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Mrs MIKAELSSON (Sweden).- The earth on which we live is subject to many threats created by humans. Those include threats not only to the environment, but to the mere existence of human beings on the earth. It often seems as though we do not realise that the earth and nature will survive without us, but that we cannot survive without them. Therefore, the way in which we use the earth's resources is crucial for the future.

One of the greatest challenges before us is how to deal with the impact that our behaviour has on the climate. Since the beginning of industrialisation, the use of fossil energy has steadily increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Today, carbon dioxide levels are about 30% above what is considered to be natural and they are increasing continuously. More carbon dioxide means more heat stored in the atmosphere, and that causes changes in the climate. Melting ice caps at the poles, rising sea levels, floods, droughts and heavy storms seem to have become more and more common, and an increasing number of scientists see those phenomena as at least partly man-made.

It is also evident that increased transportation and the burning of fossil fuels are the main reason for those problems. I point out to the previous speaker that uranium is another fossil fuel.

The international community has tried to deal with climate change. International negotiations have led to several conventions and protocols. One of those is the Montreal Protocol, which deals with the ozone layer, and another is the Kyoto Protocol, which is the

subject of today's debate. Although the Montreal Protocol seems to function quite well, there have been problems with implementing the Kyoto Protocol. It has been criticised by environmental organisations for not going far enough, but it must be seen as an important document as it has succeeded in setting up goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in developed countries. As was mentioned earlier, the European Union's goal is to reduce emissions of those gases by 8% and the United States goal is to reduce them by 7%.

Many countries have started the process of ratifying the protocol and taking the necessary steps on a national level. The EU has played an important role in finding mechanisms that can lead to fulfilling those commitments.

The Kyoto Protocol must be seen as a minimum standard. The need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions is much greater than the targets in the agreement, but it is none the less an important step forward. It is therefore appalling that the new administration of the country with the largest per capita emissions of carbon dioxide - the USA - has announced that it will break its commitments. That risks destroying what has been achieved in international agreements so far, and the consequences will be extensive if the Bush administration fulfils those threats. I think that it is no exaggeration to state that George W. Bush has not been very successful in the international arena as the new President of the USA.

There are two possible consequences. First, what the United States is doing is important. As long as it does not ratify the protocol, it delays the process. The threat to abandon the agreement has already led to similar threats from other developed countries such as Canada, Australia and even Norway. Secondly, as the USA emits more carbon dioxide per capita than any other country, its withdrawal from taking responsibility for helping to reduce greenhouse gases will have a severe impact on the global climate; it will also affect America.

It is obvious that nobody can escape. We saw recently on television that the Mississippi river has overflowed due to heavy rainfall. In Sweden, the largest inland lake, Vänern, has a water level more than 70% higher than normal and last year we could all see the trees that had blown down in the park across the road from here. All those catastrophes cause a lot of suffering for individuals but also cost society dear.

We therefore have a choice: either to deal with the problems and implement the necessary solutions now; or to wait and face the risk of creating a situation that goes out of control. I sincerely hope that the steps that we take here today and the pressure put on George W Bush by the Swedish environment minister, Mr Kjell Larsson, who is currently the minister responsible for the environment in the European Union, will lead to a change of heart in the United States.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you, Mrs Mikaelsson. The next speaker is Mr Briane, who will speak on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Mr BRIANE (*France*) said that climate change was one of the most serious problems facing the world. The Assembly was responding by urging greater efforts to solve the problem, which threatened continued sustainable development. Air pollution and climate change called for responsible action by the international community. The EPP supported the report, as it tried to make progress on the matter and to promote global trade.