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**Keynote speech by Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

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Vijay Modi, Peter Schlosser, and Prof. Sachs,  
Ashok Khosla,  
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Members of the International Sustainable Development Research Society,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

When humankind discovered fire, we had discovered *the* energy source that would lift us onto an altogether new level of development. When humankind discovered the use of fossil fuels, for better or for worse, we reached another new level of development. And we all know that humankind stands on the brink of reaching another, higher and sustainable level of development, if only we fully seize the opportunity that renewable energy offers.

In 1987, together with the release of her famous report on “Our common future”, Gro Harlem Brundtland called for a green growth agenda. Almost 25 years later, notwithstanding progress made towards that, the green growth agenda has not progressed beyond the status of “secondary agenda, “- in other words, a somewhat less important agenda.

- Yes, many countries have integrated green growth concerns into their economic growth strategies.
- Yes, many countries have renewable energy targets.
- Yes, the private sector is showing a growing interest in sustainability and climate.

But the fact of the matter is that green, sustainable growth has not yet become the global norm. Sustainability and climate are not factored into measurements of how much economies have grown or how healthy they are. And the price of oil still has far too great an impact on the well-being of economies.

Why is that? Have sustainability and climate not been discussed enough? Or have we discussed the issues too much and done too little? I believe neither is the case.

Like the transition from fire to fossil fuels, transitioning the world onto the new global norm that we all want is a piecemeal process that takes time. And I firmly believe that we *will* get to this next transition - *provided we stay at it*. This is especially so because in sustainability and climate change, we have a level of urgency that far surpasses anything that may have boosted previous transitions.

***A closer look at the climate change negotiations may support my view.***

From the early days of the Climate Change Convention via the Kyoto Protocol to the Cancun Agreements, governments have steadily built up a global climate change regime that captures a slowly, but surely growing level of ambition.

Where no country had emission reduction targets when the Convention entered into force in 1994, this changed significantly with the Kyoto Protocol. As of 2005, the majority of industrialized countries had legally binding economy-wide emission reduction targets.

The release of the Fourth Assessment Report in 2007 showed that more - in fact much more - was needed. Efforts had not been commensurate with the scale of the problem.

This led to the launch of the Bali Road Map negotiations, which focus on increasing climate change action, as well as finding solutions for what happens when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012.

The negotiations under the Bali mandate led to a significant interim achievement: the Cancun Agreements reached last year.

The outcome in Cancun was encouraging. The Cancun Agreements include a comprehensive package to help developing nations deal with climate change, including a Technology Mechanism, Adaptation Committee and the Green Climate Fund.

Importantly, the Cancun Agreements provide the strongest signal the international community has ever given to the private sector on the need to move toward low-carbon economies, by committing to limiting temperature increases to a minimum of 2 degrees, and to consider limiting warming to 1.5 degrees.

All developed countries have submitted their quantified economy-wide emission reduction targets and these have now been officially published in the context of the Cancun Agreements.

The secretariat has also published information from 48 developing countries on the nationally appropriate mitigation actions - referred to as NAMAs -, which they will implement in their effort to seek a deviation from business-as-usual emissions by 2020, with technological and financial support.

Additionally, the development of low-carbon strategies is anchored in the agreements.

The recent session in Bangkok provided a useful platform for Parties to better understand what is behind the targets and the planned actions by asking questions in a workshop setting.

***Yet for all its encouraging outcomes, Cancun did not solve the key political questions.***

For one, assessments indicate that the sum total of official pledges amount to only 60 percent of what is needed to limit the temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius. As a result,

every effort needs to be made to find a realistic way to increase the level of ambition to close the gap.

And the second key question that Cancun did not solve is the legal framework for capturing emission reduction targets and actions. Some progress was made in Cancun on Annex I mitigation in the context of the Kyoto Protocol. At the same time, Parties resolved to consider legal options with the aim of completing an agreed outcome in the context of the Convention, based on the 2007 negotiating mandate agreed in Bali.

Many Parties want targets for Annex I Parties to be inscribed in an amendment to the Kyoto Protocol, while others have stated that they will not participate in a second commitment period. A way forward needs to be urgently found on this issue in 2011, especially given the growing possibility of a gap after 2012. Related to this, needless to say, is the way forward for the protocol's flexible mechanisms and the carbon market.

These challenging issues need to be addressed and resolved in 2011. It won't be easy, but I am convinced that it can be done - simply because the negotiating process has responded to and resolved other challenging issues in the past.

Addressing the unresolved issues and finding global solutions to climate change under the auspices of the UN is critical. While input from outside the negotiations is important, the UN offers the only forum in which decisions on climate change have a legal standing. Additionally, finding solutions under the UN is the only way to ensure that least developed and small countries are included in the response. To be truly meaningful, any transition needs to be as inclusive as possible.

***But what do the Cancun Agreements mean for the transition to green growth and sustainability more generally?***

Needless to say, you cannot solve climate change without sustainable development and you cannot advance sustainable development without solving climate change.

The Cancun Agreements present a good springboard for moving forward some solutions for both.

The agreements firmly anchor low-carbon development as the key direction for the future. Industrialized countries committed to develop low-carbon development strategies, whereas developing countries were encouraged to do so.

This may be testimony to the fact that increasingly, countries are realizing that changes need to be made in their own self-interest. This is all the more important in light of upcoming energy demand.

According to the International Energy Agency, world demand for primary energy will be 40 percent higher in 2030 than it was in 2007.

For oil, this would mean adding the equivalent of 4 Saudi Arabias to production, half to meet the decline in existing oil fields and half to meet the increase in demand.

But the world does not have 4 additional Saudi Arabias to add to production. “Easy oil” has largely been extracted. Turning to other sources, such as oil sands, not only significantly increases production costs, but also involves enormous environmental damage.

Additionally, concerns regarding “peak oil” abound. While there is no agreement on exactly when “peak oil” will be reached, projections generally point to anywhere between 2020 and 2030.

Next to climate change concerns, a continued over-reliance on oil to power economic activity will lead to ever growing levels of spending on oil imports. A reliance on increasingly expensive foreign oil will ultimately impact business operations, and the consumer is likely to carry the burden of an overall higher cost of living. And an overall higher cost of living could in turn act as a new driver for poverty.

People have to understand that moving the world onto a low-carbon path is not about waging ideological battles between lobby groups. Rather, the low-carbon pathway is critical because it simply doesn’t make sense to rest all economic activity on the back of an overly expensive, finite system.

The Cancun Agreements offer the first official step away from carbon-intensive growth, and officially open up space for the development of serious low-carbon policies.

What the planet now needs most is for national governments to turn the Cancun Agreements into action, for national policies to provide the muscle that implements international will. International and national policy need to work in tandem and be mutually reinforcing, while having distinct roles.

The Cancun Agreements can incentivize action, and it is my hope that the international incentives are used to strengthen low-carbon policies on the national level.

The alignment of international and national policy has the potential to significantly alter emission trends well into the future, and in doing so, boost sustainable development.

The key to success lies in ensuring that national policy not only takes aggressive advantage of the incentives provided by the Cancun climate change regime, but fills in the incentive, regulatory and legislative gaps at home to provide sustainable solutions with a level playing field at the national level.

Implementing Cancun fully will, in many ways, turbo-charge national low-carbon objectives, but only if national policy nurtures innovation, incentivizes commercial solutions, and provides a level economic and political playing field for new energy solutions.

***Ladies and gentlemen,***

The Cancun Agreements, if implemented, can make a solid contribution to both the environmental and the economic pillars of sustainable development. But we have a long way to go before sustainable development and the green growth agendas become the global norm.

In climate change, we will continue to move forward, step-by-step and contribute to the global transition as we go along. And it is my firm belief that with your help, we will

continue on our development path that began with the discovery of fire and now challenges us to transition from fossil fuels to clean energy.

Thank you.

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