

New York

14 December 2015

Secretary-General's remarks at press encounter [scroll down for Q&A]

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO MEDIA

New York, 14 December 2015

Good morning everyone, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to see you. What a great two weeks in Paris. Now I understand why people say "We will always have Paris."

Yesterday, I returned from Paris, where Governments reached a landmark new climate change further agreement which can benefit all of humanity for generations to come.

The countries of the world have made a historic choice.

They have unanimously decided to work as one to rise to the defining challenge of our times.

The Paris Agreement is a victory for people, for the common good, and for multilateralism.

It is a health insurance policy for the planet.

It is the most significant action in years to uphold our Charter mandate to "save succeeding generations".

For the first time, every country in the world has pledged to curb emissions, strengthen resilience and to act internationally and domestically to address climate change.

The Paris Agreement is the result of years of hard work.

It embodies a successful new approach to global cooperation on climate change.

Countries have acknowledged that the national interest is best served by acting for the common good.

The Paris Agreement sends a clear signal that the transformation of the global economy to low-emission, climate-resilient growth is inevitable, beneficial and already under way.

It marks a decisive turning point in the global quest for a safer, more sustainable and prosperous future.

The Agreement will help us achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

It will save lives, improve human well-being and promote more peaceful, stable societies.

Reaching this agreement has been one of my top priorities since the day I became Secretary-General in 2007.

For nine years, I have spoken repeatedly with nearly every world leader about how the growing human imprint on the planet threatens our lives, our economies, our security and our survival. I have

visited virtually all the places, the frontlines of climate change, where I could see for myself the impact of climate change. I sent alarm bells consistently and repeatedly to world leaders.

I have mobilized also business and engaged civil society.

I have never lost faith that the international community could rise to the climate challenge.

Now I count on Governments, and all sectors of our society, to turn these commitments into urgent and decisive action.

I thank you very much.

Q: Thank you, Secretary-General. You've got 195 countries and the EU to agree to this. Does this represent a certain goodwill to the UN and will it extend to other things? People have asked if this is a legacy issue. And also, have you heard from industry on how they're going to convert to all of these clean-energy methods? Thank you.

SG: I was extremely encouraged and happy to see that all these 196 parties whether they even have their own domestic local challenges, they were one; they were united as one, believing that the global action, global action and global solutions, will benefit local solutions. This is what they have delivered.

This is a great success and triumph of multilateralism. I know that. I am very conscious of criticism and concerns from the international community about the effectiveness and efficiencies of multilateralism. But this time, they have shown their strong commitment for the common good of people and the planet.

Now, actions should begin from today. It has already begun. And the business communities, they have already expressed their strong commitment, as was shown during last year's climate summit meeting. Several hundred business leaders came to New York. In Paris, despite all the security concerns, all big and small business leaders came, and they reaffirmed that, and they confirmed that, low-carbon economy is the solution in addressing all the difficult economic growth issues.

And civil society, they have also shown their strong commitment. And I'm deeply grateful to all these business leaders and civil society, who have shown such a strong commitment and willingness to work with the United Nations and their own respective governments.

Q: Secretary-General, there's critics that say this agreement, it's not strong enough; it's weak. How do you address those critics? Thank you.

SG: This is ambitious -- strong. In terms of ambition, it has agreed, people have agreed to contain the global temperature rise well below 2 degrees, and we will continue to strive to beat this -- even 1.5 degrees Celsius. This is a very ambitious target at this time. And it has also very strong accountability and transparency. They have agreed to have a five-year cycle review. This will help. The parties to this Convention and Paris agreement will be monitored regularly.

Even before this agreement will become effective by 2020, they have already agreed to have such a review session in 2018. Then from thereon, five years. The first one official review session will come on [2023]. Therefore, it is quite strong and ambitious.

Q: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary-General. You said in your speech, when the agreement was adopted, basically, that now the hard work begins. What do you expect governments, industry, civil society to start doing from today, tomorrow, next week, what specific things?

SG: Over a period of several years, the world leaders, particularly government leaders, and business leaders, they have been listening from the people and from our nature that we must take action. The very fact that 150 Heads of State and Government gathered on 30 November for the opening meeting of this climate summit meeting means that the whole world is united.

As the Secretary-General, during the last nine years, this may be limited experience, but I have never seen that in one place, in one day, at one time, 150 leaders gathered like this way. Of course, the United Nations brings that many a number of leaders, but not in one day. They come over a period of seven to ten days. In that regard, the mood and excitement and solidarity, global solidarity, shown and demonstrated at that time was enormous.

I thought that with that kind of a political strength and energy, political energy shown there, I thought that we would have a good result after two weeks of very hard negotiation.

And, anyway, the business leaders have heard and they now realise that the low-carbon economy is the answer and solution, and those countries who have been expressing their concerns, particularly fossil-fuel based economies, they're now moving toward a very quick transition. This is what we're seeing – a very encouraging one. As a first step in implementing this agreement, I'll convene, as requested by the agreement and by the Convention on 22 April, next year, a signing ceremony, a high-level signing ceremony. I'll invite as soon as possible to world leaders to come to the United Nations to sign this one, because this will be the first day of a universal climate change agreement.

Then, in May, early May, we are now planning to have a big gathering of government, business and civil society action summit. That will be on 5-6 May. We are now trying to organize how this can be done.

Q: [inaudible] Does he have any response?

SG: I'm going to brief the General Assembly tomorrow at 11:00 [on climate change], so you'll be able to listen and you'll be able to know what the United Nations is going to do. Thank you very much. Thank you.