

22 September 2009

Opening remarks to the United Nations Climate Change Summit Plenary

Ban Ki-moon

Climate change is the pre-eminent geopolitical and economic issue of the 21st century. It rewrites the global equation for development, peace and prosperity.

Excellencies,

I am honoured to welcome you to this Summit – the largest-ever gathering of world leaders on climate change.

Your presence bears witness to the gravity of the climate challenge.

It is testament to the opportunity Copenhagen offers.

Your decisions will have momentous consequences.

You have the power to chart a safer, more sustainable and prosperous course for this and future generations.

The power to reduce the emissions that are causing climate change... to help the most vulnerable adapt to changes that are already under way... to catalyze a new era of global green growth.

Now is your moment to act.

Excellencies,

Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. We will soon reach critical thresholds. Consequences that we cannot reverse.

The world's leading scientists warn that we have less than ten years to avoid the worst-case scenarios projected by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC].

Indeed those worst-case scenarios are becoming ever more likely.

We must halt the rise in global emissions.

Earlier this month I was in the Arctic. I was alarmed by the rapid pace of change. The Arctic could be nearly ice-free by 2030.

The consequences will be felt by people on every continent.

Just yesterday I met with many leaders from small island states. They were forceful and eloquent how climate change is rewriting their future.

All across Africa – the most vulnerable continent – climate change threatens to roll back years of development gains.

Climate change is the pre-eminent geopolitical and economic issue of the 21st century. It rewrites the global equation for development, peace and prosperity.

It will increase pressure on water, food and land.... reverse years of development gains.... exacerbate poverty.... destabilize fragile states and topple governments.

Some say tackling climate change is too expensive. They are wrong. The opposite is true. We will pay an unacceptable price if we do not act now.

Excellencies,

The climate negotiations are proceeding too slow. The world's glaciers are now melting faster than human progress to protect them – and us.

There are now only 15 negotiating days left until Copenhagen.

Your negotiators need your direct political support and guidance to resolve core issues... to accelerate the pace of negotiations... and to strengthen the ambition of what is on offer.

Instead of demanding concessions from others, let us ask how we can contribute to the greater good. A successful deal in Copenhagen will mean more prosperity, more security, more equity. It will expand the pie for all.

We need to build trust step by step. Today, I call on all the leaders of the industrialized countries in this room to take the first steps forward. If you do so, others will take bold measures of their own.

I also call on leaders from developing countries to accelerate their efforts. All countries must do more – now.

Excellencies,

Let us be clear about the signposts for success at Copenhagen and beyond.

First, a successful deal must involve all countries working toward a common, long-term goal to limit global temperature rise to safe levels consistent with science.

It will include ambitious emission reduction targets from industrialized countries by 2020.

It will include actions by developing countries to limit the growth of their emissions while they grow sustainably. They will need substantial financial and technological support to achieve this.

It will also address all major sources of greenhouse gases, including deforestation and emissions from shipping and aviation.

Second, a successful deal must strengthen the world's ability to cope with inevitable changes. In particular, it must provide comprehensive support to the most vulnerable. They have contributed least to this crisis and are suffering first -- and worst.

Adaptation is a moral obligation. It is a political imperative. It is a smart investment in a more secure future.

It must be given equal priority in the negotiations, though not at the expense of mitigation.

Third, a deal needs to be backed by money and the means to deliver it. Without proper financing, the solutions we discuss are empty.

A deal must make available the full range of public and private resources, so developing countries can pursue low-emissions growth, as well as adapt. It must provide a framework that will unlock private investment, including through the carbon markets.

Fourth, a successful deal must include an equitable global governance structure that addresses the needs of developing countries.

Excellencies,

The true test of leadership is to take the long view. National leaders must become global leaders to meet the needs of their own people.

Copenhagen offers a new path. It can catalyze a global economy based on low-emissions growth that can strengthen sustainable development and lift billions out of poverty.

Success in Copenhagen will have positive ripple effects for global cooperation on trade, energy, security and health.

Failure to reach broad agreement in Copenhagen would be morally inexcusable, economically short-sighted and politically unwise.

We cannot go down this road. If we have learned anything from the crises of the past year, it is that our fates are intertwined.

Climate change links us more directly and dramatically than any other issue.

Now is the moment to act in common cause.

History may not offer us a better chance.

Excellencies,

I urge you to seal a deal in Copenhagen in December this year.

An equitable, scientifically robust deal that strengthens sustainable development and powers green growth for every country.

The science demands it. The world economy needs it.

The fate of future generations, and the hopes and livelihoods of billions today, rest, literally, with you.

I count on your leadership and strong commitment.

Thank you very much.