

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY INFORMAL THEMATIC DEBATE: “CLIMATE AS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE”**

### **Summary**

In her opening remarks, the President of the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Assembly emphasized that managing climate was among the greatest challenges currently facing the international community. The thematic debate presented an opportunity to raise awareness and build momentum on climate change, in particular, in preparation for the Secretary-General's high-level event in September, as well as for the Bali Conference at the end of 2007.

The President of the General Assembly noted that addressing climate change was one of the greatest challenges of our time. She noted the need for decisive global action to address climate change given the scientific conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). And that action to address climate change must take into account the special responsibility to assist countries most affected and those least able to respond. Such efforts "should not be at the cost of economic growth, but to achieve it," she said, noting that "a global consensus can only be secured if all countries can share in the benefits from action to address" climate change. The President noted that a sustainable long-term solution would require a global cap, with a target for reducing emissions, which should be translated into national targets in order to be meaningful.

Furthermore, she stressed that a comprehensive global response must be pursued in the context of the international development agenda. She also added that steps, including investment in climate-friendly energy production and energy efficiency, as well as technology transfers, carbon pricing and trading, will help to ensure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). She thanked the sponsors of the debate and announced that the operations of the United Nations Headquarters during the two day thematic debate had been offset or “carbon neutral”.

Noting that climate change was finally receiving the attention it merited, the Secretary-General stated that decisive action on a global scale is necessary. He noted that discussion of national strategies and international commitments at the debate would provide building blocks for the discussion of the global strategy that would take place at High-level Event at the political level, and operational level at Climate Change Conference in Bali. The Secretary-General emphasized his determination to have the entire UN system contribute to this effort and support action by Member States, especially those most vulnerable.

## **Panel 1: Climate Change: the Science, the Impact and the Adaptation Imperative**

A panel of six experts and two respondents underlined that climate change is a reality and that human activities are the main cause. Special guests invited also made comments. The most important sources are carbon dioxide from fossil fuel use and deforestation. Carbon dioxide concentrations have risen sharply with increased fossil fuel use. The impacts of climate change vary, and will be felt differently in different parts of the world. It was emphasized that impacts such as droughts, floods, and water availability are already being experienced at current greenhouse gas concentrations and levels of warming.

It was noted that the continuation of current emission trends could, among other things, potentially result in large-scale population movements and decreased food security. Climate change affects economic growth, social progress and environmental protection and these aspects are best addressed in an integrated manner. The need for sustained investment in climate research was noted, which should include enhanced initiatives for sharing findings and information with developing countries.

Panellists underlined that timely and responsible action could reduce the risk and costs associated with climate change; however, while early action will reduce overall costs, mitigation would still require significant financial resources. Strong economic growth and development are compatible with responsibility on climate change issues. Panellists ***stressed*** that adaptation is ***the responsibility of all***, not only developed countries. However, developing countries are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and they lack technological and financial resources for effective adaptation. Developing countries have restricted choices with regard to livelihood and adaptation possibilities, which increase their vulnerability to climate change.

### **Interactive debate**

Several delegations emphasized that climate change is a vital issue for Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and its impacts already affect the livelihoods of SIDS. A number of speakers underlined that climate change concerns touch on issues of proportionality, fairness and equity, and that political leadership is important. Several speakers underlined that development aid commitments made at Monterrey and Gleneagles must be fulfilled. Many delegations reiterated the continued role of the UN in supporting and facilitating the global response to climate change.

Several delegations highlighted the importance of integrating climate change considerations into national development strategies. A number of delegations noted that disaster risk reduction and adaptation are mutually reinforcing, and underlined that there are low-cost measures available for increasing community

resilience and reducing vulnerability to natural hazards and risks. It was noted that gender inequality is exacerbated in disaster situations, with more women dying in natural disasters. However, there was a real opportunity to link women's empowerment and gender equality with climate change.

Several delegations emphasized the need for deeper emission cuts by developed countries, while some also underlined the need for greater engagement by developing countries. Some speakers emphasized that full consideration must be given to the historic responsibility of industrialized countries in the development context.

## **Panel 2: Mitigation Strategies in the context of Sustainable Development**

A panel of five experts and two respondents presented ideas on possible mitigation strategies followed by comments from special guests invited to the GA debate. Many panellists stressed the urgency of taking action now, and some pointed to the complex relationship between sustainable development and climate change. They highlighted that mitigation of green house gas (GHG) emissions could help to achieve sustainable development goals. Several highlighted the link between energy use and climate change and suggested ways to restructure energy systems to achieve GHG emissions reductions.

Some panellists noted that climate change not only presents challenges, but can provide economic opportunities, including opportunities for technology innovation as well as more jobs and business ventures. They emphasized that there are win-win options. These include improving energy efficiency, transitioning to a low carbon economy, increasing renewable energy use and better forestry management that can contribute to socio-economic development while mitigating GHG emissions. At least one panellist suggested the consideration of an international programme on technology transfer.

Many panellists addressed the need to increase financial resources for clean technology development and commercialization. They pointed out that this can be accomplished through market-based incentives and sound regulatory frameworks. Equity financing is still nascent, and ways of lowering investment risks to business and asset holders and enhancing capacities were discussed. Panellists highlighted the importance of specific policy objectives for financing, including building codes, incentives for renewable energy technologies and risk guarantees for new technologies.

Panellists also stressed the importance of developing and expanding local capital markets. Some noted that pricing carbon can be an essential component of an effective climate policy. Expanding both the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and the overall carbon market could assure greater capital flows for new infrastructure and technology development. Some panellists noted that trade finance has not been tapped fully.

## **Interactive debate**

Many delegations stressed that climate change is a global challenge with socio-economic and development aspects as well as an environmental considerations that should be considered in an integrated manner in the context of sustainable development. Many stressed the need for an immediate and urgent global response to avoid adverse impacts. They highlighted the importance of negotiating a post-2012 (post-Kyoto) framework keeping in mind the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Delegations stressed that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the forum for an international agreement on climate change, and many said that negotiations on post-2012 commitments should be finalized no later than 2009. It was also emphasized that other climate change initiatives should support the UNFCCC process. Discussions on the forthcoming Conference of Parties and Meeting of Parties (COP/MOP) to be held in Bali, Indonesia in December included ideas for emissions targets, financing, technology transfer, and reducing deforestation.

Many delegations emphasized that developing countries, particularly the least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS), are most vulnerable to climate change impacts, despite their smaller contribution to total GHG emissions. Some delegations noted that developing countries' contribution to GHG is expected to increase as their economies grow. Many delegations stressed that eradication of poverty is still the overriding priority of developing countries, and they need more support in terms of funding, capacity building and technology transfer.

Delegations noted the historical responsibility of developed countries and highlighted equity concerns. They also emphasized the need to take into consideration individual circumstances in dealing with climate change and discouraged one-size-fits-all solutions.

Some delegations stressed the need for more sustainable consumption and production patterns, the transfer of cleaner energy technologies, transport sector innovations, increased funding for research and development and highlighted the potential of bioenergy. Some noted the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships among governments, NGOs, civil society and the business community. Others emphasised the leading role that the private sector led investment can make, particularly in developing countries. Others noted that within a global framework carbon trading has a fundamental role to play as a cost effective mechanism to deliver emissions reductions. Used appropriately carbon markets could deliver investment in low carbon economic growth.

## **National strategies and international commitments to address climate change**

The Secretary-General's Special Envoys on Climate Change, H.E. Mr. Ricardo Lagos, Former President of Chile, and H.E. Mr. Han Seung-soo, Former President of the General Assembly, opened the second day of the debate by presented findings from their consultations. They noted that there have been notable accomplishments at the national level in many countries. They indicated that they were encouraged by the universal support for the Secretary-General's initiative to hold a high level event on climate change. The envoys indicated that leaders expressed interest in adaptation, cleaner technology and transfer of technology, the role of markets in delivering solutions and the need for stronger partnerships. The envoys informed the General Assembly (GA) that they would continue consultations in advance of the 24 September event.

The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs stressed the need for a global response that addresses climate change within the context of sustainable development. He noted that there are opportunities for win-win solutions including by integrating climate change into the development agenda. Countries implementing national sustainable development strategies can address policies aimed at both mitigation and adaptation. Many "Partnerships for Sustainable Development" established after the World Summit on Sustainable Development address aspects of the climate change challenge. Development and deployment of cleaner technology need to be accelerated and long-term measures are warranted. He highlighted the role of the UN in addressing these challenges in partnership with all stakeholders.

Delegations welcomed the initiative of the President of the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Assembly, Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa to convene such a timely and topical debate and supported the Secretary-General's initiative to hold a High-level Event on climate change. They noted that the General Assembly possesses a particular legitimacy in considering climate change and its related issues. They also noted that the UNFCCC is the appropriate forum for negotiations on climate change and the appropriate framework for the multilateral response to climate change.

Most delegations highlighted that climate change is a sustainable development challenge that requires coordinated global response. They noted that it should be addressed in an integrated, coordinated and balanced manner taking into account the three pillars of sustainable development. Delegations stressed the centrality of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Issues of equity and fairness should be dealt with in the international regime.

Delegations underlined that climate change impacts affect all countries, but that African countries, least developed countries (LDCs), land-locked developing countries (LLDCs), and SIDS are often least able to respond and adapt. Many

delegations noted that those countries with the lowest GHG emissions are often the most affected by the adverse impacts of climate change. Delegations highlighted that climate change could be a major obstacle to the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development goals. Delegations emphasized that both mitigation and adaptation measures are required in order to mount a collective response to climate change.

### **National strategies**

Delegations reported on national and regional efforts to address climate change with respect to mitigation and adaptation. Many countries are integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation into their national sustainable development strategies and other development plans. Some countries also reported on existing and proposed national climate change strategies and plans. Many delegations underlined concrete efforts to promote cleaner energy technologies and to diversify their energy mix. Delegations presented examples of national programmes and activities in the areas of energy efficiency, renewable energy and cleaner energy technologies. Some expressed commitment to becoming carbon-neutral economies.

Several delegations mentioned programmes relating to forest conservation and reforestation and combating desertification as examples of domestic action on mitigation. Many delegations underlined their continued commitment to research on climate change and dissemination of related findings. Delegations highlighted their activities relating to the research, development, deployment, diffusion and transfer of clean and low-carbon technologies, including carbon capture and storage and clean coal technology.

Countries have adopted a wide range of specific policies and measures to achieve national and regional climate policy goals. Some delegations noted that a combination of customized policy instruments have been utilized to address climate change at the national and regional levels. Several delegations gave examples of national and regional targets related to: GHG emissions, GHG emissions intensity, energy efficiency, the share of renewable energy in total energy consumption, bio-fuel use, forest coverage, and the share of “green” buildings in total building stock. Other policies and measures employed include: removal of harmful subsidies, tax measures, emissions trading schemes, labelling and certification initiatives, development of mass transport systems, improved waste management and waste-to-energy programmes, voluntary agreements between government and industry, public funding of research and development (R&D), co-financing of pilot projects, payment for environmental services and public awareness campaigns on consumption and production patterns and standards and labelling programmes.

Delegations also reported on measures undertaken to reduce vulnerability to the adverse impacts of climate change and enhance resilience, including through strengthened early warning and response systems. Several delegations reported that having undertaken vulnerability assessment and capacity building in relation to adaptation, they were now advancing with the implementation of adaptation projects.

### **International commitments**

Many delegations stated that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is the cornerstone for future action. The precautionary principle and the need for enhanced corporate social responsibility were also mentioned. Many delegations noted that other events and initiatives should complement and reinforce ongoing negotiations under the UNFCCC. Many delegations stressed the need for deeper emission reductions by developed countries and adequate action by developing countries.

Some delegations underlined that quantitative targets would not be commensurate with the development needs of developing countries, and some pointed out the need for incentives. Many delegations noted the crucial role of technology under any future global response to climate change, including not only R&D but also dissemination and deployment of existing technologies. Many underlined the important role that could be played by an expanded and enhanced carbon market. Some suggested recognizing the role of forest conservation. Several delegations stressed the need to change unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. One delegation suggested the consideration of external debt swaps for conservation measures.

Some delegations indicated that the forthcoming COP/MOP in Bali could decide on a negotiating “roadmap”, and several noted that this “roadmap” should include timetables, deliverables and milestones for the next two years. Some delegations expressed a willingness to conclude the negotiations on a post-2012 agreement by 2009, and some delegations suggested increasing the frequency of UNFCCC meetings. Several delegations noted that the dialogue on long-term cooperative action under the UNFCCC should be strengthened and extended.

Many delegations underlined the importance of fulfilling international commitments in relation to climate change, particularly with respect to technology transfer, capacity building and finance. Many delegations stressed the need for strengthened support to developing countries to mobilize financial resources, technology transfer and capacity building related to climate change.

Many delegations noted that implementation of internationally agreed goals is hampered by: insufficient financial resources for adaptation; degradation of natural resources; lack of access to and transfer of adaptation technologies; lack of capacity to predict the timing, frequency, and scale of adverse impacts of

climate change; inadequate integration of climate change policy and adaptation measures in national development strategies; and weak or sometimes absence of climate observation networks.

One delegation suggested creating a network of countries working toward becoming carbon neutral economies. Some delegations highlighted the special needs of developing countries dependent on fossil-fuel production and export. In the context of national emissions, reference was made to the emissions associated with manufactures for export.

While recognizing the positive contribution of the CDM, many delegations highlighted insufficient national institutional capacity for participation by many developing countries, particularly in Africa, LDCs and SIDS. They called for the expansion of the CDM, increased support for small-scale projects and simplified and speedier procedures.

Many called for the operationalization of the Adaptation Fund and the commitment of adequate resources to the other climate funds, in particular the Special Climate Change Fund under the UNFCCC. Some delegations emphasized the need to grant priority access to the Adaptation Fund without conditions, in particular for SIDS. Several delegations underscored the need for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) procedures to be streamlined.

Many countries called for the strengthening of North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation in research, development and demonstration initiatives for mitigation and adaptation. Many countries noted that development assistance can contribute to tackling the impact of climate change on vulnerable population groups. Some suggested that development assistance could be targeted to the promotion of sustainable development and capacity building in the vulnerable regions and populations. Some countries underlined that resources allocated to such activities should be additional and not detract from existing commitments.

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Further details about the Thematic Debate, including the program, statements, presentations by panellists, international media coverage, national strategies to combat climate change and video recordings of the debate are available on the President's website;

<http://www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/thematic-climate.shtml>