

How Scotland could make real difference on climate change

By John Sturrock

WE ARE told we face unprecedented alterations to weather patterns across the globe. Disruption of this sort may pose potentially serious security risks for many countries as competition for scarce resources grows and the pace of change outstrips our ability to adapt.

Mass migration is one such threat. This could bring about dangerous conflicts within and between states. We will need to find ways to address these.

More pressingly, prior to the Copenhagen summit, we see positions being staked out and political and economic interests predominating as impasse grows over the relative roles of developed and developing nations.

There is the danger that those charged with making decisions will be driven into taking stances that will lessen rather than enhance the prospects of a successful outcome. It is hard to act unilaterally to break a deadlock if you fear conceding too much and being disadvantaged as a result.

There is a different approach that might just work.

In a report to the Security Council in April, the UN Secretary General identified the potential benefits that skilful, impartial third-party mediation can bring to peaceful settlement of disputes.

Mediation, unlike arbitration, does not result in a decision or judgment. The parties themselves have control over the outcome. That approach may be essential in the kind of international conflicts that global climate change will bring. It seems essential even as Copenhagen looms.

Such an approach will require a new kind of leadership, and skill in collaborative decision-making which transcends national interests; but how else are we to tackle what is to come without impasse and breakdown? The UN report called for increased use of mediation to achieve constructive resolution of disputes. With that in mind, the organisation Mediators Beyond Borders (MBB), the only non-government dispute-resolution body with observer rights at Copenhagen, wants to include mediation in the Copenhagen protocols.

This move has been endorsed by individuals and organisations from around the world. MBB's president, Dr Kenneth Cloke, who will lead the delegation in Copenhagen (of which I am privileged to be a part), was recently in Edinburgh and addressed a meeting at the Scottish Parliament. He suggested Scotland had an opportunity to support this initiative and could itself play an important third-party role in an increasingly complex world.

In a powerful article in *Foreign Affairs*, entitled *Copenhagen's Inconvenient Truth*, Michael Levi said that "realistic expectations and the right negotiating strategy are essential".

In other words, it seems crucial that the way in which discussions about climate change are conducted creates the proper context for really innovative thinking and open debate.

Parochial or partisan negotiation will not take us to where we need to be. We need to find ways to add value and to focus on common ground and mutual interests. This is where mediation comes in, helping all parties feel a sense of active participation, respectful engagement and genuine recognition of their concerns and aspirations, hopes and fears, achievements and limitations.

That, in turn, requires getting beneath the surface, and really exploring what needs to be done. It will take courage to lead on this and will test the mettle of the world's statesmen and women.

Scotland could play that "third-side" role, offering real value, assisting other countries to find a solution and then gracefully moving on. We desperately need such contributions today. It may be the way in which this country can make a difference.