

Special Event
Second Committee, 64th Session of the General Assembly
“Climate Change Negotiations: Road to Copenhagen
Tuesday, 13 October 2009

[Background]

According to the IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report, global mean temperature has increased by around 0.74°C over the past century, and past emissions are estimated to involve some unavoidable further warming (about a further 0.6°C by the end of the century relative to 1980-1999), even if atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations were to remain at 2000 levels. If greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise at their current pace and atmospheric concentrations are allowed to double from their pre-industrial level, the world faces an average temperature rise of between 1.8 and 4.0 degrees Celsius this century.

Global average sea level rose at a rate of 1.8 mm per year from 1961 to 2003 and at a rate of about 3.1 mm per year from 1993 to 2003. In the past decade and a half, thermal expansion of the oceans has contributed about 57% of the total sea-level rise, with decreases in glaciers and ice caps contributing about 28% and losses from the polar ice sheets contributing the remainder.

Climate change impacts on human well-being can work through several pathways, including impacts on: food production and food security, e.g., linked to water scarcity, land degradation, and desertification; health and the incidence of various vector-borne diseases; the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, including flooding, drought and tropical storms; and sea-level rise. The last two types of impact have particularly severe consequences for human settlements and population displacement. The more dependent are people on climate-sensitive forms of natural capital, the more at risk are they from climate change.

How severe these impacts will be on human well-being will depend in the first instance on the actions of the international community to control greenhouse gas emissions and slow climate change. It is for this reason that the world needs a climate change deal in Copenhagen that is science-based, comprehensive, balanced and equitable and fair for the future of human beings. There are less than sixty days from this Special Event until the Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meets in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Success in Copenhagen can strengthen climate-resilient development and assist the world’s poorest and most vulnerable to adapt to the inevitable impacts of climate change. Failure risks increasing poverty, as the poor are already the most vulnerable to climate change, and reversing development achievements, including progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

[Objective]

Bearing all this in mind, the question now is *How*: *how* to reconcile differences and ensure an ambitious outcome in Copenhagen, and *how* to ensure that the international community and nation-states act sufficiently quickly and decisively to avert the worst impacts of climate change. This “how” will be the focus of discussion at the Special Event. The panelists will provide different points of view in order to stimulate a debate on the best way forward to address the climate change challenge.

[Proposed questions to consider]

1. How can it be ensured that the international community and nation-states act sufficiently quickly and decisively to avert the worst impacts of climate change?
2. How can the gap be bridged between what the science tells us is needed by way of emission cuts to stabilize atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations at “safe” levels and what governments are willing to commit to by way of national emission targets?
3. How can differences be reconciled over mitigation effort of different Parties as well as over technology and financing in time to ensure an ambitious outcome in Copenhagen?
4. Are there areas of emerging consensus where negotiators might be able to make quick progress in forging cooperation and building trust among Parties?
5. What criteria would define success in Copenhagen?