

Responding to Climate Change

Climate change is the defining global challenge of the 21st Century. That is why addressing climate change is a priority for the 62nd session.

The President of the General Assembly considers climate change as the flagship issue of the 62nd session. He is working with Member States to consider how the United Nations system as a whole can tackle the climate change challenge.

Therefore the President of the General Assembly has convened a thematic debate entitled "Addressing Climate Change: The United Nations and the World at Work" on 11 and 12 February 2008 to give various stakeholders and member states an opportunity to discuss partnerships and efforts by the United Nations system to tackle climate change. A follow-up meeting focusing on investment and climate change will take place on 9 June 2008.

Based on the suggestion of the President of the General Assembly, "Responding to Climate Change" was the theme of this year's General Debate which brought together many heads of state and government and ministers in late September 2007. Almost all speakers took up this theme and expressed their views on climate change. There was a strong sense of urgency and commitment to achieve results. On the eve of the general debate a high-level event on climate change was convened by the Secretary General.

The general debate and the high-level event brought a lot of momentum for the upcoming climate negotiations on a post-2012 regime under the umbrella of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol. In early December the General Assembly adopted a resolution "Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind" which contained some messages for the UN climate conference in Bali. The President of the General Assembly also sent a letter to the delegations present in Bali.

The aim during the remaining session will be to support the climate negotiations and to consider which role the UN system can play in addressing climate change. On 11 and 12 February 2008 the President of the General Assembly has therefore convened a thematic debate "Addressing Climate Change: The United Nations and the World at Work".



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

10 December 2007

Excellencies,

Climate change is the flagship issue of the 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly. At the General Debate in September 2007 delegations have emphasized that the Assembly should make its full contribution to address this unprecedented global threat.

The Assembly recently adopted two important resolutions on climate change. The first contains a political commitment of support for success in Bali. The second calls on the Secretary-General to provide an overview of the United Nations work on climate change. This work is part of the General Assembly's broader mandate to set the strategic policy framework for the United Nations system.

It is my firm belief that we need to build a global partnership to effectively respond to climate change. It is only by acting together that we can overcome this enormous challenge.

Therefore, I intend to convene a High-level thematic debate at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 11 and 12 February 2008. The objective is to consider how the United Nations system in partnership with Member States, the private sector, civil society, parliaments and the media can most effectively tackle climate change. We have to create synergies in order to support the process of negotiations within the UNFCCC.

In Bali you have the opportunity to make concrete progress on how to decisively address the defining issue of our generation. I am confident that you can achieve this. You can be assured that the General Assembly offers its full support to this process.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurances of my sincerest appreciation.

Srgjan Kerim

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Srgjan Kerim', written over the printed name.

To the Conference of the Parties
to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
in Bali

24 September 2007

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
on “The Future in Our Hands: Addressing the Leadership Challenge
of Climate Change”**

Mr. Secretary General,
Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,

As the Secretary General stressed in his opening statement in this very Assembly, over 20 years ago, world leaders told us that climate change was real; that we had to make changes and sacrifices - that we could no longer live at the expense of the planet and future generations.

Since then, we have to ask: have we done enough to tackle climate change? Obviously not! And that is why we have gathered here again today.

The science is clear; it is unequivocal. We know how the impact of global warming will change all of our lives if we do not act decisively. Recent events in Africa serve as a stark reminder.

I therefore commend the Secretary General for convening this unprecedented High-level meeting.

Excellencies,

With the political will we can overcome the threat of climate change, and doing so exercise visionary leadership on the world stage.

Beyond the serious consequences, there is an ethical dimension to climate change. Beyond the impact on ecosystems, economics and communities everywhere, we have a moral obligation to our fellow human beings.

To tackle this challenge the United Nations, and the General Assembly, should play a central role. That is why, I chose “Responding to Climate Change” as the theme for the General Debate.

We must build on the outcome of the General Assembly’s first thematic debate on climate change in August, today’s event and the coming General Debate. These discussions can serve as a guide for the negotiations in Bali, but also for other remedies.

Because, and according to the IPCC, to be sustainable our broader adaptive strategies should take into account the full environmental, economic and social affects of climate change.

There is a common understanding that the solutions must be global: that each nation, each city, each town and community have a stake. Your participation today, and in the general debate confirms this.

And because climate change and our response will affect every aspect of human activity and our environment the United Nations is the appropriate global forum to take action to address it.

Indeed, there has been no shortage of action. There are many initiatives this organization has taken since the Framework Convention on Climate Change came into force. But by themselves these alone are not enough in the absence of a binding global agreement.

What we need now is a stocktake; a clear vision of the way forward; and, a strategy to get us there together.

That is why I would like to propose creating a comprehensive roadmap to guide the way forward for the UN system and its Member States: to outline the instruments we have and structures necessary to address climate change.

This process should also draw in the expertise of civil society, business and the academy – to create a global movement, a true global consensus for action.

Therefore, at the beginning of the New Year, I intend to convene a thematic debate, to begin to forge this consensus; and drawing on this broader expertise elaborate the steps the UN family should take to enhance its contribution and coherence. The General Assembly could then consider the full range of policy implications.

We all agree that climate change is unquestionably the biggest challenge facing humanity in the 21st century.

There is no more time to waste. The momentum we have now must not be lost.

Thank you.

12 December 2007

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Side Event on 'Climate Change and Children'**

Excellencies,
Ladies, gentlemen and children,

I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Greece, Ambassador John Mourikis, and Hilde Johnson the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF for inviting me to address this meeting.

I would also like to commend Greece for making 'climate change and human security' the principle theme during their Chairmanship of the Human Security Network.

Excellencies,

Whatever kind of action is taken, climate change it is going to have a profound affect on many aspects of all of our lives.

It will pose a direct challenge to our capacity to provide a wide range of universally recognized rights, such as the right to live in peace, with the security from hunger, adequate housing, health, and water.

Climate change is going to become an issue of social justice and human security.

When we talk about addressing climate change through the abstract concepts like mitigation and adaptation, we should never forget the human dimension.

While climate change will affect everyone, it will affect the poorest and the most insecure groups the most.

Children are among the most vulnerable in all countries and societies. They are likely to suffer the most from climate change.

We all have a common responsibility for their security.

I am very encouraged that UNICEF has recognized these issues and is committed to taking action in coordination with other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

It is high time that we begin to make the world more climate proof, especially to protect our children.

We therefore need to think practically about what can be done to alleviate the suffering that climate change could reap for millions of people: from increased hunger, malnutrition, water shortages, floods, droughts, and diseases, which could be triggered by extreme weather, loss of livelihoods, and displacement.

The brochure UNICEF will present today not only analyses the situation of children in relation to climate change, it offers concrete solutions.

For example, because children are more likely to be victims during natural disasters we have to be better prepared and reduce risks through better contingency planning.

This has implications for future disbursements from the Central Emergency Response Fund and national disaster management policies.

We also know that – due to climate change - disease is spreading as weather patterns alter and temperature shifts. So we have to do more to halt the transmission of diseases through education and preventative treatment.

We know that climate change is expected to exacerbate the quantity and quality of water supplies - without action by 2020 between 75 and 250 million people in Africa alone will face increased water shortages - so we have to manage this valuable commodity more carefully, more efficiently.

There are other practical ways of making an impact to raise the profile of these issues.

One of the most visible has been UNICEF’s “Billion Tree Campaign” that has been made possible through the participation of children in youth and education programmes throughout the world.

It is of utmost importance that the promotion of different approaches towards climate change be a collaborative effort bringing together Member States, international organizations, the UN family, businesses and non-governmental organization.

Only by acting together can we achieve meaningful results.

These themes will be at the forefront of the General Assembly’s High-level debate entitled ‘Addressing Climate Change: the United Nations and the World at Work’, on 11 and 12 of February 2008.

Again in early April, the Assembly will consider these themes as part of a High-level debate on how to accelerate progress to achieve the Millennium Development Goal by 2015.

These and other forthcoming events on human trafficking and human security are further opportunities for us to consider how to make the 'world fit for children'.

Excellencies,

I am very heartened that children have a voice in this event.

It is essential that we listen and let their message resonate.

Children have an amazing imagination and appreciation for humanity. Sometimes they are able to see more clearly than us grown-ups what the future holds. So let us pay attention to their concerns.

As I mentioned yesterday at the opening of the commemorative event on children, I was a delegate at the Special Session on children in 2002.

When I returned this year as President of the General Assembly, I began the session with a video-message made by children from my country; because, there is nothing more important than the future of our children and young people.

They are the next generation of leaders.

Thank you very much for your attention.

May I wish you all a very productive meeting.