



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

21 July 2008

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to enclose herewith the informal summary of the meeting entitled '*Climate Change and The Most Vulnerable Countries – The Imperative to Act*', which was held on 8 July 2008.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Member States, the Deputy-Secretary-General and other UN officials for their support and active participation. I was impressed by the presentations and the contributions to the debate which confirmed the collective urgency to address the special needs of the most vulnerable countries..

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Srgjan Kerim', written in a cursive style.

Srgjan Kerim

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations

New York

**President's Summary of the Informal Meeting  
of the United Nations General Assembly**

**“Climate Change and the Most Vulnerable Countries - the Imperative to Act”  
New York, 8 July 2008**

**Opening Session**

1. The **President of the General Assembly** underscored that climate change is inherently a sustainable development issue that poses an overwhelming burden on those countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS). He stressed that not enough is being undertaken to assist the most vulnerable countries in building their capacity to adapt. The President emphasized the costs of addressing climate change citing Nicolas Stern who recently doubled his initial cost estimates for stabilizing concentrations of greenhouse gases to 2 per cent of global GDP. Without action, the annual economic losses from extreme weather events and natural disasters could be up to USD 1 trillion by 2040. Therefore, existing agreements to curb emissions need to be implemented to avoid future impacts of climate change that will exceed the world's ability to adapt. The President also called for the creation of effective mechanisms to allow technology transfer to developing countries, as well as for sufficient financial resources for the most vulnerable countries delivered through an effective climate funding architecture. He expressed his hope for the adoption of a General Assembly resolution on climate change to send a strong political message in support of a comprehensive global framework in 2009.

2. The **Deputy Secretary-General** underscored the immediate and severe burden placed on the poor by climate change. She noted that 1 in 19 people in developing countries will likely feel the impact of global warming, compared to only 1 in 1,500 in the 30 industrialized and market-economy countries that make up the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). She pointed out that those most vulnerable face higher risks associated with floods, adverse health impacts and lack of access to clean water caused by climate change. She highlighted that these impacts taken together amount to a development crisis. Unless action is taken today, the international community could fail to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015, and to reverse some of the development gains made towards achieving the Goals.

3. In his special video-message to the meeting, **H.E. Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives**, highlighted that SIDS and other vulnerable countries are at the frontline in facing the impacts of climate change. He emphasized the extreme vulnerability of small island States, low-lying coastal areas and other threatened communities to sea level rise, salination and the loss of arable land, extreme weather events and the resulting forced migration away from ancestral land. He further underlined the fact that vulnerable developing countries contribute least, yet stand to suffer the most

from climate change impacts. In addition they had limited domestic and foreign policy tools to mitigate effects and a lack of capacity to protect themselves through adaptation programmes. He highlighted the concept of climate justice noting developed countries bear the responsibility for climate change and that it is their duty to protect and assist. He indicated that this is equal to a call for adopting a rights-based approach to global warming and this could be considered by the United Nations as a new universal right – the right to live in a safe, secure and sustainable environment.

4. In his keynote address, **Mr. Ogulande Davidson**, Co-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group III, emphasized that climate change for vulnerable countries is more of a developmental and poverty reduction problem than it is an environmental problem. He highlighted that most vulnerable countries only emit less than 5 per cent of greenhouse gases but will suffer the most from climate change impacts. He underscored that despite the sharp increase in GHG emissions between 1970 and 2004 of 70 per cent, a mitigation potential exists including measures such as major investment in mitigation and adaptation technologies, technology development and transfer, tax breaks, policies that go beyond climate change such as those on trade, energy access and security, and setting an effective carbon price. On adaptation options, he emphasized a three-pronged approach, including simultaneously building adaptation capacity, undertaking adaptation actions such as awareness raising and early warning systems, and exploiting synergies with other issues such as biodiversity, forests, desertification, land degradation and disaster management. In concluding, he stressed that significant financial and technical assistance was needed by vulnerable countries and that at the same time a reduction of 80 per cent of global GHG emissions is required by 2050 to avoid major impacts on vulnerable countries.

#### **Panel**

5. The panel, moderated by **Mr. Eugene Linden**, author and journalist, comprised the following speakers: **Mr. Reid Basher**, Senior Coordinator, Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR); **Mr. Ian Noble**, Senior Climate Change Specialist, World Bank, and **Ms. Veerle Vandeweerd**, Director, Environment and Energy Group, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

6. The speakers presented different aspects of the work within the United Nations system on climate change and in particular on climate change adaptation, including through international financial institutions, disaster risk reduction and a broader development perspective.<sup>1</sup>

7. It was underlined that climate change leads to an increase in disasters. Therefore, disaster risk reduction was a core climate policy to protect the vulnerable, and in particular adaptation policies need to encompass disaster risk reduction. Disasters affected 2.5 billion people in the last decade, with the main hazards being floods, storms and droughts, all of which were climate-related. The poorest countries were 5 times more affected by disasters. The need for an IPCC assessment on tools for the management of

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<sup>1</sup> All presentations can be found at <http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/ThematicDebates/ccact.shtml>

extreme events was stressed, as well as the need to link the adaptation and disaster risk reduction agendas.

8. The costs for adaptation have been estimated in recent studies to amount to a range between USD 30 and 70 billion annually. Among the existing financial instruments for adaptation discussed, the pioneering work of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was highlighted. At the same time the need for new funding instruments for adaptation was strongly emphasized, including a levy on the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), a global GDP levy, a global carbon tax, the auctioning of allowances or levies on airfares, bunker fuels, etc. The Adaptation Fund under the UNFCCC was discussed as critical for how adaptation will be handled in the future because it is designed to fund "concrete adaptation activities". Climate investment funds were also discussed as a funding instrument, including the recently approved Clean Technology Fund that targets USD 4-5 billion for low carbon technologies and the Strategic Climate Fund, both of the World Bank.

9. It was noted that adaptation is central for effective development assistance as it has the potential to make poverty reduction and disaster prevention policies and programmes more successful. The impacts of climate change will lead to greater absolute poverty if no action is taken on international commitments and climate-proofing official development assistance. In this context, the need for national action was also highlighted, including the mainstreaming of adaptation, enhancing climate resilience and securing new and additional financing. Regarding international financing, the difference between mitigation and adaptation financing was highlighted. Whereas financial resources for mitigation are expected to come mainly from the private sector, adaptation financing is dependent on public resources and international support. Private sources of funding can only cover a portion of the adaptation costs, e.g. in the infrastructure sector.

10. The panelists agreed that a successful outcome of the Copenhagen climate conference in 2009 was the most important issue for adaptation in the near future. Given a successful outcome, one panelist highlighted that it was most important to continue to act on adaptation, to try innovative approaches and to learn from each other, even while proponents of certain approaches may continue to differ on the way to achieve effective adaptation.

## **Discussion**

11. During the ensuing interactive dialogue with member states and special guests, the following issues were raised:

12. Some delegations highlighted the centrality of the principle of common but differentiated responsibility as a tenet of the debate at the UNFCCC. This and the other principles of the UNFCCC should guide mitigation and adaptation, including calls to mainstream adaptation into national development strategies as well as plans and calls for South-South cooperation. These points were welcomed by delegations as long as they did

not constitute a new conditionality or distract from existing commitments by donor countries.

13. Some delegations welcomed the proposal by the President of Maldives on climate justice and a rights-based approach to ensure action to address climate change is equitable.

14. One delegation highlighted the agreements achieved at the Group of Eight (G8) summit in Japan, including the long-term GHG emissions reduction goal of 50 per cent by 2050, on mid-terms goals that are ambitious and economy-wide, on the importance of developing countries, LDCs and SIDS, and enhanced cooperation with them, including on disaster risk reduction and mainstreaming climate change into national development plans.

15. Another delegation highlighted the importance of a successful conclusion of the Copenhagen conference in 2009 with a global, binding agreement and commitments by all countries in accordance with the principles of the UNFCCC. In addition it mentioned the recently launched EU-Africa partnership which includes chapters on climate change, management of natural resources, forests and rapid response to disasters. The proposed Global Alliance to Combat Climate Change that would include a dialogue on adaptation, strengthening the participation in the CDM and natural disaster management was also highlighted.

16. One special guest highlighted the link between population movements and climate change and also underscored the differentiated impact climate change has on woman and men. Woman and girls are the most vulnerable in the face of climate change impacts. Furthermore, it was noted that the link between human rights and climate change needs to be further explored.

17. One delegation highlighted the differences between the financing for mitigation and financing for adaptation. Large parts of financing for adaptation will not be market based and can act as a measure of the commitment of the international community to vulnerable countries.

18. Another delegation explained and sought support for a draft resolution titled “the threat of climate change to international peace and security” to be adopted during the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the General Assembly.

19. Another delegation proposed that a list of highly vulnerable countries, including those with mega-deltas be developed.

20. Panelists responded to questions from delegations on ownership in adaptation, South-South cooperation, climate change negotiation preparedness of vulnerable countries and environmental refugees. On ownership one panelist highlighted the great motivation that many countries already had shown, e.g. within the “Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-

2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities in disasters” as a vehicle that contributes to adaptation.

21. On South-South cooperation one panelist underscored the fundamental nature of the issue not only between developing countries, but also within them. It was noted that South-South cooperation is also an issue of ownership. One panelist argued that active participation in negotiations cannot be left to negotiators alone. Climate change needs to be internalized into the whole system of government, including training provided in ministries beyond environment such as trade, finance and water. Mainstreaming also means that every sector of society integrates climate change adaptation, because climate change negotiations also determine the development agenda.

23. On environmental refugees, one panelist echoed the growing concern that the disaster reduction community is not up to speed with climate change, because sub-regional climate predictions are not precise enough. However, another panelist cautioned against putting too much importance on climate change and risk reduction.

#### **Closing remarks**

24. The closing remarks were given by **Mr. Cheik Sidi Diarra**, United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Africa and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

25. The Under-Secretary-General underlined that there is a momentum to tackle climate change head-on and that the international community has already identified what needs to be done. He stressed that integrating adaptation into planning processes is a necessary strategy for sustainable development over the long-term. Many LDCs and SIDS face difficulties for this integration due to various factors, including poor monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, limited awareness amongst stakeholders and the local population. He furthermore emphasized the importance of incorporating risk management and risk reduction into adaptation planning at all levels. South-South and North-South cooperation are effective tools to promote the implementation of adaptation measures. In conclusion, the vital importance of increased resources to vulnerable countries was underscored together with greater awareness of existing international mechanisms in support of the most vulnerable countries.