

Will Mandela end 'global apartheid'? By Genevieve Cooper for the Buenos Aires Herald, COP-4 Argentina, November 1998

Among the international government figures and advocates of every stripe present at the UN climate change conference here, Aubrey Meyer stands out.

A passionate and intense advocate of a unique idea to head off an environmental disaster and create global equity, Meyer has attracted more attention than ministers and environmentalists. The conference's official newsletter described him serenading cleaning staff and security guards with the violin past midnight on Friday. A columnist in the newsletter of an environmental group depicted him as "*a tall, pony-tailed type, "on the brink of a psychotic episode."*

Meyer, 51, is the director of the London-based Global Commons Institute (GCI). GCI is an organization dedicated to global environmental issues with a small budget derived from philanthropist donations. He also is an independent policy consultant for Globe International, an organization of some 500 legislators from around the world who cooperate on global environmental issues.

Meyer's personality and background, including the way he got involved in environmental issues, are unusual. What led to his founding GCI was his wish to write a musical, he said in an interview with the *Herald*.

Born in the United Kingdom, Meyer was raised in South Africa where he studied music. He then left South Africa to continue his music studies in London and over the years performed as an orchestra violinist in England, Ireland and Portugal.

In the early 80s Meyer wrote an orchestral score for the Royal Ballet in London which was successful in England and abroad. In 1988 while he was thinking about writing a musical, Meyer came across the story of murdered Brazilian ecologist Chico Mendez. At first thinking Mendez would be a good subject for a musical, he found himself drawn to a budding green movement. Having avoided activism against apartheid in his native country, he decided it was time to get involved in the environment issue, he said. GCI was born in 1989.

Since then, GCI has devised an organizing principle with which to approach the climate change problem, and Meyer came to the conference to persuade others that his plan would both control global warming and also end what Meyer refers to as "global apartheid" — the disparity between developed and developing countries.

Delegates at the conference are wrangling to determine how developed and developing countries will share the burden of stabilizing rising greenhouse gas emissions believed to be responsible for global warming. Under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, developed countries adopted what, if ratified, will become



legally-binding targets to reduce emissions. Developing countries have not yet committed to emissions reductions and there are differences among developing countries over whether and how they will participate.

In Meyer's view, the Kyoto Protocol *"creates a very inequitable and unsustainable precedent."* Developing countries' participation is essential, he says, but adds, *"how the problem is going to be shared has got to be equitable or there's not going to be a solution."*

Meyer's plan is to cap global emissions worldwide. Of that amount, each country — industrialized and developing - would have a permit to emit a certain share. In time, a country's permits to emit CO₂ would become proportional to its population, meaning that the industrialized nations which now have approximately 20 percent of the population but produce 80 percent of the greenhouse emissions would have to reduce their emissions to match their populations or buy permits from developing countries, *"If they (the US) can't deliver cuts at that rate, they don't have to. They can buy back from the credit available in other people's surplus,"* Meyer explained.

The tradability of emissions rights is controversial. Meyer asserts that when emission rights are assigned and traded they become property rights. Environmentalists say it is a right to pollute and therefore not a property right. He and environmentalists also disagree on the timing of phasing out fossil fuels. Some environmentalists want fossil fuels eliminated immediately. Meyer's plan allows time to phase them out.

The US has not been enthusiastic about "Contraction and Convergence, Allocation and Trade," as Meyer's idea is known. However, the scheme grew partially out of US demands for emissions trading and "meaningful participation" of developing countries in emissions reductions.

Meyer has been lobbying with more success in other regions. China, India, the Africa Group of Nations, the European Parliament and the Non-Aligned Movement have each made statements or resolutions in support of per-capita emission rights distribution, he said.

South African President Nelson Mandela is the current president of NAM and is aware of the Contraction and Con-version argument. Mandela is in a position, according to Meyer, "to open the political space necessary to end global apartheid."

At the conference, Meyer is promoting Contraction and Conversion with seemingly everyone he meets, distributing colourful graphs and devoting hours to explaining the complicated plan. He also has been trying to get Mandela and US Vice-President Al Gore to come to the conference and shake hands.

A handshake between Mandela and Gore could push the Convention toward full participation and an equitable approach to mitigating climate change, Meyer believes.

Although Mandela and Gore have so far not heeded his plea, Meyer is a very persuasive man and has shaken up NGOs with the rapid spread of his idea and his certainty that his idea is the way the world should go — so much so that a columnist in the newsletter of an environmental group coalition called him a *"dangerous madman"* who *"seems to believe he is the only person who knows THE Truth about the climate."*

Meyer thought the critique was amusing and gave the newsletter to the Herald.

Globe International will hold a forum to discuss Contraction and Convergence today at noon.