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ADDRESS
of the
President of the Republic of Poland
H.E. Mr. Lech KACZYŃSKI

during the General Debate of the sixty-second Session
of the UN General Assembly

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United Nations, New York

Chairman,
Secretary General,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to begin by conveying expressions of respect and gratitude to Ms Haya Rashed Al Kalifa, who chaired the previous 61st Session of the UN General Assembly, at the same time sincerely congratulating her successor Mr. Srgjan Kerim, the newly elected Chairman of the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly. I would like to wish the Chairman that his work be fruitful and to underscore that you can count on Poland in all the actions you take. The choice of the subject of this year's session proves the special role of the United Nations as a forum for debating the most important global challenges.

According to many scientists, the growth of carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere, which is the effect of deforestation and of the combustion of hard coal, lignite, peat, oil and gas, is the cause of detrimental climate change.

According to them, the increasing carbon dioxide content, by creating an insulating layer around the earth contributes to climate warming. This results in the melting of glaciers, which in turn is supposed to cause the rising level of the waters and oceans, which will lead to threats of floods affecting people living on islands and in coastal areas. According to protagonists of this view, also the directions of sea currents and wind forces are changing. In different parts of the world disasters are caused by floods, tornados and drought. Thousands of people suffer, being killed, injured, losing their belongings and homes. The weather anomalies affect mostly the poorest people, who sometimes have no choice but to live on the flood exposed lowlands, unstable mountain slopes and in dangerous dwellings. The economic losses caused by environmental calamities reach many billions of dollars.

To be objective, it should be noted at this point that many scientists represent dissenting views. They believe that climate change and the occurring weather anomalies are just natural phenomena. Clear evidence of this may be found looking at the past thousands of years. For example, in Central Europe, the process of withdrawal of the ice cover from the last ice age started some dozen thousand years ago, followed by both significant climate warming (10 thousand years ago) and climate cooling (8 thousand years ago), which had nothing to do with human activity.

Regardless which view is right, it is important the political will of most governments and parliaments in the world the Framework Climate Convention of the UN has been adopted. Its basic objective is to stabilise the concentration of greenhouse gases (mainly carbon dioxide) in the atmosphere at a level,

which according to the protagonists of the former of the above presented views, would prevent dangerous anthropogenic intervention in the climate system of the globe. Greenhouse gas emissions are correlated with the level of economic development.

The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, in the face of the necessity of further economic growth, may be achieved by the application of new technologies, more efficient energy sources and the increase of the role of natural absorbers of such emissions, including forests.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland highly appreciates the Secretary General's initiative to arrange the high level meeting on climate change. The matter of mitigating the negative effects and halting the process of climate change cannot be treated only as a question of environmental protection, but also as a comprehensive challenge, which requires far-reaching political, economic and financial decisions, as well as international cooperation, collaboration between the public and private sectors, and also understanding and cooperation of the entire international community.

The growth of concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is one of the greatest challenges facing mankind in the years to come. The highly developed countries are responsible for this growth: through the combustion of huge amounts of coal, oil and gas, combined with deforestation, they have achieved great affluence, but they have also caused major changes in the atmosphere and contributed to the decline of biodiversity. There is a need to stop this process and such is the purpose of the Climate Convention and the Kyoto Protocol.

Pursuant to these agreements the developed countries should pursue their economic policy so that while attaining growth they should at the same time stimulate sustainable development of developing countries. This should be a Pact of Special Solidarity. The effect of this pact should be to bring the growth of concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to a halt. This is achieved by using soft funding mechanisms, i.e. trading in emissions, joint projects and clean development measures. Emissions trading and joint projects stimulate the reduction of emissions among developed countries. We must fully implement these instruments. Clean development provides the opportunity to transfer the latest technologies from developed countries to the developing ones. However, it requires the establishment of an efficient funding system, which we must also put in place.

The above indicated mechanisms indicate clearly, that the Climate Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, although they are associated with protection of the environment, constitute essentially purely economic agreements aimed at clean development and strongly interfering with the interests of particular

countries. Because of that they are extremely hard to negotiate, and the principle of compromise building prevailing in the UN requires far reaching understanding of the interests of all the parties concerned. In the negotiations and plans for the future we must understand the economic conditions prevailing both in developed and developing countries. We must therefore understand the economic situation both in the USA and in Poland. We must equally understand China and Brazil, Saudi Arabia and Ghana in this regard.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the point of view of the Climate Convention and the Kyoto Protocol Poland is a success story. In the course of the last 17 years we have attained 60% growth of GDP and we have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 32% with respect to the baseline year. This success is attributable to a stable environmental policy, new and more effective technologies, increased share of renewable energy sources, as well as increased public awareness. This is proof that development does not have to be connected with increased greenhouse gas emissions. Quite the contrary, in fact it can lead to a decrease of the concentration of greenhouse gases, thus mitigating the climate change effects. There is no doubt that deforestation in the developing countries increases the emissions of greenhouse gases and destroys biodiversity. We must counteract that. We cannot demand slower development of those countries at their expense. We must therefore help them in realistic and tangible ways.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As deforestation negatively affects the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, afforestation must lead to the opposite effect. Therefore, one of the ways to mitigate climate change is also to rebuild living natural resources, destroyed by commercial activity. Forestry can be a good example. Afforestation of degraded soil and regeneration of existing forests enable the absorption of carbon from the atmosphere and the restoration of endemic biodiversity. In this respect Poland is also a success story. Evidence of that is the consistent implementation of the "National Afforestation Growth Programme" i.a. by restoring the original character of man-managed forests. The programme has led to the accumulation of over 40 million tons of carbon dioxide per year by Polish forests. We are thus contributing not only to increased absorption of atmospheric carbon dioxide but also to restoration of natural biodiversity. May this be reflected by the world class jewel of nature – the Bialowieza National Park. It is here that on one hectare of land do we have an accumulation of over 300 tons of carbon accumulated in biomass (over a thousand tons of CO₂) and thanks to this we have here thousands of species of plants, animals and fungi, as well as large quantities of magnificent water. The neighbouring degraded farmlands, created after the felling of naturally growing trees, contain merely dozen-or-so tons of carbon in the soil with a

complete absence of endemic forest species. The water balance here is also negative. Such degraded areas in Europe and in the whole world are indeed many. And this is our great challenge.

Moreover afforestation positively affects water management by delaying runoff and augmenting absorption of water. This can also bring significant benefits in terms of flood protection and prevention of desertification. In this respect it is necessary to step-up cooperation in the realm of implementation of climate convention provisions on protection of biodiversity and prevention of desertification.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland attaches great importance to the Climate Convention, as a convention on sustainable economic development. We have presided over the 5th Conference of Parties to the Climate Convention in 1999 and we shall have the honour to host the participants of the 14th Conference in December 2008 in Poznan, to which I already cordially invite you. I hope that it will be an important step contributing to building global agreement concerning climate issues after 2012, which shall bring together the interests of developed and developing countries in the name of solidarity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The aforementioned UN conventions concerning global sustainable development, aim at providing mankind with environmental security i.e. clean air, clean water and biodiversity. It is high time for the three conventions to start to cooperate paving a clear way towards reasonable global development in a more effective manner, in line with the planned UN system reform.

When presenting this policy and intentions I wish to assure you, that Poland regards the achievement of global agreement concerning actions for sustainable global development as its top priority and shall make every effort to assure that the concept for such agreement should be arranged by the 14th conference of parties to the climate convention in Poland. This will be our response to climate change.

Thank you very much for your attention.