



**President of the General Assembly High-Level Event
Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Agenda
New York, 23 March 2017**

**Opening Address by
Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, President of the United Nations General Assembly,
H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first recognize the President of the General Assembly and the Government of Fiji for your climate leadership. Today's special event is the latest in a long list that is your lasting legacy of leadership on this critical issue.

Thank you for shining a light on vulnerability through your work in the Pacific Islands Forum and Climate Vulnerable Forum. Thank you for your bold Paris Agreement contribution of 100 per cent renewable power by 2030. Thank you for being the first to ratify the Paris Agreement. And thank you for your excellent partnership as COP 23 President in preparation of this year's UN climate change conference.

I must also express my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General for making the connection between climate change and the sustainable development agenda and calling for an integrated approach to our challenges.

Your vision of preventing future risk through stronger institutions, more resilient societies and bold action must guide every nation forward through the sometimes turbulent waters of transformative change.

One hundred and thirty-seven Member States are working towards that vision by ratifying the Paris Climate Change Agreement. This is both a crucial step towards concerted action on climate change and a step towards truly sustainable development.

As the international community takes these important initial steps in this new era of implementation, we must do so with the full knowledge that the sustainable development agenda and climate change agenda are inherently linked.

These challenges must be addressed in an integrated manner because there is only one on-the-ground reality. By looking at climate and sustainability holistically, we maximize the potential for positive outcomes of every action we take. And when international commitments are turned into country-level action, tangible benefits are delivered to communities and the people who live there.

Implementation is the policy that meets these commitments. And we must move quickly to put this policy in place.

We must bend the emissions curve, build societies resilient to climate impacts and reduce risk by limiting warming to safe levels. And the policies that accomplish these goals must be developed with a focus on the sustained well-being of people, sound stewardship of the planet and responsible economic growth.

This will fundamentally transform our social and economic structures and redefine our interaction with the natural world. Such a transformation opens the door to a future where growing human needs are reconciled against the need for a stable climate and healthy ecosystems.

This challenge is immense. Inaction or insufficient action will destabilize the natural systems that underpin all social and economic development. It is only through urgent, concerted effort that we can overcome this challenge.

The potential rewards from acting on climate change and sustainability are also immense. Climate action proactively manages global risk. And the SDGs present a compelling growth story for businesses. By some estimates, work towards the SDGs may open US\$12 trillion dollars of market opportunities or more.

Momentum is building to address these two agendas jointly. I have heard this clearly at events I have recently attended – the World Economic Forum, the World Government Summit, the Munich Security Conference, the Climate Leadership Conference and even major energy conferences like Petroleum Week and CERA Week.

In each of these venues, I have heard the compelling case for integrated action from leaders of governments, leaders of finance and leaders of business.

So momentum is certainly building in national governments and in the unprecedented alliance of companies, investors, cities, regions, institutions and individuals – all moving towards low-emission, sustainable growth.

These groups are acting in their own best interests. Businesses are reducing costs now and future risks. Investors are tapping into stable markets with predictable growth. Cities and regions are acting on climate change to enhance the quality of life in their communities. And people increasingly demand products that don't harm others or the environment.

We have truly entered the era of implementation. It is up to us, collectively as one community of nations, to accelerate action that builds a better future for all.

We must address the challenges of sustainability and climate change in an integrated manner, with people and planet at the centre of our work.

We must encourage transformation that promotes responsible use of natural resources and protects the environment for future generations. This transformation must be defined by equity, innovation and investment in a future where resilient societies and economies are powered by clean engines of growth.

I appreciate your contributions to this global momentum and towards our common climate and sustainable development goals.

I am confident that the steps we take today will further amplify and accelerate this momentum and fulfil the vision of a tomorrow we are proud to hand over to our children and their children.

I look forward to hearing from all of you.

Thank you.
