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STATEMENT BY

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**Prime Minister
of the Kingdom of the Netherlands**

**HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON
CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Challenge of Climate Change

United Nations General Assembly

NEW YORK, 24 September 2007

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The world's climate is going to change dramatically in the coming centuries. And this will have a major impact on us all.

We are already seeing the effects around the world. In Africa, more and more crops are being lost to heat and drought. Bangladesh has a major problem with salinated wells on the coast. In Bolivia, food supplies in the mountain regions are under threat. In Indonesia, major flooding is a growing problem. And the list goes on and on.

We need to tackle the cause of climate change and drastically limit greenhouse gas emissions. Industrialised nations must take the lead. The Netherlands is willing to do whatever it takes. We are aiming to reduce our emissions with thirty per cent by 2020. None of us can afford to ignore our responsibilities. Countries with rapidly growing economies will also need to commit to agreements aimed at making production cleaner and more efficient.

But this is not enough. Reducing emissions will slow down climate change, but it won't stop it. So we need to do more. We will have to adapt to the effects of climate change. Climate considerations should be taken into account in all the investment decisions we make.

I come from a country of rivers. And more than half of it is below sea level. Sea level is rising and rainfall in our region is increasing. So climate change will have a major impact on us and our water management.

Even before the second millennium began, farmers in the Netherlands were digging ditches to drain the water from the land and make it arable. In fact, my country has been one big innovative water management project for over a thousand years. Water influences everything. The landscape. The cities. Trade and the economy. Transport. Technology. Recreation. Even public administration. The oldest administrative bodies in the Netherlands are the water boards, which are responsible for drainage and flood protection.

This tradition affects how we view the challenges we are discussing here today. Adaptation is not new to us. It is the oldest idea in our history and it is still relevant today.

In 1953, a severe storm breached the dykes in the south-west of the Netherlands. There was extensive flooding and more than eighteen hundred people perished, including some members of my own family.

For nearly fifty years we worked on an advanced system of flood defences called the Delta Works. We reinforced the dykes and dunes, blocked sea inlets and built a giant storm surge barrier.

Thanks in part to the Delta Works, the west of the country has become one of the most dynamic regions in Europe.

We adapt to the challenges of a water-rich landscape on a smaller scale, too. For example, more and more floating homes are being built in residential areas. And a few years ago the world's first floating greenhouse was built in the Netherlands.

We have learned that adapting to water can make us stronger. That it pays to be creative and innovative.

If we do it right, adaptation will enable us to raise the standard of living and make the living environment better and safer.

We see the impacts of climate change everywhere. We need to develop solutions that are tailored to specific situations. It is important to identify the regional effects of climate change at an early stage. Only then will countries be able to develop and implement good adaptation strategies in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Since "the polluter pays" is an important principle I believe that extra costs for adaptation can not only come from the development budget.

The rewards of working together are big. Nobody has all the answers. We can all learn from the experiences of others.

That is why we give this topic so much attention in our development relations with other countries. With our Indonesian partners, for example, we are reclaiming land near Semarang to protect the city centre from flooding. Experience has taught us to factor adaptation to climate change into all our policy decisions. With our partners, we want to lay a solid foundation for their adaptation programmes. Development and adaptation go hand in hand.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The United Nations Climate Change Conference will take place in Bali at the end of this year. The Netherlands strongly advocates a joint approach to climate change, within the framework of the UN Climate Convention.

'Bali' is a unique chance to put together a climate change toolbox, combining emissions reduction, adaptation, technology and funding. We should use this conference to start negotiating a follow-up to Kyoto. And we need to give more support to the most vulnerable developing countries to help them take measures to adapt.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If the Netherlands had not learned to adapt to an ever-changing environment, it would have been lost to the sea long ago. We have turned a weakness into strength. Everyone should factor nature and climate into their investments. We are keen to share our knowledge and experience with others. If we work together we can contain climate change.