



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

8 May 2017

Excellency,

I am pleased to enclose herewith the summary of the High-Level SDG Action Event on Climate and Sustainable Development Agenda, held on 23 March 2017 at United Nations Headquarters in New York that I organized in collaboration with the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The summary contains the main conclusions from the views shared by the Member States and other participants during the plenary, opening stocktaking Panel and two afternoon roundtable Sessions.

It is my hope that these conclusions will motivate further action among all Member States, the UN system and other stakeholders, for more effective implementation of concrete solutions on climate and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of the 2020 targets and milestones for both the Paris Climate Agreement and Sustainable Development Agenda.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Thomson'.

Peter Thomson

All Permanent Representative and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

High Level SDG Action Event
"Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda"
New York, 23 March 2017
Trusteeship Council

President's Summary of Key Messages and Observations

The President of the 71st UN General Assembly, Mr. Peter Thomson, in close collaboration with the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Ms. Patricia Espinosa, convened Member States on 23 March 2017 for this High Level Action Event on Climate Change and Sustainable Development.

Specifically the event aimed to invigorate political momentum on climate change, highlighting its deep linkage to the Sustainable Development Agenda. Emphasis was placed on concrete solutions on climate and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that yield cross-cutting dividends, especially regarding land-use, energy, and the Ocean. Additionally, it aimed to increase common understanding among key actors including Member States, the UN system and non-state stakeholders regarding the urgent need to ramp up ambition and implementation in the context of the 2020 targets and milestones for both the Paris climate agreement and the Sustainable Development Agenda.

UN Secretary-General, Mr António Guterres, joined President Thomson and UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Ms. Patricia Espinosa. In his first major address on climate change since taking office, the Secretary-General stressed the two Agenda's deep inter-dependency and the need for urgent action.

The SDG Action Event contained four segments: a Stocktaking Panel on "Climate – Ambition and Action"; a Plenary in which 86 Member States and 4 Observers took the floor, including at the Ministerial level; and two parallel afternoon sessions entitled "Implementing Solutions" and "2020 as Opportunity". Both afternoon sessions were attended with full rooms.

The main conclusions from the High Level Action Event were as follows:

- The climate and sustainable development agendas are more than mutually enforcing, their fates are intertwined.
- A global transformation is already underway towards sustainability due to positive action of leaders to date. This is proving to be good for peoples' well-being, livelihoods, business, and sustainable peace. It provides further opportunities for all sectors to engage, including governments at all levels, the private sector, philanthropy, civil society, academia, and others.
- Continued urgent and scaled up action and ambition is needed on all fronts – and particularly to reach those farthest behind and most vulnerable – in order to ensure the international community's goals are met. Most pressing among these are the need to ratchet up climate ambition and meet SDG 2020 targets within frameworks to which Governments have pledged.

High-level Panel: Stocktaking on Climate – Ambition and Action

This stocktaking Panel focused on ratification of the Paris Agreement, climate science, and gaps in and opportunities for implementation.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Chair, Dr. Lee, stressed that IPCC 5th Assessment Report (AR5) demonstrated temperatures are increasing on land and in the Ocean, sea levels are rising, and the amounts of snow and ice are diminishing as greenhouse gas emissions and concentrations have climbed. Highlights of the AR5 include that ocean warming dominates the increasing energy stored in the climate system. AR5 also clearly established the link between cumulative past, present, and future Co2 emissions and temperature rise. More emissions now lead to higher temperatures in the future, which implies a carbon budget for any given global temperature limit. Based on the Paris Agreement objective to limit global average temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the corresponding carbon budget was two-thirds used by 2011. It is projected to be fully used within 20 years given current global annual emissions rates.

Impacts of climate change were also highlighted, including impacts on the Ocean, which will continue to warm, acidify, and lose oxygen. Dr. Lee noted that according to AR5, 90% of warm water coral reefs would suffer significant risks from global warming above 1.5 degree Celsius, and warming of 2 degree Celsius is projected to result in at least an average sea level rise of 40 centimeters over this century with higher emissions leading to higher sea-levels. Given the increased need for information on the ocean and potential for significantly higher sea-level rise in particular, the AR6 cycle in 2019 is anticipated to include a Special Report on the ocean and the cryosphere. Dr. Lee noted it would also include another Special Report on climate change and terrestrial systems, including desertification and food security as well as a methodology update report.

World Meteorological Day, celebrated on 23 March, was acknowledged. Related to this, the need was recognized for improved capacity to forecast disasters and understand linkages between climate change and natural systems, human health, and the economy – all of which were noted to underpin the IPCC's science and research which support sustainable development. Dr. Lee reiterated a commitment by the IPCC to delve more deeply into these linkages going forward.

Additional speakers in this panel lauded the momentum behind early Ratification of the Paris Agreement, including its early entry into force in November 2016. At the time of the event, 137 of the 194 Parties to the UNFCCC had ratified the Paris Agreement and it was noted that 57 countries had not yet ratified the Agreement for various reasons including long domestic legislative processes – with only a few not having yet started the process.

It was noted that approximately 20 texts remain to be adopted on implementation of the Paris Agreement, work that is being led by the UNFCCC. In this process it will be critical to ensure that the goal of keeping global temperatures well below 2 degree increase is maintained, as well that a balance is kept between adaption and mitigation in accordance with commitments made in Paris. The unique and pressing interests of vulnerable, small-island, and low-lying developing states were highlighted and would remain a priority by the incoming Presidency of the 23rd Conference of Parties (COP23), the Government of Fiji, which also noted the priorities of adaptation and financing, the ocean, multi-stakeholder participation and partnerships, the needs and priorities of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small-Island Developing States (SIDS), and gender and climate change.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) Executive Director, Mr. Bamsey, noted that climate action has come to be equated with opportunity and wealth creation however this is less the case in developing states and in regards to adaptation. He noted that the GCF aims to use its billions of funds to leverage the trillions required to successfully address climate change, including for adaptation while respectfully reflecting countries' priorities. It was noted that this is possible given GCF's various instruments, including loans and grants, which can help vitalize projects that would not be possible otherwise.

Multi-stakeholder action was vividly highlighted by former COP President Segolene Royal, who referred to on-the-ground results that had multi-prong impacts that advance climate mitigation, adaptation and various SDGs. Examples by the Minister included over seventy climate action coalitions, which pledged commitments in Paris as part of the UNFCCC Action Agenda and which also were advancing collaborative and collective SDG-implementation. Other speakers, including Governor Inslee of the US State of Washington, highlighted green investment including green bonds, and sub-national action where governments at all levels and the private sector collaborate to become laboratories of innovation and lead on SDGs and climate action, including city and state-wide strategies. The significant nexus between climate change, the health of the Ocean, and the economy was also stressed.

Human ingenuity, supported by adequate resources and inclusive finance, was noted as a key driver of solutions for both climate and SDGs. Examples by the panelists included new carbon fiber to enable lighter electric vehicles, efficient production of photo-voltaic cells, carbon cap and trade sub-national legislation, vocational training that supports green jobs, and enterprise opportunities for all but especially for women and youth.

A video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ5nKGHMWC0) was also launched at the event by Stockholm Resilience Center and Mission2020 which highlighted the concept of a 'golden rule' for decarbonization to successfully avoid tipping points and bend the emission curve, whereby all sectors and all individuals, reduce emissions by half per decade in order to stay below dangerous thresholds of climate change.

Moving forward, Ambassador Luke Daunivalu of the Fiji Mission stressed that leadership is needed by governments, the private sector and civil society; a multi-stakeholder approach must continue; adequate funding is required; and personal ownership is essential. "We must bring it home", he said.

Plenary

86 Member States and 4 Observers took the floor in the plenary debate. This includes statements at the Ministerial level and 2 on behalf of Major Groups – the Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC) and Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

During the event, Andorra, Armenia, the Philippines and Tajikistan announced that they had deposited their respective instruments of ratification to the Paris Agreement during the week of the event. The PGA recognized that they were the most recent to join the numerous ambitious Parties to the climate convention who had already joined the Paris Agreement family.

Member States expressed enthusiastic support for implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Agenda, often citing detailed and ambitious plans for national level implementation. An analysis of statements reveal soft trends in issues shared at the event, recognizing these are not inclusive of all action taken or priorities at the national level. Nonetheless, a snapshot of Member States interventions reveals that over half identified adaptation as a priority when discussing climate change. As many, just over half, spoke on energy and one-fifth on transportation – in various

forms – reflecting the link between these issues, SDG implementation and climate change. Nine Member States acknowledged gender dimensions. Approximately one-third of those who spoke noted financial instruments that they were employing to advance implementation of SDGs or address climate change; and nearly one-half called for scaled-up resources to meet the challenge.

Over twenty Governments reiterated emission reduction targets including various percentage targets by 2020, 2030 or other years, and a handful reiterated a commitment to climate neutrality. Virtually all interventions reflected the collaborative spirit which secured the Paris Agreement and expressed resounding support and encouragement for incoming President of COP23, the Government of Fiji. Statements included urging all Governments to “stay the course” for COP23 in Bonn and beyond, meet national commitments, and ensure that pledges are ever-more ambitious. It was noted that climate policies should be independent from political cycles and rest upon scientific data; and that although the task to address climate change is herculean, it must be accomplished with all hands on deck. In sum, there was strong and confident endorsement of the multilateral process that delivered the SDGs and the Paris Agreement and pledges of support to ensure this continues.

Breakout Session I: Implementing Solutions

Session I, entitled ‘Implementing Solutions’ focused on scaling up implementation of the Paris Agreement and SDGs. Through an expertly-moderated discussion, speakers delved into the deeply cross-cutting dimensions of climate and the Sustainable Development Goals, and provided concrete examples of where implementing solutions with a multi-sectoral approach has enhanced social, economic and environmental dividends, in particular for land-use, energy, and the Ocean.

Significant emphasis was placed by the panelists and audience, during the interactive discussion, on how best to translate national level commitments into concrete initiatives. As a first step, it was noted that governments benefit from clearly articulated goals and designing policies that incentivize action in support of these goals. The value of engaging a breadth of stakeholders in this effort was frequently cited – for example with development banks, the private sector, academia, civil society, and other community groups to enhance implementation. Moreover, multiple speakers evidenced how data and technology are increasingly available and at a scale as to transform economies and society.

These good practices and assets were evidenced through concrete examples provided by panelists and respondents such as measuring and reducing city-level pollution, decreasing the cost and increasing distribution of solar and wind energy including off-shore, the design and sharing of technology for a credit card that allows users to track and offset carbon emissions of purchases, and the vast applications of big data to advance SDG implementation and climate action. The rich contribution of panelists was complemented by interventions from the audience including on gender equality and dimensions of climate change, action at the sub-national and community level and the interlinkage of the health of the Ocean and climate.

Breakout Session II: 2020 as Opportunity

Session II, entitled ‘2020 as Opportunity’ focused on the costs and opportunities of achieving targets within the Sustainable Development Goals and climate change agenda by the year 2020, in particular with regards to land-use, energy, and the Ocean.

Panelists and respondents provided a wealth of examples whereby a well-designed policy or innovation – led by governments or the private sector and engaging multiple stakeholders – could make immediate

impacts to deliver on an SDG, build resilience to climate change, or reduce emissions. In the case of public transport the benefits to public health and reduced carbon emissions were clearly evidenced. Additional technological innovations were highlighted that can assess and make available data on air pollution down to the street or hyper-local level – stressing the high costs of air pollution especially in urban areas to human health, the economy and environment, most notably in developing states.

The recent significant gains in delivering renewable energy were also highlighted – a clear boon to both SDG7 on energy and SDG13 on climate. The decrease in cost of renewables, with solar becoming the least expensive energy source in over 50 developing states, was recognized. Synergies between SDG15 on biodiversity and climate action were also recognized in that restoring degraded land enhances agricultural production, ecological resilience, economic value and the land's capacity to store carbon.

In these, as in other areas, partnerships between governments, the private sector and investment community are supporting national plans on SDGs and climate. Private sector's increasing leadership in delivering on SDGs, including climate change, was cited by many. UN Global Compact noted their effort to hold a repository of commitments by this sector and others described platforms – such as the Ocean Investment Platform – to help share information and facilitate partnership-building. A common thread was that businesses increasingly view these efforts, including science-driven decision-making, as good business.

Challenges to scaling up action were also noted, and include ensuring the right balance of partners in developing and implementing solutions; knowledge sharing at all levels – from the policy halls to the community level – given the remaining skepticism to climate science and solutions in some cases; the digital divide especially in developing states, rural areas and among some demographics; regulations and perverse subsidies that undermine green innovation; and limited finance or limited access to funding.

Support was expressed for emerging or new tools and methods that can help to overcome these challenges. Some of those mentioned include strengthening the empirical case between economic growth and climate action including mitigation and resilience such as in the upcoming report of the New Climate Economy among other high profile reports; “radical transparency” of information which can increase public knowledge and inspire action; disruptive technology; and “data story-telling” to translate the vast information at hand on sustainable development and climate in order to “make it personal”, with an understanding that personal responsibility and behavioral change is part of the solution.

This Summary cannot do full justice to the breadth and depth of interventions and discussion held during the course of the event. Statements for those who submitted and videos of the entire event including Breakout Sessions I and II can be found online at: <http://www.un.org/pga/71/event-latest/climate-change-and-the-sustainable-development-agenda/> (Statements under Documents and Videos under 'Media' tab.)

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD, Vol.32 No.27) has provided an additional summary, including some highlights of Member States and panelists' specific interventions.