

31 July 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the Fourth Thematic Debate of the 61st Session of the General
Assembly “Climate Change as a Global Challenge”**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our debate today is a testimony to the political and moral importance of addressing climate change. I would therefore like to thank Member States, in particular, the ASEAN Group and the European Union for asking me to convene this debate.

I would also like to welcome Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon; his climate change special envoys, H.E. former President Ricardo Lagos and H.E. Han Seung-soo; as well as our distinguished panelists and guests.

During this thematic debate, we have a real opportunity to raise our overall level of awareness about the science, the impact and the challenges we face from climate change; but, also the opportunities ahead for a more sustainable future.

Although the warming of the global climate has many aspects, it is fundamentally a development issue. Climate change should therefore be addressed in the context of our broader international development agenda. What is at stake is the fate and well-being of our planet. We must not lose sight of this point in our efforts to address this major concern.

I hope we will all take advantage of the presence of experts that have traveled here from across the world. They bring unique regional, scientific, and sectoral perspectives on the impact of and response to climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

How we protect our environment, manage climate change, secure our planet and safeguard our future, for our children and generations to come, is one of the greatest international challenges of our time.

This message was central to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro fifteen years ago.

More recently, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has concluded that warming of the climate system is an established fact and a growing concern.

The weight of scientific evidence continues to accumulate month by month.

And as the causes are becoming increasingly clear, so too are the consequences.

The mutual concern of people across continents reflects the growing consensus that climate change needs to be addressed. It is urgent that we act now. The longer we wait, the more expensive this will be.

The cruel irony of climate change is that the countries least responsible for it will be worst affected - economic growth and poverty reduction will be undermined.

Greater variations of rainfall, combined with rising sea levels, will lead to more extreme weather, particularly in parts of Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

We therefore have a special responsibility to help those countries most affected to adapt to climate change.

This includes greater investment in climate-friendly energy production and energy efficiency. In the meantime, technology transfers must be actively pursued to help ensure that all the Millennium Development Goals are met.

Measures designed to address climate change should not be at the cost of economic growth, but to achieve it.

Together we can work towards a new framework that sees economic growth, social justice and environmental care advance hand in hand.

Excellencies,

I am pleased to announce today, that our thematic debate is carbon neutral.

Over the next two days the entire carbon emissions of the United Nations Headquarters, and the emissions from the air travel to bring experts to the debate, have been off-set.

Moreover, we are off-setting our carbon emissions by investing in a biomass fuel project in Kenya, thus creating new economic opportunities for local farmers.

I hope that this modest example will inspire similar initiatives in the future. We can begin by making simple changes in the way we affect the environment; by increasing our energy efficiency, recycling more, off-setting our carbon emission and supporting more sustainable lifestyles.

However globally, we must move towards a post-Kyoto framework based on the understanding in the United Nations Climate Change Convention – that we share common, but differentiated responsibilities.

We must agree on an overall strategy that reflects our shared desire to ensure that the requirements of economic growth take environmental and social considerations fully into account. We must adapt our needs and mitigate the consequences of consumption.

This will enable us, not only to improve living conditions for all, particularly the poorest, but also to ensure a sustainable long-term solution.

Fundamentally we require a global carbon cap, with a target for reducing emissions. In order to be meaningful, this will have to be translated into national targets as well. So, I look forward to hearing your national strategies to address climate change.

Within a global framework carbon trading has a fundamental role to play as a cost effective mechanism to deliver emission reductions. Used appropriately carbon markets could deliver investment in low carbon economic growth.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In an interdependent world we must recognize and champion a multilateral solution to the problems we face.

The General Assembly has an important role to play in addressing climate change. It has implications across a broad range of issues: from the environment, health, energy, to economic development.

We will need to act with imagination, initiative and innovation on these complex set of interrelated issues. We all have an obligation to take action, in line with our capabilities and historic responsibilities.

I believe it is not just more urgent than ever before, but also, more possible than before to build a global consensus for tackling environmental change.

We have the technological capability and scientific know-how. However, a global consensus can only be secured if all countries can share in the benefits from action to address it.

It is up to us. It is our shared responsibility. It is our shared opportunity. And, working together, I believe it can be our shared achievement.

Finally, I would like to thank the sponsors of the thematic debate for their kind support – the Government of Japan, the European Commission, the United Nations Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation.

I look forward to the interactive debate today and the plenary discussion tomorrow.

Together, we can have a fruitful debate, and prepare the ground for the General Debate of the 62nd session of the General Assembly dedicated to climate change, the Secretary-General's High-level event on climate change in September, and a successful outcome of the Bali conference and beyond.

Thank you.