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THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly, at the Opening Ceremony of the High-level Segment of COP18 / CMP8

Your Highnesses,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Madam Executive Secretary,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by thanking our Qatari hosts for their most generous hospitality, and for the kind invitation for me to participate in the High-level segment of the Opening Ceremony of COP18, in my capacity as President of the UN General Assembly.

It is my great honor to address you this afternoon.

The political and legal origins of the UN Framework Convention, and the process of holding Conferences of the Parties to assess progress in dealing with climate change, are both rooted in actions undertaken by the General Assembly more than two decades ago.

Since that time, your dedication and hard work has resulted in a number of milestone achievements, including the Kyoto Protocol, the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, and the establishment of the Green Climate Fund.

While of critical importance to the future of our planet, grasping the complexity of many of the items on your agenda requires a level of expertise that most of us not directly involved in the COP negotiations simply do not possess.

Speaking as a former Foreign Minister, I can attest to this from personal experience. The grand challenges before the COP process have yet to capture the full imagination of a critical mass of diplomats from around the world.

Addressing the problem of climate change must become a core national interest of every UN Member State. It should become embedded in the worldview of all who formulate and execute foreign policy, so it can assume its rightful place at the heart of the conduct of international relations in the 21st century.

I personally believe that we're dealing here with a threat to the future of our planet that is rivaled in its cataclysmic effects only by thermonuclear conflict.

Before proceeding with the remainder of my remarks, allow me to pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's persistence in drawing the world's attention to this grave danger to humanity. I applaud his leadership in delivering the message that climate change and environmental degradation are destroying our path to sustainability.

Excellencies,

I believe that increased support by the General Assembly for the great efforts of the Delegations to successive COP can help spur the world to more rapid and concerted action.

I am ready to do my best to engage the General Assembly so we can act more in concert with one another.

To that end, I intend to schedule a high-level thematic debate on the subject of climate change, green energy and water sustainability during the resumed part of the 67th Session. It will aim to increase political awareness and support for the benefits of embracing the paradigm shift to renewable, low-carbon energy systems.

I believe this may help sharpen the lens through which diplomats look at the underlying challenges.

I hope that the "new normal" that the Secretary-General and others talk about can become associated first and foremost with sustainable development and return to prosperity not financial sacrifice and privation.

One of the strongest supporters of such an approach is the newly established United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network spearheaded by the Director of its Secretariat, Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University. It was put in place to overcome the compartmentalization of technical and policy work on climate change, in order to promote more integrated approaches to the economic and environmental challenges confronting the world.

I am very grateful that the Network has agreed to closely work with us in pursuing this endeavor.

Excellencies,

In coming to the end of my remarks, I would like to wish the Parties to the Convention success in their negotiations.

The window of opportunity to prevent the effects of climate change from spiraling out of our control is closing.

When future generations look upon the choices we made, let them not be forced to exclaim that we failed to act in time.

Let them not have to suffer the consequences of the inability to answer the clarion call to act with conscientious foresight.

I'm afraid that we cannot say as those who came before us could that we did not know the extent of the damage we were causing.

That is why I believe it is our most solemn and urgent duty both as individuals and nations, now more interdependent than ever before to achieve the breakthrough that allows us to leave the world in a better shape than we found it in.

Thank you for your attention.