

5 September 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,  
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,  
before the 60<sup>th</sup> Annual DPI/NGO Conference on Climate Change:  
How it Impacts Us All**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Friends,

It is an honour to join you on the occasion of the 60th Annual DPI/NGO Conference. I wish to welcome all of you especially those who have traveled from abroad for this occasion.

The presence of civil society at the opening of the General Assembly is vital to ensure that this organization, is an organization of the people, for the people - embodying the global aspirations of civil society.

As the world becomes more interconnected, no problem can be viewed in isolation. And, we must ensure that we give priority to the emerging global challenges affecting humanity. In this regard, it is fitting that the 60th DPI/NGO Conference focuses on “Climate Change: How It Impacts Us All”.

The effects of climate change know no boundaries. Societies in all corners of our world simultaneously face threats that will affect their quality of life and, in some cases, their very existence. A comprehensive global response to this threat must be pursued in the context of the international development agenda.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has confirmed the indisputable link between human activities and climate change. We are confronted with both a collective and an individual responsibility to address this challenge and reverse its destructive trends.

We are already experiencing the devastating consequences of climate change, and we are aware that even more extreme weather events will occur in the years to come.

Although the natural disasters that we are witnessing must be attended to, international efforts must go beyond relief, to encourage a way of living that gives priority to the environment. In our efforts to counter climate change, we have an opportunity to protect and restore the incredible diversity of the Earth’s landscape with its unique healing properties.

The impetus of civil society can be harnessed most effectively by fostering awareness and continuing to develop innovative approaches at the grassroots level which empower people to contribute actively in finding solutions.

A radical change of behavior and consciousness is needed. This will only be successful if it is home-based engaging communities in identifying the actions and responses that are most suited to their particular circumstance.

Furthermore, we know that the poorest and most marginalized segments of society suffer the most brutal effects of climate change which further undermines their economic growth and poverty reduction. These are also the countries least responsible for it.

We have a moral imperative to act. Preserving our environment is a responsibility that we all share – rich and poor, developed and developing nations.

Any measures designed to address climate change should not be at the cost of economic growth, but part of the efforts to achieve growth.

This includes greater investment in climate-friendly energy production and energy efficiency, as well as technology transfers to help ensure that all the Millennium Development Goals are met.

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

Development cannot happen in the absence of a healthy and secure environment.

We are aware that the increase in natural disasters and the scarcity of natural resources can place tremendous pressures on societies that we are not prepared to manage effectively, including in the developed world - and this may lead to greater incidents in conflict.

Our decisions must therefore be holistic and immediate. 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.

I salute the Secretary-General for his leadership on this issue and I also wish to pay tribute to the NGOs for building on the momentum of the 60th anniversary of the Annual DPI/NGO Conference to highlight that civil society worldwide is united in its desire to combat climate change.

It is evident that without the commitment and participation of all sectors of society, including Member States, the UN Secretariat, the private sector, the scientific and research community, civil society and the media, we will not achieve our goals.

How to better coordinate our efforts and sustain this momentum in the face of diverse priorities confronting the international community is an issue of great concern.

Our dedication must go beyond words and translate into continued action.

As President of the 61st General Assembly, I was pleased to witness the complementary initiatives that were undertaken throughout the UN system this past year to address climate change.

From the Secretariat, to the Security Council, the ECOSOC, and the General Assembly's thematic debate, we have underscored the need to analyse the implications of climate change at all levels and to foster greater collaboration. In doing so we have reaffirmed the centrality of the United Nations as the organization best equipped to tackle this endeavor moving forward.

I am therefore encouraged that there will be continuity into the 62nd Session of the General Assembly, as climate change will be a priority theme for the upcoming General Debate.

We also look forward to the High-Level Event on Climate Change being hosted by the Secretary-General on 24 September and to the Climate Change Conference in Bali this December.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While this is the last time that I address the NGO community during my tenure as President of the General Assembly, it is by no means the last time that I will engage in dialogue with you.

I have been very impressed by your dedication, expertise, and willingness to partner with Member States and the UN, donating your time, resources and energies on behalf of the greater good.

The relationship between the United Nations and NGOs has its foundation in the Charter itself, and the sixty year history of this Conference is indeed proof of these long standing ties.

As the United Nations has grown in size and scope, and the members of the NGO community have multiplied and become more diverse, there have been new opportunities for partnership. But there have also been challenges, due to mistrust and lack of understanding.

It is essential that we continue to build stronger ties, on the basis of respect for each other's contributions and the recognition that we are all indispensable and interdependent in the effort to foster peace.

The United Nations is an intergovernmental organization, but it draws its strength and inspiration from the support of civil society worldwide.

Your presence and input enriches these halls, bringing to our attention the realities on the ground, and reminding us that the test of our success is determined by the impact felt by those who are most in need.

I wish you very fruitful discussions over the course of the next three days, and I look forward to the outcome of this Conference.

Thank you.