

Remarks by Mr. Richard Kinley, Deputy Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Earth Information Day, 8 November 2017

Thank you first to Carlos Fuller, Chair of the SBSTA, for the kind introduction.

I am extremely pleased that in this wonderful event at this COP and historic occasion of the first Meeting of Parties to the Paris Agreement that we have found time and space for this event. And let me also thank the World Meteorological Organization and the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission for collaborating with us on this event to make this event a reality. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the climate change secretariat and the UN system who worked hard to make this discussion possible.

So here we are one year after last year's Paris Agreement which was a landmark achievement for our planet. Indeed, it is widely celebrated for its universality – uniting all nations in meaningful action on climate change. The Paris Agreement includes some guidance on what “meaningful” means.

I am happy to say, that definition is based in sound science and represented by a long-term goal. Namely, to hold global temperature rise to as close to 1.5 degrees as possible.

To strike the balance between human emissions and the planet's natural ability to absorb those emissions, we need action by all, we need that action urgently and we need to understand the results of the climate action we take. Those of you gathered in this room know better than anyone how urgent is the need for action.

Information played a critical role in getting us to this point, and information will determine meaningful action moving forward. I pay tribute to all of you who have toiled for many years - in the lab and in the field, in search for knowledge.

First, your work on building of information was seen in forming the Paris Agreement. Yes, the agreement is the determination of governments within this multilateral process. However, the agreement adopted in Paris could be even more ambitious due to the mobilization of action of non-Party stakeholders, regional and city governments and businesses and investors who are also right now ramping up their own ambition on climate change.

While I cannot speak to the individual motivation of each stakeholder to support the Paris Agreement, I feel strongly that science – assessed by the IPCC and supplied by a dedicated observation and scientific research community of thousands worldwide – made the decision to support the agreement much easier - now ratified by more than 100 governments. The risks from climate change were clearly and coherently conveyed. The UNFCCC political process has been informed by science – decisions are more crucially important and have implications round the world.

For companies and investors, the risks that arise from climate change are existential. The conditions that allow for our current prosperity are only protected by limiting global temperature rise to safer levels. Information shed light on the fact that the risk of private sector inaction on climate change far outweighs the risk to business from taking urgent action.

Local governments also must act on information regarding climate change. Issues such as rising seas, water scarcity and extreme weather will affect communities and cities and people who live there worldwide. And regional governments must look at these same factors as they strive to remain competitive in the national and global economic landscape and fundamentally to protect their citizens.

And as the transformation to a climate-safe and sustainable development path moves forward, good information allows us to monitor our progress towards limiting temperature rise.

This deliberate and managed transition to a new model of growth and development foreseen not only in the Paris Agreement but also the Sustainable Development Goals must therefore be accompanied by a fully functional and improved global monitoring and observation system.

And we now have more and better ways than ever to monitor the natural world. We have better technology – satellites with high resolution, powerful computers that can quickly analyze big data and more advanced modeling than ever before. We have to must use this technology to better understand the cycles in our oceans, in the atmosphere, in energy and especially in the crucial carbon absorption cycles of ecosystems.

Information is the catalyst that will makes such analysis possible.

By observing and sharing information, we give every nation the tools needed to design and build their own sustainable, clean and green futures. We must ensure that when policymakers seek to accomplish their national contributions to the Paris Agreement, decisions are based on sound planetary science.

In this way, information can put us on the path towards a sustainable, climate-safe future and ensures we stay on this path.

In coming years, we will see many changes in both policy and applied action as national governments move to implement their contributions to the Paris Agreement. We will see new strategies and new synergies across societies and economies in support of this transformation. This action is really and truly urgent, it must move to the situation where we have peaking emissions as soon as possible, if possible by 2020 – we need resilient societies.

Information is key to making the right choices for people and to understanding the positive impacts of these policies and actions. And it is crucial to understanding how each individual action contributes to our global goals.

On behalf of the UNFCCC Executive Secretary, I welcome earth information day as a platform for sharing observations and knowledge.

I encourage the free exchange of information and for everyone to take a moment in the next week to look at the earth information posters. I also hope that this event can shine new light on how we can, as one world determined to implement one vision of the future, turn the promise of Paris into our collective reality.

Thank you.