two billion people in our world still live on less than two dollars a day. We know that every minute of every day of every year a woman dies in childbirth from lack of adequate medical care.

The debate around how to restructure the world's economy's consumption of energy will be the most fundamental debate over economics that any of us will ever experience. The labor

movement is the economic conscience of the world. We must be at the table and we must do our job.

We hope during the course of this conference to discuss the options and equip ourselves with the tools to create that fairer society. What are the effects, merits and drawbacks, for instance, of a cap and trade, or cap and auction? What role do Café standards and other regulations play? What about nuclear and new coal technologies? And above all, where does trade fit in?

Global warming, as the noted economist Sir Nicholas Stern observed, represents the greatest market failure of capitalism. We want solutions, but we don't want to sign over our planet's carbon-free future to a new generation of "robber barons" or "new carbon oligarchs."

(Applause.)

Third, the most thoughtful public policy, like the most elegant geometric solution, won't feed a single family or sustain a city if it isn't supported by a majority of the citizenry who are living under it. We need a global warming policy that adheres to the mandates of science and creates a global society with greater equity. To achieve those goals, we also need to build the political coalitions capable of winning this argument in every major country around the world. That's our third charge at this conference: to come away smarter, more committed as a global labor movement to the proposition that our strength will be greater and our solutions more powerful, when we share our vision of a sustainable future with a much, much broader audience.

Alliances between labor and environmental movements are not new. Indeed many of the important social advances in the United States that improved the public health of our members, expanded their opportunities, they came because we worked together as a progressive community. We've seen it before. Now we're challenged as we never have been before. We need to create a shared vision on a scale that we never even envisioned. In the Blue-Green Alliance, we've tried to harness the strength of two very different organizations, North America's largest industrial manufacturing union and the Sierra Club, our country's largest and oldest grassroots environmental organization.

Our goal is to create one of the most important advocacy tools: to turn environmental challenges into economic opportunities and to recognize the essential role of workers' rights as part of the solution to fixing global warming. We exhort you to use this conference to help shape and push forward that agenda in the years to come. Thank you. (Applause.)

And now I'm really pleased to introduce Dr. Robert Socolow to give us his presentation on global warming. Dr. Socolow is a Professor of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at Princeton University; he was the Director of the University Center for Energy and Environmental Studies from 1979 to 1997. He teaches in both the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Dr. Socolow's current research focuses on characteristics of a global energy system responsive to global and local environmental and security constraints. His specific areas of interest include carbon dioxide capture from fossil fuels and storage and geologic formations, nuclear power and energy efficiency in buildings, and the acceleration of deployment of advanced technologies in developing countries. He's especially well-known for his *Carbon Wedge Theory* that I think provides us with an extraordinarily useful tool in thinking about how we plan the public policy responses to carbon reduction. Join me in welcoming Dr. Robert Socolow from Princeton University. (Applause.)