



## THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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## ADDRESS TO HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

New York, 24 September 2007

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two decades ago, here in this Hall, climate change first surfaced on the world's political agenda. The subject, proposed by the island nation of Malta, remains as evocative today as it did then -- "the protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind".

Much has happened since those early days. But the fundamental challenge remains unchanged, and has become even more pressing. Indeed, I am convinced that climate change, and what we do about it, will define us, our era, and ultimately the global legacy we leave for future generations.

Today, the time for doubt has passed. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has unequivocally affirmed the warming of our climate system, and linked it directly to human activity.

The scientists have very clearly outlined the severity of the problem. Their message is simple:

- we know enough to act;
- if we do not act now the impact of climate change will be devastating;
- and we have affordable measures and technologies to begin addressing the problem right now.

What we do not have is time.

That is why I have invited you, the leaders of the world, to join me for this high-level meeting on climate change.

The unprecedented challenge of climate change demands unprecedented action. And unprecedented leadership. Leadership that is ready to set new directions. Your leadership.

I am gratified that so many of you have come to this event. By being here, you have signaled that you share my concern. And you are ready to act.

Today, the effects of climate change are being felt around the world. But they are being felt most by those who are the least able to cope. Indeed, the terrible irony for many developing countries is that, though they have contributed the least to the process of climate change, they are the ones most at risk from its consequences. For some island States and peoples this is a matter of survival. The moral imperative could not be clearer.

Climate change is a serious threat to development everywhere. Indeed, the adverse impacts of climate change could undo much of the investment made to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. But it is not a zero-sum game. By being creative, we can reduce emissions while promoting economic growth. This is our opportunity to: advance sustainable development; encourage new kinds of cleaner technologies, industries and jobs; and integrate climate change risks into national policies and practices.

We must be guided by the reality that inaction now will prove the costliest action of all in the long term.

Excellencies,

National action must be at the center of our response to climate change – with industrialized countries taking the lead. Fifteen years have passed since the Framework Convention on Climate Change was finalized in Rio. It has been ten years since the Kyoto Protocol was adopted. Yet most industrialized country emissions are still rising. And their per capita emissions remain unacceptably high. At the same time, support for adaptation by poor countries has fallen well short of what is required.

Addressing these shortcomings requires contributions from all countries and all sectors of society, from civil society and business, to regional and local governments. That is why I have invited their representatives to join us today, and to share their ideas and experiences. All sectors will need to be engaged if global emissions are to peak in the next ten to fifteen years, and be significantly reduced in the years thereafter, as indicated by the IPCC.

Given the nature and magnitude of the challenge, national action alone is insufficient. No nation can address this challenge on its own. No region can insulate itself from these climate changes. That is why we need to confront climate change within a global framework, one that guarantees the highest level of international cooperation.

This is precisely the kind of global challenge that the United Nations is best suited to address. Indeed, I am gratified by the universal recognition that the UN climate process is the appropriate forum for negotiating global action. At the same time, I share the dismay of many at the slow progress of these negotiations.

Excellencies,

This meeting is an opportunity to infuse this process with political momentum. The crucial negotiations under the UN Framework Convention in Bali this December are almost upon us. We need to set the stage for a comprehensive agreement that tackles climate change on all fronts. And we must reach this agreement as soon as possible to ensure a global policy is in place by 2012. Our goal must be nothing short of a real breakthrough in Bali.

The essential parameters of a global framework are increasingly clear. They include:

- Enhanced leadership by the industrialized countries on emission reductions;

- Incentives for developing countries to act, but without sacrificing economic growth or poverty reduction; and fully consistent with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.
- Significantly increased support for adaptation in developing countries, especially for least developed and small island developing states;
- Strengthened technology development and dissemination; and
- New approaches to financing, including better use of market-based approaches.

Excellencies,

Our immediate challenge is to transform our common concern into a new consensus on the way forward. This journey begins in Bali this December. It will succeed or fail based on the strength of the leadership and commitment displayed by the people in this hall.

We hold the future in our hands. Together, we must ensure that our grandchildren will not have to ask why we failed to do the right thing, and left them to suffer the consequences.

So let us send a clear and collective signal to people everywhere that we will address this challenge head-on.

Thank you.