

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

Bert Bolin, pioneering climatologist who won Nobel

By Dennis Hevesi

Friday, January 4, 2008

Bert Bolin, a pioneering climatologist and the first chairman of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with the former Vice President Al Gore for their warnings about global warming, died Sunday in Stockholm. He was 82.

The cause was stomach cancer, Henning Rodhe, a chemistry professor and colleague of Bolin at Stockholm University, told The Associated Press. According to Stockholm University, Bolin initially planned to travel to Oslo to accept the prize on behalf of the IPCC, but was unable to do so because of poor health, The AP reported.

Last month, while visiting Sweden, Gore told Bolin in a written statement: "Bert, you set up the framework for the IPCC and without your contributions we would not have come to where we are today. Thank you for starting the process."

Bolin traveled to Washington in May 1959 and, according to The New York Times, told the National Academy of Sciences that a 25 percent increase in the amount of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere during the 150-year period ending in 2000 could be expected. Carbon dioxide, he said then, was the cause of a warming trend of two to three degrees in the previous 50 years.

He was chairman of the UN panel from 1988 to 1997 and, with scientific expertise and acquired diplomatic skills, shepherded the panel through the first two of its influential climatological assessment reports.

"You're dealing with people from all countries, all perspectives, all different points of view; people who are strongly attached to particular ideas," Dan Reifsnyder, the U.S. State Department's deputy assistant secretary for environment and sustainable development, said Thursday. "Somehow Bert got this group to work together to produce objective scientific and technical reports that come very close to policy."

The panel, created in 1988 by the UN Environment Program and the World Meteorological Organization, brought together 3,500 scientists from around the world and set them in three working groups. One examines atmospheric chemistry and greenhouse gas emissions. The second deals with the impacts of various degrees of climate change.

The third researches the possibilities for mitigation.

The concerns expressed in the first of the two assessments issued while Bolin was chairman, in August 1990, led to the drafting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the first international document bringing countries together to deal with the issue. The framework, first promoted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, has 192 signatories, including the United States.

The second assessment issued during Bolin's tenure, in 1995, led to the Kyoto Protocol, which called on industrialized countries to collectively limit or reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 5 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. The United States signed the protocol in 1998, but the document has never been sent to the U.S. Senate for its consent.

"Bert was responsible for helping to assure that the IPCC remained an objective scientific and technical body," said Reifsnyder, who worked with Bolin for many years.

Bert Richard Johannes Bolin was born in Nykoping, Sweden, on May 15, 1925. He graduated from Uppsala University in 1946. He earned a master's degree in 1949 and a doctorate in 1956, both in meteorology, at Stockholm University. He was hired as an associate professor there and remained on the faculty until 1990.