

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO UNFCCC COP16 HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT
Cancun, 7 December 2010

Your Excellency President Calderon,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Excellencies,
Ms. Figueres of UNFCCC,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is the Fourth time I come before you since becoming Secretary-General of the United Nations. From the heady days in Bali, to the search for progress in Poznan and unmet expectations in Copenhagen last year, this has been a long journey. And we know our journey will not end here in Mexico.

Yet, we cannot allow the ongoing nature of these complex negotiations lull us into any type of complacency.

Business as usual cannot be tolerated, for it would condemn millions – no, billions – billions of children, women, and men around the world to shrinking horizons, and smaller futures.

Cancun must represent a breakthrough. The status quo will not do. Determination must be our watchword.

A new future must begin to take shape here. There is no real option.

Here in Cancun, we must move forward.

This is a marathon race, not a sprint. Climate change was not created overnight. It will not be solved overnight either.

But if we work together, we can forge an effective, long-term response to climate change.

Every country must be a part of the solution. Every country has a role to play.

We must act as united nations, showing courage, common sense and compromise.

Excellencies,

I realize you all face political and economic constraints at home.

However, I am deeply concerned that our efforts so far have been insufficient ... that despite the evidence, and many years of negotiation, we are still not rising to the challenge.

We are here for one reason: to protect people and the planet from uncontrolled climate change.

To do that, we need to make progress – in these global negotiations

and through national actions each of you take in your countries to curb emissions and increase resilience.

The longer we delay, the more we will have to pay – economically, environmentally, and in human lives.

Since the Bali climate conference three years ago, the health of our planet has continued to decline. Global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise.

The pace of human-induced climate change is accelerating.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – the IPCC - the world's authoritative, consensus voice on climate science – has warned that global emissions need to peak within the next decade, and then decrease substantially, if we are to limit global average temperature rise to two degrees above pre-industrial levels.

To achieve this – and hopefully much more – we need results now, results that curb global greenhouse emissions, strengthen our ability to adapt, and help to create a more sustainable, prosperous future for all.

In particular, we need results that help the poor and most vulnerable.

Their plight must figure front and centre.

Excellencies,

Last year, I met a teenage boy from Bangladesh. He told me how torrential rains had inundated his village.

Rivers of mud from deforested land nearly washed away his home.

As the flood waters retreated, cholera struck.

He survived. Many did not.

This young man's story points to a larger truth.

We cannot sustain progress toward the Millennium Development Goals without progress on climate change.

We will not reduce extreme poverty without coming to grips with the increasing intensity and unpredictability of weather trends associated with climate change.

We will never assure energy security – or international security – without climate security.

Now, more than ever, we need to connect the dots between climate, poverty, energy, food and water. These issues cannot be addressed in isolation.

Excellencies,

Tangible progress is possible here in Cancun.

The world is looking to you to adopt a balanced set of outcomes.

We do not need final agreement on all issues. But we do need progress on all fronts.

We cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

You can take significant decisions here in Cancun on forests, on adaptation, on technology, and on the creation of a new fund for long-term climate financing.

You also need to make progress on mitigation, on anchoring your national commitments, on accountability and transparency, and increasing clarity on the future of the Kyoto Protocol.

Finally, Parties need to agree on how – and when – to move forward after Cancun on issues still under discussion.

The UN system has generated movement in many of these areas.

First, on protecting forests. Nearly 20 per cent of global emissions come from deforestation and land use. A decision to move forward with REDD Plus will provide tangible results for the planet, and for millions of people whose sustenance and income depend on forests.

On energy, a coalition of UN entities is working with the private sector and governments to realize the twin goals of universal energy access and significant cuts in energy intensity in the next two decades.

And on long-term finance, my High-Level Advisory Group on Climate Financing concluded that it is challenging but it is possible for developed countries to realize their goal of raising \$100 billion dollars a year by 2020 to support climate action in developing countries. I encourage Parties to use the Group's findings as inputs to your climate finance negotiations.

Excellencies,

From Bogota to Beirut, from Dhaka to Durban, the United Nations system is helping countries to reduce disaster risk and build more resilient cities.

In West Africa, we are helping to expand rural energy access through low-carbon technologies.

In Vietnam, we are supporting green trade initiatives that bring jobs and incomes.

As countries travel the low-emissions pathway, the United Nations can help to navigate the maze of funding and investment options.

We can provide skills training and technology assistance, and supply

the latest climate assessment tools and services.

The United Nations system can, in short, support you in turning promises into action.

Let us, together, take the next steps down the road toward a safer, more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

The UNFCCC process is an essential component in our overall response.

But ultimately, success will be measured by results – results in these negotiations, and results achieved through actions by each and every country to meet this challenge.

Nature will not wait while we negotiate.

Science warns that the window of opportunity to prevent uncontrolled climate change will soon close.

The time for waiting, while keeping one eye on everyone else, is over.

The world— particularly the poor and vulnerable -- cannot afford the luxury of waiting for the perfect agreement.

I repeat: We cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Action now, and agreement and movement on as many issues as possible, must be our aim, here, in Cancun.

Every country can – and must – do more.

It is up to this generation to forge a new path to low-carbon prosperity.

From the family cook stove to the factory floor, from classrooms to corporate boardrooms, and here in the negotiating halls of Cancun, together, we can create a clean energy future.

This will require our greatest efforts.

But the stakes are worth it.

The stability of the global economy, the well-being of your citizens, the health of our planet, all this and more depend on you. I count on your leadership, your sense of flexibility and your sense of compromise to make this world better for all. Thank you.