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PRESS RELEASE

Historic United Nations climate change conference kicks off in Copenhagen with strong commitment to clinch ambitious climate change deal and unprecedented sense of urgency to act

(Copenhagen, 7 December 2008) – The United Nations Climate Change Conference - Copenhagen, 2009 kicked off today with a strong sense of confidence that countries can seal a comprehensive, ambitious and effective international climate change deal in Denmark and with an unprecedented sense of urgency to act on climate change.

The highly anticipated conference marks an historic turning point on how the world confronts climate change, an issue with profound implications for the health and prosperity of all people.

Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen announced that 110 heads of state and government will attend the conference at its conclusion.

The Prime Minister pointed to the fact that climate change knows no borders. "It does not discriminate, it affects us all," he said. "And we are here today because we are all committed to take action. That is our common point of departure – the magnitude of the challenge before us is to translate this political will into a strong political approach," he added.

The two-week meeting, the fifteenth Conference of the 193 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the fifth meeting of the 189 Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, is the culmination of a process set in motion in Bali, where Parties to the UNFCCC agreed to conclude negotiations on a new global deal in Denmark in 2009.

The urgency to act was underscored by Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, Chair of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, who told the conference that global emissions would need to peak by 2015 for the world to stay below a two degrees Celsius temperature rise. "The costs of responding to climate change will become progressively higher as time goes on, therefore we must take action now," he said.

"We have reached the deadline and there is no going back", said newly elected COP President and Danish COP 15 Minister Connie Hedegaard. "Copenhagen will be the city of the three C's: 'Cooperation', 'Commitment' and 'Consensus'. Now is the time to capture the moment and conclude a truly ambitious global deal. This is our chance. If we miss this opportunity, we will not get a better one," she said.



UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer said there was unprecedented political momentum for a deal.

"World leaders are calling for an agreement that offers serious emission limitation goals and that captures the provision of significant financial and technological support to developing countries," he said. "At the same time, Copenhagen will only be a success if it delivers significant and immediate action that begins the day the conference ends."

According to the UN's top climate change official, negotiators must focus on solid and practical proposals that will unleash prompt action on mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology, reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries and capacity-building.

Yvo de Boer spoke of three layers of action that governments must agree to by the end of the conference: fast and effective implementation of immediate action on climate change; ambitious commitments to cut and limit emissions, including start-up funding and a long-term funding commitment; and a long-term shared vision on a low-emissions future for all.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an aggregate emission reduction by industrialised countries of between minus 25% and 40% over 1990 levels would be required by 2020 in order to stave off the worst effects of climate change, with global emissions falling by at least 50% by 2050. Even under this scenario, there would be an only a 50% chance of avoiding the most catastrophic consequences.

"Industrialised countries meeting under the Kyoto Protocol need to raise the level of ambition of developed countries with regard to individual targets and the need to make rapid progress on the tools and rules that developed countries can use to reach their targets, such as carbon market mechanisms, land use and land use change and new gases," said Yvo de Boer.

The UNFCCC working groups starting Monday will have six days to conclude negotiations before the Ministerial High Level Segment starts 16 December. Ministers will then in turn have two days to take any unresolved issues forward before the more than 100 world leaders arrive the evening of 17 December. This means a total of eight negotiating days to prepare a workable package that consists of both immediate and long-term components which leaders can endorse on 18 December.

More than 15,000 participants, including government delegates from 193 Parties to the UNFCCC and representatives from business and industry, environmental organizations and research institutions, are attending the two-week gathering.

UNFCCC Press Office contacts

http://unfccc.int/meetings/cop_15/media/items/5070.php

About the UNFCCC

With 193 Parties, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has near universal membership and is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol has been ratified by 190 of the UNFCCC Parties. Under the Protocol, 37 States, consisting of highly industrialized countries and countries undergoing the process of transition to a market economy, have legally binding emission limitation and reduction commitments. The ultimate objective of both treaties is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.