

## **Opening Remarks**

*\*No audio. Text derived from notes taken on that day and as such, quote directly with care.*

### **Sheila Embleton:**

Sheila offered an official welcome to the conference.

I met some of you last night but let me officially welcome you. In my role, I have opened many conferences. But I am particularly pleased to be here. First, because of the topic of the environment and climate change. It touches every one of us right now. Individually we can do something before it's too late, if we have personal will. It starts with communicating and sharing ideas.

I also feel a personal attachment because I was present when the ideas was born in 2008 and have followed its development. It began with a conversation between Adrian (Shubert), myself and Miriam (Duailibi) at the ECOAR Institute for Citizenship in Brazil.

Miriam expressed frustration that the discussion on climate change ignored the circumstances, needs and realities of those in developing countries and that the platform needed to be better known in the North.

The idea began with a plan to hold a conference to talk about Canada and Brazil in bilateral terms but this broadened to include other countries. South Africa and India were brought into the fold.

We had no idea how to fund the conference, though. It was serendipity. Money fell from the sky from Environment Canada. Kaz (Higuchi) and James (McLellan), who are seconded to York University from Environment Canada, had the funds. It seemed like the perfect marriage of money and ideas and that is how we got here today.

The Organizing Committee was brought together to plan the event and the conference became complete with the addition of the Arctic participants.

I want to thank everyone involved for their ideas.

This conference is also a reflection of York's desire to take internationalization seriously. York is one that has taken this seriously and it is enshrined as one of the University's true priorities, one of five, in its plan. Here at this conference, we are trying to make that priority a reality.

We also do this through partnerships, exchanges, study programmes, language teaching here and abroad, internships. We have a commitment and a strategic framework to make connections that otherwise might be missed in broader internationalization.

We also take South America seriously and the conference is a result of this, as is our partnership with ECOAR. We have a partner institute in India (Jadavpur University) and this is where Joyashree came in. This was the beginning of planning the conference. Interdisciplinarity also helped in forming our organizing committee.

This conference is carbon neutral and the offset costs are included in the budget. To accomplish this, York had to agree to institutionalize the offset costs. They created an accounting category for the offsets, making us a leader in Canadian universities in this respect.

I have a few more thank yous. Thanks to the IRIS assistants, Annette (Dubreuil) and Jennifer (Jew), who assisted in organizing the conference. All of the hard work and the funding would be irrelevant if not for the speakers who travelled here to share their insights with us. We had a few panic moments, some visa troubles. We managed to get two visas for our speakers from India processed on the Easter weekend, which was nothing short of a miracle. Our thanks goes to the head of the visa section at the High Commission of Canada to India in New Delhi, Dr. David Manicom. He is an academic at heart. He has a PhD from McGill and is a published author and prized winning poet. He went beyond the bureaucracy to make this possible. That is the power of this conference, he saw the importance.

I am sure this conference will be amazing, that the acquaintances you make will turn into ongoing and we will make some real progress towards solution to these real pressing issues.

Thank you to all.