



**Remarks by**

**H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe**

**President of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations**

**General Assembly**

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Opening Session

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*Please check against delivery.*

H.E. Mr. Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs,  
Dr. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, Minister of State,  
Excellencies,  
Secretary-General,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are all gathered here today to confront a troubling reality- we have done too little for too long – we have ignored the growing scientific evidence and mounting risks at our own peril – we need to live with the knowledge that we may very well have completely altered the course of history for future generations by our years of collective inaction on climate change.

Let me be very clear so there is no mistaking the seriousness and gravity of the task before us- global climate change is not just one amongst many pressing global crises, it is THE definitive global challenge – it is central to how we live, our health, what we eat and drink, how we do business and prosper and also how we struggle to eke out livelihoods, confront our vulnerability to extreme risks, and cope with ill-health and loss.

Now I see many familiar faces in the audience today. Like many of you, I too have attended various global fora related to climate change over the course of two (2) decades but as the quintessential saying goes – “What have we got to show for it?”

After years of meetings in diverse corners of the globe to discuss, argue, exchange views, share experiences and – at times – negotiate on climate change, the question my now seventeen year old son asked me in the wake of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Sandy on the New York area, still haunts me today: “Dad, are we any closer to reaching an agreement that will address climate change or are we in danger of falling even further behind?”

In spite of the personal despair, and the hitherto ominous and cautionary note, I remain an eternal optimist since I see in the midst of our collective years of inaction, signs for optimism and hope, beginning with today’s event. And here I would like to thank our hosts, the Government of the United Arab Emirates, for having the vision to convene this meeting – appropriately termed ASCENT – in advance of our Secretary-General’s September Summit,

so as to allow us to prepare for the latter with new resolve, creative ideas and big, bold commitments and action.

Distinguished Guests,

The September 23 Summit must be a watershed moment for urgent action, ambition and, above all, demonstrable leadership. It comes against the backdrop of the sheer weight of five consecutive IPCC assessments that should compel us towards concrete consensus-based actions to address the global climate change challenge and, I hope, move us away from the business-as-usual model of acrimoniously parsing language and negotiating texts that do not result in bold actions.

Our shared planet and all of our people demand no less and they deserve to have their demands addressed.

We can no longer say that climate change is a challenge for tomorrow; it is a matter of urgent priority yesterday and today. Low lying coastal communities and small island developing states know all too well how climate change induced extreme weather events can wreak destruction on their homes and livelihoods, rolling back decades of development efforts in just a few short hours. Likewise, everywhere across the globe, people face the growing threats of climate change impacts in the form of inundations, droughts, hurricanes, desertification, rising sea levels, food and water insecurity, as well as the growing challenge of human migration and vector borne diseases. As the Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said in releasing the 5<sup>th</sup> Assessment report last month [quote] “no one on the planet will be untouched by climate change,” [end quote].

Humanity is both witness and victim of the adverse effects of climate change, but also the prime suspect in generating this global threat. Anthropogenic climate change is unequivocal and only decisive human intervention can and must make a difference by keeping temperature rise well below two (2) degrees.

To meet the challenge of climate change, we need to succeed on a number of complementary tracks culminating in 2015. First, we must agree upon a new development agenda, with

poverty eradication and sustainable development at the centre, and second, we must finalize a legally binding agreement on climate change.

As President of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly, I am doing my part by getting Member States to “set the stage” for the elaboration of a post 2015 development agenda. It is my firm belief that sustainable development will not be possible without sound, effective climate policy and action. We must therefore ensure that we address the inextricable linkages between the development and the climate change agendas as we move towards their respective 2015 deadlines.

In addition to preparing us for the Climate Change Summit, this ASCENT should provide us with an opportunity to further explore solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, which are already affordable and readily available. From energy efficiency to transportation, from sustainable cities to agriculture and forestry, many of the areas that will be presented here are also the focus of the ongoing discussions on the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.

It is my hope that these next two (2) days will inspire concrete actions that galvanize bold announcements and innovative actions at the September Summit by all stakeholders – governments, private sector and civil society – which will meaningfully address climate change. Such innovative actions on the ground will help spur even more ambition from political leaders in reaching a global, legally-binding climate agreement in Paris on November 2015.

The year 2015 presents us with an historic opportunity for a paradigm shift. Now is the time to show an increasingly disbelieving world that we finally mean business when we say that we will ensure a sustainable future for our planet and its children.

Thank you.

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