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You have gathered here to consider the future of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as well as to launch an addition to the Fourth Assessment Report, the Report on Climate Change and Water. These scientific findings will again drive home the urgency to act. We all know that water is life. Stresses on this precious resource threaten the very essence of survival. At the same time, water can threaten life and livelihoods. The added clarity that the report on water provides will no doubt be key in addressing these issues.

This gathering is taking place after a truly momentous year in climate change: you released the Fourth Assessment Report and were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for your invaluable work together with Al Gore. In addition, Parties to the UNFCCC adopted the Bali Road Map at the UN Climate Change Conference.

As with previous assessment reports, the AR4 provided the climate change process with the most concise of scientific findings. It created huge public expectations for Parties to begin providing the political answers that adequately respond to the science. As such, it played a critical role for reaching the Bali breakthrough.

The Bali Road Map, designed to map out the road to enhanced action on climate change

The Road Map consists of a number of forward-looking decisions on international action against climate change. Firstly, it includes decisions on strengthening on-going work, including on technology, reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries (REDD) and the Adaptation Fund. Secondly, the Road Map includes a mandate for a two-year negotiating process to strengthen international action on climate change. Thirdly, the Bali Road Map also includes work on further commitments by industrialised countries under the Kyoto Protocol.

The process on future action is set to culminate in a new climate change deal at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009. With the 2009 deadline, there are merely one and ½ years in which to complete negotiations on a climate change agreement that measures up to the scientific findings. This is no small challenge.

The Bangkok Climate Change Talks 2008, which concluded on 4 April, were the first meeting to advance the Bali Road Map. At the meeting, Parties agreed to a work programme that structures the negotiating process in an organised manner. In this context, all critical issues, including advancing adaptation through finance and technology, risk reduction strategies,

reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries, investment and financial flows for climate change, scaling up technology transfer and sectoral approaches will be taken up in targeted workshops in conjunction with official meetings in the course of 2008. 2009 will see further inter-sessional meetings and workshops, but Parties have not yet decided on which topics these will zoom in on.

The Bangkok meeting also agreed that the shared vision on long-term cooperative action will be discussed at the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan in December 2008. The shared vision will guide the overall direction in which the process is headed. Parties further agreed that the project-based mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol should remain available to industrialised countries to meet their emission reduction targets. This has laid the first important foundation for the continuation of these tools beyond 2012 and is an important signal to business. These are all important developments on the road to Copenhagen.

The IPCC's work as an engine that has driven the climate change process forward

Carl Sagan once said that it is the tension between creativity and scepticism that produces the findings of science. This is of course also true for climate change science, and it is the IPCC's work that conclusively laid the scepticism surrounding climate change to rest. Moreover, the IPCC's work has enabled the link between science and policy-making. One of the many accomplishments of the IPCC in its 20-odd years of existence have been the contributions to major outcomes under the UNFCCC process.

The Second Assessment Report was completed in 1995 and was key in the work of Parties towards the Kyoto Protocol that was agreed two years later, in 1997. The consideration of the Third Assessment Report led to the introduction of the agenda items adaptation and mitigation. Negotiations on adaptation led to the launch of the Nairobi Work Programme on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change.

The IPCC has also responded to requests by governments and provided detailed information by issuing special reports on specific topics, including carbon capture and storage and ozone and climate and elaborating methodologies, for example the 1996 and 2006 guidelines on National GHG inventories.

These contributions have become the basis for ensuring transparency, accuracy, consistency and comparability of the data that are used under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol to judge Parties' compliance with their commitments.

Solid science as the basis for sound policy-making

With the negotiating process under the Bali Road Map, which needs to conclude in an enhanced climate change agreement, the link between policy-making and science perhaps needs to be stronger than ever before.

The task ahead of Parties is daunting: they have to negotiate one of the most complex international agreements in history in a very limited period of time. They will need all the support they can get.

It is important that Parties continue to receive updated scientific information in the future, so that they can continue to make informed decisions and find workable solutions in the future.

The philosopher Bertrand Russel once said: “The greatest challenge to any thinker is stating the problem in a way that will allow a solution.”

Your consideration regarding a special report on renewable energy will no doubt be helpful to Parties in their mitigation efforts in the future. Further specific scientific information may be requested by Parties and may have to be responded to.

Conclusion

The work programme for the two-year negotiating process, which was agreed to at the Bangkok Climate Change Talks has provided Parties with the clarity that enables effective and targeted work.

My hope is that at this meeting, the IPCC too will get clarity on its future work, well in the knowledge that continued information on climate change science are crucial inputs into political processes.

Lastly, I want to extend my sincere condolences to Prof. Bert Bolin’s family and colleagues. Prof. Bolin was an inspirational scientist to whom we owe many of the advances made in climate change science since the 1970’s. With key contributions to the work of the IPCC, Prof. Bolin’s legacy will help drive action on climate change for many years into the future.