

8 July 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,  
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Thematic Debate on Climate Change and the Most Vulnerable  
Countries**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Eleven of the past twelve years rank among the twelve warmest years since global temperature records began in 1850.

The most recent IPCC assessment suggests that, without action, by 2100 sea levels could rise by as much as 0.6 of a metre, and temperatures by as much as 4 degrees centigrade.

When I attended the First Annual Meeting of the Global Humanitarian Forum, hosted by Kofi Annan in Geneva recently, I was very struck by the statements made by climate witnesses from around the world. Their testimonies were a stark illustration of how global warming is already affecting many people's lives.

At the United Nations delegations from the Caribbean have already expressed concern over the increasing frequency of tropical storms that are disrupting agricultural productivity and tourism.

In Bangladesh, the government is seeking international support to scale-up investment in flood protection as the monsoons become more severe. And, we are all aware of the impact of cyclone Nargis on the people of Myanmar.

The low-lying states of Micronesia have called for coral reefs to be considered as eligible carbon sinks under the Clean Development Mechanism so that they have financial incentives to maintain their vulnerable coastlines from inundation.

Nigeria recently pointed out that one third of the African continent is threatened by land degradation as a result of desertification and declining fertility.

To curb dangerous greenhouse gas emissions to acceptable levels the general consensus is that they must be cut by over 50 per cent by 2050 to have a good chance of keeping temperature rises to about 2C. Achieving this will require economic change of unprecedented proportions.

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

There are two points I would like to emphasize today. First, climate change is inherently a sustainable development challenge. And second, we must focus much more on enabling poor countries to prepare for the impacts than we have done so far.

As Anwarul Chowdhury, former High Representative for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), said in June 2007:

“The UN debate on climate change will lose credibility if the concerns of [the most vulnerable] countries are sidelined or marginalized,”

Developing countries are generally considered to be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than more developed countries.

Many countries in Africa, the Asian mega-deltas and small Island states are judged to be most vulnerable to climate variability and change.

High levels of vulnerability and low adaptive capacity are linked to factors such as a high reliance on natural resources, limited ability to adapt financially and institutionally, low GDP per capita, high poverty rates and lack of social and economic safety nets.

Without question, there is now a substantial and growing body of evidence on climate change and its consequences.

- The UN has warned that by 2010 the international community should prepare for 50 million environmental migrants - some predict up to 200 million by 2050.

- By 2020, in some countries, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 per cent.

- Rising sea levels are expected to exacerbate storm surges and erosion threatening vital infrastructure, settlements and facilities that support the livelihood of island communities.

- For some countries however, rising seas levels may yet pose an existential question for their nationhood.

These are deeply, deeply alarming concerns that we need to think about in human terms. What will we do when people start fighting, not over ideas or national identities, but over water?

What will we do when people start fleeing their countries, not because of political persecution, but because of environmental catastrophe?

If we want to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we need to recognise that climate change and development aid are all part of the same basic challenge: achieving sustainable development.

Excellencies,

We all know that addressing the threats posed by climate change will be tremendously expensive.

Lord Stern recently doubled his assessment of the costs of stabilizing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to 2 per cent of global GDP.

However, even at these levels (500ppm) there would still be a 50 per cent chance that the global climate will warm more than 2 degrees centigrade.

Failure to stem and reduce emissions could cost much more though – at least 5 per cent and perhaps as much as 20 per cent of global GDP.

But without action, just the annual economic losses 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!

Collectively the international community must move towards a post-2012 framework based on the understanding in the United Nations Climate Change Convention – that we share common, but differentiated responsibilities.

However, first of all, we all need to implement existing agreements curbing greenhouse gases. The longer we delay mitigation, the more likely it is that global climate change will exceed our ability to adapt.

On adaptation there is so much to do, even before an agreement is reached in Copenhagen.

I would therefore like to add my voice to that of the Secretary-General in support of a generously financed, fully operational Adaptation Fund by the end of this year. In this context, I would also like to commend the leaders of the G-8, who in support of the most vulnerable countries have committed to support urgent action to mainstream adaptation into national development strategies.

Yet these funds alone will not be sufficient. The UNFCCC estimates that up to 86 per cent of all financial flows needed to respond to climate change will come from private investors.

Our recent dialogue on climate change with the financial sector, on June 9th, emphasized the important role that the private sector will play in developing and financing climate solutions. However, beyond State and private sector action, as responsible global citizens we can all begin by making simple changes in the way we affect the environment; by consuming less, increasing

our energy efficiency, recycling more, off-setting our carbon emissions and pursuing more sustainable lifestyles.

Excellencies,

As a result of our discussions on climate change throughout the 62nd session of the General Assembly, I believe it is not just more urgent than ever before, but also, more possible than before to build a global consensus for tackling climate change.

To achieve this we need to build on our previous work and strengthen the ability of the UN system to assist vulnerable countries build their capacity and capability to adapt, while ensuring that the system works together more coherently to deliver more than the sum of its parts.

We have to create mechanisms to allow technology to be transferred to developing countries that otherwise could not afford them.

We have to make sure there are sufficient financial resources channelled through an effective climate funding architecture to benefit the neediest.

We have the technological capability and scientific know-how, however, a global consensus can only be secured if all countries can share in the benefits from action to address it – in particular the most vulnerable countries.

Early warning systems must be improved so that when disasters strike more people have a chance to make it to safety.

In this regard, during my recent official visit to Italy I was informed that climate change sensors had been established on Mount Everest and in Chile.

I would like to commend the Government of Italy for this important contribution and encourage others to follow their example.

As an Assembly there is more we can do to recognize the needs of the most vulnerable.

Reflecting their legitimate concerns, the Pacific Small Island Developing States have proposed a draft resolution entitled “The threat of climate change to international peace and security”, which would send an important signal to the world that we have to get serious about the security threats posed by climate change too.

Finally, as a result of our comprehensive discussions on climate change this session - whether as part of the General Debate, or exploring policies to strengthen global partnerships, or developing a strategic dialogue with the global investment community, or, to improve UN coherence, and provide a voice to those that will be most affected by global warming - it is my hope that this Assembly will adopt a resolution taking a principled stand, demonstrating its relevance and

sending a strong political message in support of agreeing a comprehensive global framework in 2009.

Climate change is not a concern for the distant future but something that people around the world are witnessing here and now. What is necessary to overcome this enormous challenge is courageous long-term political leadership which transcends short-term economic interests and the day-to-day tussles of politics.

I thank you.