

Speech to the World Climate Conference – 3
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Your Excellency, Esteemed Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you on this warm summer day on behalf of the Secretary-General. He is, as we speak, in Norway, on his way to the bitterly cold Arctic polar ice rim, and looking forward to joining you during the High Level Segment of the Conference, and to share with you some of his first-hand observations from one of the most climate-affected regions on Earth.

The Secretary-General has called climate change the defining challenge of our generation. No issue is more essential to our survival as a species. And no issue is more fundamental to long-term security and sustainable prosperity for all nations, rich as well as poor.

When the World Meteorological Organization held its first World Climate Conference in 1979, it was essentially a scientific conference. Key institutions such as the World Climate Program, the World Climate Research Program and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were established as a follow-up to the conference.

The IPCC was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2007. The prize was a tribute to the IPCC's scientific endeavor, its remarkable teamwork and the policy relevance of its assessments. It was also a tribute to those who made the first World Climate Conference an important conference by paving the way for the establishment of the IPCC. Today, it is in your hands to make the third World Climate Conference an important milestone in the fight for peace and human security.

In a situation where climate politics has become high politics, it is extremely useful to have international scientific bodies made up of nationals from all groups of nations. This protects the independence of the research undertaken and increases the credibility of the scientific results produced.

The importance of having a scientific and rational basis for opinions and actions was imprinted in me during my studies to become a medical doctor. A doctor must base any action on sound science to be credible. The same applies to politicians. Climate politics must base itself on the results of the work of many of you who are here today.

The politics of climate change starts with you, with the science. Science, in turn, must be translated into political action. When deciding on what to do with climate change, political leaders must be guided by the best available scientific knowledge.

I had the privilege of working closely with a large number of the world's best scientists when leading the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development, which published its report "Our Common Future" in 1987. Already then scientists had reached the conclusion that man-made climate change was plausible and probable.

We now know that even if we manage to halt and reduce emissions of green house gases, the climate will continue to change and so, therefore, must we. All countries will need to adapt to a changing and more erratic climate. Droughts, floods, storms, and a rise in sea levels will increase the risk of famine, disease, and displacement, in particular in vulnerable least developed and small island developing states. It is therefore imperative that we focus on adaptation.

The basis for all adaptation is a high quality early warning mechanism. The first challenge is therefore to establish a sufficiently comprehensive and fine-masked system for collection of relevant data over time. Once that is in place, we need a sufficiently advanced system for modeling and prediction, into which the data is fed.

The result is a weather forecast. The problem is that a forecast is not enough. We already know that by 2020, up to 250 million people in Africa will face growing shortages of water due to climate change. Still, very little is done to prepare for such a development.

Our challenge is to communicate information about what to expect in a more efficient manner to those who need this information in order to make the right decisions, for their country, their business, their farm, their family, and their lives. Climate information must be fed into the process of decision-making at all levels.

Women and children are among the most vulnerable. But women are also among the most powerful agents for change. Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement is one example. Improved climate information must empower women and make them drivers of adaptation.

Many may think that we already have access to the information we need, and question the relevance of an initiative for a new framework for climate services. To do so is, to say the least, a blatant expression of ignorance or arrogance, or both.

It was heartbreaking to hear the stories from the Horn of Africa in 2006, when shepherds were not alerted ahead of a long awaited drought. Consequently, they were not able to take precautionary action and slaughter and sell off their herd before it starved to death and famine set in. It is always the poor who are left out of the information stream. This has to change. Improved communication of weather information will save lives.

When we know that disaster sooner or later will strike, we can prepare and thus reduce suffering. Bangladesh, Cuba and Vietnam are examples of countries who have invested in disaster risk reduction. Studies have shown that these kinds of investments are among the most cost-effective adaptation investments the world can make.

The Global Framework for Climate Services being considered at the third World Climate Conference this week aims to meet a crucial need. It calls for a strengthened, unified approach to collecting, analyzing and mainstreaming climate information into the broader development agenda. It is important that the Framework also acknowledges the need for increased investment in vulnerable developing countries so that they can better assess and adapt to climate impacts.

If we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals we have agreed upon, it is essential that we integrate climate science into our development plans and strengthen adaptation efforts. Adaptation is an essential investment in a safer, more prosperous future for us all.

The need for strengthened climate science has never been more apparent - or more necessary. We need to work together, harnessing the world's best minds for more informed, science-based decision making to meet this grave threat.

And as we do so, we must draw on all the strengths of the United Nations system, for climate change is far more than an environmental issue. It affects everything from the health of our economy to the health of our citizens. It is about the future of life as we know it on our planet – the only home we have.

The Secretary-General has called all the world's leaders to the United Nations next month for an important summit on climate change. We must mobilize political will at the highest level to act on what the science is telling us.

As you all know, in less than four months, the world's governments will meet in Copenhagen to seal the deal on a new climate change agreement. Any such agreement must be scientifically ambitious, fair and effective in reducing emissions.

Clear, credible scientific data is essential for informed decision-making at the global level in Copenhagen this December. It is essential for those in the business community who are creating the new green technologies that can drive low-carbon growth. And it is vital to creating a more informed public discourse on our response to climate change. The science demands we act boldly, or we may not get a second chance.

We have much work to do and little time to do it. We must join forces, bring forth the best scientific thinking, and ensure that this third World Climate Conference takes a much needed and important step in the right direction.

And so I urge you, esteemed delegates, to make your voices heard. Think soberly and act creatively. Collaborate and cooperate. The world needs your knowledge and your initiative, now more than ever. I wish you a most productive and successful conference, and look forward to your conclusions.