

SUMMARY OF THE INFORMAL THEMATIC DEBATE OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON CLIMATE CHANGE AS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

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The informal thematic debate of the General Assembly on the subject of "Climate change as a global challenge" was held from 31 July to 2 August 2007, in the Trusteeship Council Chamber at UN headquarters in New York. On 31 July, two panel discussions were held involving experts and representatives of intergovernmental organizations and academic institutions. In the morning, the panel session addressed "The science, the impact and the adaptation imperative." The afternoon panel focused on mitigation strategies in the context of sustainable development.

From 1-2 August, member states engaged in a general discussion and delivered statements about their national strategies and about international commitments to address climate change.

OPENING OF THE MEETING

The event was opened by UN General Assembly President Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa (Bahrain) on Tuesday, 31 July. She explained that she had convened this meeting following a request from the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) New York Committee. She highlighted the relevance of climate change in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the importance of developing a framework for tackling climate change after 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period ends. She also noted the need for national strategies, the value of carbon markets and the opportunity to build a global consensus on climate change.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said climate change is finally receiving the highest attention, which it merits. Noting that the science is clear and that serious impacts are already being felt, he said the time has come for action on a global scale. He urged new thinking and said a comprehensive agreement under the UNFCCC for the post-2012 period was needed by 2009. He announced a high-level General Assembly meeting on climate change on 24 September 2007. He noted his appointment of three special climate change envoys and his discussions on this topic with world leaders, local government representatives, civil society and the private sector. He said the UN aims to become a climate neutral organization.

PANEL I: CLIMATE CHANGE: THE SCIENCE, THE IMPACT AND THE ADAPTATION IMPERATIVE

The first panel, which was moderated by UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis, focused on climate change science, impacts and the "adaptation imperative."

John Holdren, Harvard University, provided an overview of climate change science, observing that the significant impact of climate change resulting from human activity

is a "known fact" and that the serious effects on humanity that will increase over time.

Sir Nicholas Stern, London School of Economics, focused on the economic consequences of climate change. He indicated that a "do nothing" approach would ultimately result in the loss of five percent of global economic income, whereas "strong and timely action now" could reduce the costs of climate change to about one percent of global income. Stating that the goal should be to keep the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere to 450-550 parts per million (ppm), he suggested that it would be wise to try to stay within the lower end of that range. To achieve this, he said 50 percent reductions in global emissions are needed by 2050.

Herve le Treut, Laboratoire de Météorologie Dynamique, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique CNRS, outlined the development of climate science and modeling, as well as various scenarios for future climate change.

Kenrick R. Leslie, Caribbean Community Climate Change Center, reflected on challenges facing his region, including the impacts of temperature and sea-level rise, and of extreme weather events such as hurricanes.

Sunita Narain, Centre for Science and Environment, India, stressed that the poor are the most vulnerable to climate change. She noted the gender dimension to the problem and the particular vulnerability of women in poor communities. She emphasized climate change as a development issue and said adaptation was both inevitable and costly. She also noted that no country has effectively de-linked its economic growth from its emissions growth, and urged a future multilateral regime based on fairness and justice.

Responding to these presentations, Neroni Slade (Samoa) led the discussions, noting the particular vulnerability of small island states. A number of speakers stressed the need for fairness and justice in how climate change is addressed by the global community, recognizing the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Maldives underscored latest findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), suggesting that "we have not yet invented a politics to go along with the climate science." The International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (ISDR) noted that more people are threatened now from extreme events than ever before.

Brazil stressed issues of fairness, equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. He noted that reductions from Annex I parties for the first commitment period are not sufficient, and anticipated stronger commitments for the second commitment period. He added that Brazil is ready to increase its participation in ensuring a truly global effort.

WWF urged that negotiations be started in Bali and concluded in 2009. He noted that Annex I parties cannot solve the problem alone, and urged the development of new mechanisms to address the problem.

The Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) said climate change and development must be addressed together rather than separately. The Food and Agriculture Organization and World Meteorological Organization outlined their respective work on climate change.

Responding to a question from Iran about the role of natural climate cycles in causing climate change, John Holdren stressed that natural variations do not explain the observed changes.

Regarding next steps, Nicholas Stern outlined several elements he said would be required for a global deal on climate change. He suggested that the target of a 75 percent reduction by 2050 on the part of developed countries would be required, along with an intermediate target of a 20-30% reduction by 2020. With regards to mitigation, he said it would be necessary to move beyond the Kyoto Protocol's existing Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which cannot provide emissions reductions at the scale needed. He supported bringing deforestation into a future mechanism. He also urged more research and resources for adaptation and political leadership to secure an agreement.

Sunita Narain said developed countries need to accept their responsibility for climate change, stressed the right of developing countries to economic growth and development, and said the South should not be expected to take on targets. John Holdren said the North must begin to cut emissions immediately, while the South's emissions would need to start declining by 2020-2025.

PANEL II: MITIGATION STRATEGIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On Tuesday afternoon, a panel session was held on mitigation strategies in the context of sustainable development. The discussion was moderated by Mohamed El-Ashry, UN Foundation. He identified various elements that should be considered in developing a post-2012 framework, including: differentiated targets and timetables that reflect issues of equity and fairness, forests and carbon sinks, market-based mechanisms, adaptation financing mechanisms, technology development and transfer, and financing.

Robert Socolow, Princeton University, reported on research confirming the significant and ongoing increase in fossil fuel extraction and greenhouse gas emissions over time. He outlined a variety of policies that could act as "wedges" to reduce current emissions growth. Noting that both North and South would have to take action, he said neither would have a "free pass" to continue business as usual, but the North would have to cut emissions considerably by 2050 (by about 75%). He suggested a focus on the wealthy one-fifth of the world's population who are responsible for high *per capita* emissions regardless of what country they live in.

Anthony Olusegun Adegbulugbe, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, noted developing countries' tendency to downplay climate change compared with development concerns, while noting a growing recognition of their vulnerability to climate change. He highlighted synergies between climate mitigation strategies and development policies in areas such as energy efficiency, fuel substitution, renewables, afforestation, and land and waste management.

Bjorn Stigson, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, noted the private sector's major role in investing in future infrastructure and as a key stakeholder in combating climate change. He said business needs a sound policy and regulatory environment and clear carbon price signals. He stressed the need for

increased public-private sector cooperation, stating that the private sector is not yet seen as an equal partner in the UNFCCC process.

Abdalla Salem El-Badri, OPEC, underscored the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and urged access to modern energy to meet the MDGs. He welcomed diversification in the energy mix, while noting that fossil fuels are expected to meet most of the growth in demand expected through to 2030, and the potential of carbon capture and storage in this regard.

Michael Liebreich, New Energy Finance, discussed the potential role of clean energy in mitigating climate change, noting the recent growth of investment in renewables in the US and Asia, the value of carbon funds, the need to scale up the CDM or a successor mechanism, and the need to transfer technology and skills.

Yvo de Boer, UNFCCC Executive Secretary, noted that the Kyoto Protocol is not sufficient to deliver the emissions reductions needed to tackle climate change, and considered what the ground rules might be for a negotiation on a post-2012 framework to be launched in Bali, and what a future agreement might include. He said parties need to feel that their concerns are being taken into account, noting that industrialized countries want an ambitious, cost-effective approach that does not impact competitiveness and enhances the engagement of developing countries, while developing countries are focused on poverty eradication and economic growth. He then proposed that the post-2012 framework should not include "hard" targets for developing countries, but instead provide incentives to limit emissions growth, support clean energy, and address concerns about competitiveness and economic growth. He drew attention to a sectoral or policy-based approach as one avenue for further exploration. He stressed the role of the private sector, market-based mechanisms and equity. Finally, he expressed optimism for future talks, given recent agreements within the G8 and EU and the efforts of such countries as China, India and Brazil.

In the ensuing discussion, Masayuki Sasanouchi, Environmental Affairs, Toyota, stressed the importance of technology innovation, development and commercialization. Paul Bledsoe, US National Commission on Energy Policy, recommended mandatory targets for the US, higher automotive fuel standards, and energy efficiency goals across all sectors. He suggested that once the US has adopted strong emissions targets, developing countries could eventually take on goals, adding that major developing countries are already taking serious action.

Several speakers stressed the role of the private sector, with one referring to the need for straightforward regulation, predictability and transparency. China emphasized its efforts to combat climate change, noting that it was wrong to assume that China was not doing anything simply because it does not have targets under the Kyoto Protocol, and that the challenges for developing countries to continue to grow economically while addressing environmental issues are unprecedented. Robert Socolow questioned whether the UNFCCC separation of countries into groups such as "Annex I" was still useful, since "we are all citizens of a world in danger."

CONCLUDING ADDRESS: Following the second panel discussion, participants heard a concluding address by Jeffrey Sachs, Earth Institute, Columbia University. Sachs said there was both good and bad news relating to the climate change dilemma. On the positive side, he said the costs of solving the problem were actually much less than had been originally feared: probably less than one percent of global income.

However, he feared that even forging an agreement between countries to spend fractions of one percent of their income would not be easy.

He suggested a focus on a few key sectors, namely energy, transportation and deforestation. On deforestation, he said addressing this would provide a low-cost, large-scale, pro-poor solution. Regarding energy, he said an ongoing reliance on fossil fuels was inevitable, and urged demonstration projects to establish carbon capture and storage as a viable technology. He also supported scaling-up renewable energy sources and hybrid vehicles.

He argued that a carbon tax would be much easier to regulate and monitor than a carbon market, supported a subsidy on sequestration, and said developed countries should have to bear most of the costs, although these would not be onerous. He expressed optimism that negotiations in Bali would be successful and said that once countries study the financial costs they will realize that it is affordable and far cheaper than the costs of inaction. He suggested that both North and South should be committed to action and that a voluntary approach would not be required because industrialized countries could easily support the South.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

On 1 and 2 August, member states engaged in a general discussion and delivered statements about their national strategies and international commitments to address climate change.

The discussion began with a briefing from two of the three Special Envoys on Climate Change appointed by the UN Secretary-General in May 2007: Ricardo Lagos and Han Seung-soo (the third Envoy, Gro Harlem Brundtland, was unable to attend).

Ricardo Lagos, former President of Chile, urged a political decision on a post-2012 regime involving all countries, asking whether it was possible to envisage a third category of countries that are neither rich nor poor but have a medium-level *per capita* income. He expressed optimism that an agreement was possible and said negotiators at the Bali conference in December 2007 should establish a clear and defined timetable to finalize a deal by 2009.

Han Seung-soo, former President of the General Assembly and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea, reflected on his discussions with world leaders in his new role as Special Envoy. He explained that the high-level General Assembly event on 24 September would not be a negotiation, since the UNFCCC is the forum for such talks. However, the September meeting did present an opportunity to send a political signal to negotiators at the Bali conference.

Sha Zukang, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, noted the many relevant policies and actions identified during the past two sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development. He also emphasized the importance of partnerships, access to clean technology, South-South cooperation, and integrating climate change within the broader development agenda.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBER STATES: National actions to address climate change were reported by many countries, including Albania, Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Bahrain, Belarus, Canada, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Ecuador, Egypt,

Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Malawi, Maldives, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Palau, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Spain, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay and Zimbabwe).

As well, many speakers outlined their views on the multilateral negotiations designed to reach an agreement for the post-2012 period, when the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period ends. A number of speakers said the high-level event on 24 September 2007 called by the UN Secretary-General should provide political momentum for an agreement at the Bali conference in December 2007 on a "roadmap" for completing post-2012 negotiations by 2009. The urgency of the climate change problem and the importance of equity, fairness and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities in developing a future agreement were also underscored by many speakers. A number of member states also affirmed the UNFCCC as the appropriate forum for negotiations.

Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, called on all member states to ratify the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol. He emphasized developed countries' responsibility to make deeper emissions cuts, noted the need to increase financial support, technology transfer and capacity building, and urged more North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation. He stressed the UNFCCC as the appropriate forum for reaching a global consensus and said the Bali conference in December 2007 should produce a clear timeframe and a plan to reach an agreement on a post-2012 framework.

Portugal, for the European Union (EU), noted the EU's unilateral commitment to cut emissions by 20 percent by 2020 compared with 1990 levels, and its willingness to cut emissions by up to 30 percent if other developed countries made comparable commitments. He supported extending the carbon market, increased cooperation on technology research and transfer, addressing emissions from international aviation and maritime transport, and reducing emissions from deforestation. He said the EU's goal of restricting overall global mean surface temperatures to 2°C or less means global emissions should peak within 15 years. He stressed the importance of absolute emissions reduction commitments and the need for developed countries to take the lead. Finally, he said the Bali conference should result in agreement on the need for a new multilateral regime by 2009.

Uganda, for the African Group, urged strengthening the Adaptation Fund and supported an open and transparent process in striving for a multilateral agreement. He stressed climate change as a sustainable development issue, underscored the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol process as the appropriate forum for discussion, and expressed concerns at attempts to link this issue too closely to issues of security or governance.

Belize, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), urged developed and emerging developing countries to agree on a strong mitigation framework. He noted with concern the absence of CDM activities in the Caribbean and also stressed the importance of action on adaptation.

Grenada, on behalf of for the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), stressed the needs of small island developing states, the potential role of private financing, and the expansion of risk insurance funds.

Benin, for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), urged improved access to the CDM, and greater consideration to the needs of the LDCs with regards to emergency response measures. He urged developed countries to meet their obligations under various multilateral agreements to support LDCs, including in adapting to climate change.

The US emphasized his country's commitment to the UNFCCC and to an approach recognizing the fundamental connections of energy security, climate change and sustainable development. He outlined domestic actions, including steps to reduce the economy's greenhouse gas intensity, cutting gasoline consumption, and cooperating on clean technologies.

The Russian Federation advocated the consolidation of efforts of all countries, without exception. Kuwait opposed setting commitments or targets for developing countries, stating that developed countries must meet their commitments under the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol.

The UK characterized climate change as a shared dilemma that demands actions by all, recognizing the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. He stressed the need for developed countries to take the lead and for developing countries to take action also, with support and assistance from the North.

China emphasized the need to address unsustainable patterns of consumption and the need for clean technology development and transfer. He drew attention to China's new National Climate Change Programme. This Programme includes several goals for 2010, including: a 20 percent reduction of energy consumption per unit of GDP; raising the share of renewables (including large-scale hydropower) to 10 percent; stabilizing industrial emissions of nitrous oxide at 2005 levels; and increasing forest cover to 20 percent of the country. He suggested that, while the world has focused on China's total emissions, it has not recognized the fact that China has 1.3 billion people and relatively low *per capita* emissions. He urged cooperation to achieve "win-win" solutions.

India said environmental concerns should not become conditionalities that hinder growth in developing countries. He said the concept of large developing country emitters does not exist in the UNFCCC or any other UN agreement, and developed countries should not try to "export the problem" of climate change given their historical responsibilities. He stressed the low *per capita* emissions in countries such as India.

Ukraine highlighted the role of Joint Implementation and supported a longer commitment period. He suggested bringing together and systematizing the various multilateral environmental agreements. Trinidad and Tobago urged completion of negotiations on the Adaptation Fund and said the adaptation needs of small island developing states must be prioritized.

Japan said all major emitters must participate in a new framework, thus moving beyond the Kyoto Protocol. He said a new framework must be flexible and diverse, taking into account each country's circumstances. He added that Japan would extend wide-ranging support to countries that can agree with this approach and would develop a new mechanism to provide long-term support to developing countries.

Germany noted the EU's ambitious agenda and his country's willingness to go even further by cutting emissions by up to 40% by 2020. He also drew attention to the significant employment creation benefits from various energy and climate change projects.

Australia highlighted the announcement of its cap-and-trade emissions trading system in July 2007 and said it would set a long-term aspirational goal in 2008. He supported an international framework that includes all major emitters and allows for flexibility. He also highlighted initiatives at the regional and bilateral levels. New Zealand supported agreement on a Bali roadmap and a post-2012 outcome that includes factors such as deforestation and a technology component.

Sweden said a future regime should be effective, fair and comprehensive, intensify action under the Convention, and give a high priority to adaptation, with industrialized countries assisting developing countries in this regard. She added that a future regime should recognize that developing countries are already making important contributions to tackling climate change and that their further engagement will be part of the overall effort in limiting and reducing emissions.

Brazil said developing countries should not be expected to take on commitments now but that incentives should be provided for them to take on actions and initiatives suited to their national circumstances. He noted Brazil's proposal relating to deforestation and its successful 30-year experience with biofuels. He added that different countries bear different levels of responsibility for the problem and should approach the negotiations accordingly. Cuba expressed concerns at the "troubling" US strategy, suggesting that it may compromise global food security.

Switzerland stressed community resilience to natural disasters and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015. He also noted the relevance of the UN reform process on global environmental governance. Iceland noted work towards a sustainable hydrogen society and the potential for geothermal energy in many developing countries.

El Salvador stressed the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to tackling climate change. The Czech Republic supported ambitious commitments for the next commitment period and support by the North for developing countries. Malaysia stressed the need for a strong technology component in a future agreement. Guatemala raised issues of avoided deforestation, linkages between climate and biodiversity protection, and ecosystem services.

Chile said the Bali conference should result in a roadmap and the establishment of a preparatory committee with high-level representation that is open to all parties and encourages NGO and private sector participation. He said the process should result in industrialized countries taking on stronger targets and commitments by developing countries to adopt national policies to combat climate change. The process should conclude at a world leaders' summit in early 2010.

Norway noted the broad consensus that the future agreement should be firmly anchored in the UNFCCC, and noted its activities on carbon capture and storage. Saudi Arabia said mitigation actions must not lead to market distortions that disrupt energy supplies or block development. He expressed concern that oil exporting developing countries are negatively impacted both by climate change and the response measures meant to address climate change. Israel emphasized the role of

private investment funds and noted its work on renewables, with 75 percent of households already using solar power for water heating. Denmark noted its "pioneering role" in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Iran highlighted linkages with desertification.

Tuvalu urged a new legal instrument under the UNFCCC that would allow developing countries to take on voluntary commitments and would include incentives. Bangladesh was encouraged by the G8 goal of at least halving emissions by 2050, urged all major emitters to work together on global targets for the short-, medium- and long-term, stressed that industrialized countries must take the lead, and raised the issue of environmental refugees. Tanzania urged more CDM projects in Africa.

South Africa proposed a Bali roadmap to provide momentum and a negotiating framework for the next two years. This roadmap would outline a clear programme of work with a view to concluding a deal by the end of 2009. He suggested that a package deal would need to strike a balance between five key areas: adaptation; mitigation; managing the unintended consequences of policies and measures on other countries' economies; technology development, diffusion and commercialization; and means of implementation, including capacity building, financing and awareness. With regards to mitigation, he proposed more ambitious and legally-binding targets for all developed countries under the Kyoto Protocol, and "enhanced and incentivized mitigation actions" by developing countries under the UNFCCC. In this context, he indicated that the current "Convention-track" dialogue should be converted into a "meaningful negotiating framework."

CLOSE OF THE MEETING: In her concluding remarks, General Assembly President Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa thanked participants for ensuring a successful event. She highlighted speeches outlining the many ongoing national activities, as well as comments on the UNFCCC's key role, the clear and compelling science, the need for industrialized countries to set more ambitious targets and the importance of support for developing countries to assist them in doing more on climate change. She also noted the need for a clear political vision for the future, the gender dimension, the particular needs of LDCs and SIDS, the role of the private sector, the broader development agenda and the relevance of climate change to the MDGs. Indicating that a summary of the debate would be circulated shortly, she closed the meeting at 6:45 pm on Thursday, 2 August.