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Address to the High-Level Segment of the UN Climate Change Conference

Ban Ki-moon

This is the moral challenge of our generation. Not only are the eyes of the world upon us. More important, succeeding generations depend on us. We cannot rob our children of their future.

President Yudhoyono,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me thank the Government and people of Indonesia for hosting us, and all of you for being here.

Before I speak to the reason we all came here today – to address climate change, let me say a word about the outrageous attacks perpetrated against the UN and innocent civilians yesterday in Algiers. These cowardly attacks cannot be justified under any circumstances. The sacrifice of UN officials – who serve the highest ideals of humanity -- and innocent civilians who died alongside them, cannot and will not be forgotten. The perpetrators of these crimes cannot escape the strongest possible condemnation of the entire international community.

As we convene here in Bali the eyes of the world are upon us. This is a historic moment, long in the making. Decades of careful study by the planet's leading scientists. Years of heated argument among the world's policy makers. Countless media stories debating the linkage between observed natural disasters and global warming.

Now, finally, we are gathered together in Bali to address the defining challenge of our age. We gather because the time for equivocation is over. The science is clear. Climate change is happening. The impact is real. The time to act is now.

The latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us that, unless we act, there will be serious consequences: rising sea levels; more frequent and less predictable floods and severe droughts; famine around the world, particularly in Africa and Central Asia; and the loss of up to a third of our plant and animal species.

They emphasize that the costs of inaction – in ecological, human and financial terms – far exceed the costs of action now.

But the scientists also stress a silver lining: that we can still address the problem, in ways that are both affordable and promote prosperity. By being creative, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions while promoting economic growth.

In this sense, climate change is as much an opportunity as it is a threat. It is our chance to usher in a new age of green economics and truly sustainable development. New economies can and must grow with reduced carbon intensity even as they create new jobs and alleviate poverty.

Excellencies,

This shift toward a greener future is in its infancy and needs urgent nurturing. The multilateral agreement that will emerge from the UNFCCC negotiations needs to make the necessary changes possible. We must ensure an

incentive structure for countries, businesses, and individuals. There is no trade-off between fighting climate change and pursuing development. In the long run, we can prosper only by doing both.

Already, there is an emerging consensus on the building blocks of a climate agreement, including adaptation, mitigation, technology and financing. It must also be comprehensive and involve all nations, developed and developing. Our atmosphere can't tell the difference between emissions from an Asian factory, the exhaust from a North American SUV, or deforestation in South America or Africa. And it must be fair, reflecting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

The issue of equity is crucial. Climate change affects us all, but it does not affect us all equally. Those who are least able to cope are being hit hardest. Those who have done the least to cause the problem bear the gravest consequences.

We have an ethical obligation to right this injustice. We have a duty to protect the most vulnerable.

That is why any agreement should look to developed countries to continue taking the lead on curbing emissions. And developing nations need to be given incentives to limit the growth of their emissions. Together, we can spur a new era of green economics, an era of truly sustainable development based on clean technology and a low-emission economy.

But we must also take action on the immediate challenges. It is critical that we follow through on existing commitments and ensure the resilience of populations that are or will be the hardest hit by climate change impacts.

Distinguished Delegates,

What the world expects from Bali – from all of you – is an agreement to launch negotiations towards a comprehensive climate change agreement. You need to set an agenda – a roadmap to a more secure climate future, coupled with a tight time-line that produces a deal by 2009. The date is crucial not only to ensure continuity after 2012, when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires -- but equally, to address the desperate urgency of the situation itself.

I am encouraged by progress in the negotiation on both the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol. The implementation and enhancement of agreements on adaptation, deforestation, and technology will be important both now and in the period after 2012.

I also note with satisfaction the movements within Annex I countries toward the enactment of serious climate mitigation measures. I recognize the actions in non-Annex I countries through new national climate plans, policies and measures for sustainable development. I welcome these actions and urge that, as indicated in statements made during these negotiations, they pursue their expressed intentions to do still more.

Reaching a comprehensive climate agreement will not be easy. Having the right tools for such an agreement will help us to implement it in a cost-effective way. And the United Nations will assist you in every way possible. We stand ready to deliver on the mandates that you have already entrusted us, to support you throughout the negotiating period, and to help implement the agreements reached.

Every UN agency, fund and programme is committed. We are determined to be a part of the answer to climate change. Indeed, as the summary paper distributed to all delegations explains, the Chief Executives of the UN system have already begun to define a joint UN contribution on this issue.

As this work progresses, we will continue to provide a credible, coherent scientific foundation for understanding what is happening to our planet and how we might best address it. We will continue to expand support for global, regional and national action on climate change, drawing on the agenda you set. And we will lead by example, by moving towards carbon neutrality throughout the UN System.

Excellencies,

You have come here with a clear charge. At the High-Level Event on Climate Change in New York in September, world leaders called for a breakthrough in Bali. This is your chance to live up to what the leaders have been calling for. If we leave Bali without such a breakthrough, we will not only have failed our leaders, but also those who look to us to find solutions, namely, the peoples of this world.

This is the moral challenge of our generation. Not only are the eyes of the world upon us. More important, succeeding generations depend on us. We cannot rob our children of their future.

We are all part of the problem of global warming. Let us all be part of the solution that begins in Bali. Let us turn the climate crisis into a climate compact.

Thank you very much.