

24 June 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,  
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Annual Meeting 2008 of the Global Humanitarian Forum “The  
Human Face of Climate Change”**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,

Let me first thank former Secretary-General Kofi Annan for bringing so many leaders and experts together at the first Annual Meeting of the Global Humanitarian Forum.

I was very touched by the statements just made by the climate witnesses. Their reports are a stark illustration of how the impact of global warming will change all of our lives if we do not act decisively.

Climate change is anything but abstract: it is people who are suffering increased floods and droughts, it is people who have to face re-emerging diseases linked with climate change, it is still people, and often the most vulnerable of them, who may have to leave their village or their countries when climate damages become too intense to cope with. The topic of climate refugees is no longer a concept: it is a sad fact.

Climate change affects nearly every aspect of human activity. Its implications range from the environment, health, security, and migration, to energy, good governance and economic development, as is also reflected in the program of the Global Humanitarian Forum.

Each nation, each city, each town, each community and individual has a stake. It is clear therefore that the solutions must be global and that we need to forge a global alliance for action.

The United Nations has a crucial role. It is best placed to provide an integrated response to the complementary challenges of addressing climate change and sustainable development. And I commend the leadership of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in this regard.

Distinguished guests,

Climate change has become the flagship issue of the 62nd session of the General Assembly. World leaders spoke passionately about the urgent need to address climate change in the General Debate last September and sent a strong political message that gave the necessary impetus to ensure agreement in Bali.

In February of this year I convened a high-level debate of Member States to discuss with different stakeholders how to forge partnerships in order to rise to the challenge of climate change. All participants agreed that without an effective global partnership we will not be able to overcome the scale of the challenge that climate change presents to our way of life.

Mayor Bloomberg of New York spoke of the leadership role for cities. Let us not forget: over half of the world's population lives in urban areas!

Sir Richard Branson spoke about the role of private business and advanced his idea to create a “war room” to fight global warming. Indeed, we need the private sector to foster innovation, develop and transfer new technologies, leverage green investment and change our economic future.

The President of the European Parliament, Hans Poettering, addressed the responsibility of national parliaments to adopt legislation and hold governments accountable on behalf of citizens. And non-governmental organizations spoke of their role to galvanise public support. The media need to raise awareness and bring the human faces of climate change into all our living rooms.

Distinguished guests,

We all know that addressing the threats posed by climate change will be tremendously expensive. The numbers we are talking about are immense: in 2030, it is estimated that additional global investment and financial flows of over 200 billion USD would be necessary just to return emissions to current levels.

Lord Stern made clear in his report that, unless major investments were made to address the issue, worldwide economic losses would correspond to a 5-10% loss in global GDP. In fact, poorer countries would suffer losses in excess of 10% of their GDP.

According to recent estimates global annual economic losses resulting from extreme weather events and natural disasters will be up to 1 trillion USD by 2040. These numbers are not merely statistic data. They are simply frightening!

The UNFCCC estimates that up to 86% of all financial flows needed to respond to climate change will not come from public sources, but from private investors.

Therefore in early June, I initiated a debate of Member States with representatives from financial institutions – pension funds, investment banks, hedge funds, insurance companies, representing trillions of dollars of assets, on the role that private investments could play as part of the solution.

Panelists made quite clear that the global climate regime will need to provide stability and long-term planning security and regulation if it is to successfully provoke the needed private investments to address climate change. Governments need to provide stable and smart regulatory regimes.

In early July, I will convene a meeting to discuss the impact and concerns of the most vulnerable countries, such as small island states and least developed countries.

Our response must also be seen in the context of our broader international development agenda. The links with ongoing United Nations initiatives on Financing for Development, achieving the Millennium Development Goals, improving international environmental governance and most recently in addressing the global food crisis are clear.

We need to reconcile the economic aspirations of developing countries, in particular the poor, with the necessity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The challenge is to find policies, instruments and technologies that can create low-carbon economies which promote sustainable economic growth and provide incentives for individuals to change behaviour.

In all of this it is the human face that we should consider when making policy decisions. And we all need to take greater individual responsibility for our actions if we are to secure the planet for future generations to enjoy.

The United Nations is ready. I hope you are also ready. We need you as our partners!

I thank you.