

GA INFORMAL THEMATIC DEBATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE JULY 31, AUGUST 1 & 2
President of the GA: H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa

‘What is at stake is the health and wellbeing of our planet.’ ‘The defining challenge of our time’. The countries least responsible are the most affected – Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Asia are being affected by extreme weather.

There must be a global carbon cap that is translated into national plans for action. We have the technological ability; we have the scientific know-how; what we need is the political will. She stated the importance of the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility for all discussion around this crisis.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon:

The arctic is warming twice as fast as the global average. Glaciers are retreating and this puts water at risk. Desertification, drought and food insecurity follow in its wake. We must take decisive action on a global scale – our response will determine what our legacy will be. I see the crisis as serious enough to appoint 3 special envoys on climate change.

Mr. Ban describes climate change as “the defining issue of our era”.

Since the start of the industrial revolution, the United States and Europe account for more than 50 percent of the total, accumulated global emissions over two centuries, while China accounts for less than eight percent, (Raupach CSIRO Global Carbon Project).

The 50 least developed countries have together contributed less than 0.5 percent of global cumulative emissions over 200 years.

8 billion tons of carbon were emitted globally as CO₂ in 2005 compared with 6 billion tons that were emitted in 1995

PANEL 1: SCIENCE – THE IMPACT, ADAPTATION IMPERATIVES

John Holdren: Professor, Environmental Policy, Harvard University

The scientific facts are in. It is no longer hypothesis or suggestion.

1. there is significant disruption of climate because of human activity. The earth is getting hotter. This is not uniform, but the last quarter century has seen 23/24 of the hottest recorded years. Effects of heating are rapid, non-uniform and damaging
2. The effect is caused by carbon dioxide CO₂ from fossil fuel emissions and from deforestation particularly of the tropical rainforests. The current level of human interference with temperatures is already dangerous. Now we must ask what do we need to do to prevent catastrophe.
3. There is already serious harm – wildfires, tropical storms, floods and droughts. There are 150,000 premature deaths each year because of this climate change. In 2005 28 billion tons of CO₂ were put into the atmosphere and 12 billion tons from deforestation.
4. The present global temperatures exceed pre-industrial temperatures by 0.7⁰C. Agriculture in the tropics is already negatively affected.

Nicholas Stern, author of the Stern Report, former chief economist, World Bank:

The Stern Review, 30th October 2006, describes climate change as an economic externality, i.e. a cost that is borne by parties not involved in the action or not part of the economic exchange causing the situation. Therefore addressing this externality should allow market forces to develop low carbon technologies. The report concludes that mitigation, i.e. addressing the issue *now* is the best economic choice. It highlights that the ethics of the issue can not be ignored or even separated

Climate change has many effects on economic development. Most effects are coming through water – more frequent and severe floods; droughts, severe storms.

- If we act responsibly, we must expect 1.5 -2.0C
- If we act irresponsibly, we must expect increases in temperature up to 5C We can expect a loss of world national income of 5%.
- Timely action could reduce loss of income significantly.
- Climate responsibility and economic growth can coexist.
- We must stabilize CO₂ emissions – 50% reduction in absolute levels by 2050
- Delay is dangerous.

Adaptation is going to cost a lot of money. e.g. In London they will have to build bigger barriers on the river, larger sewers, air conditioning of the London Underground. This is in a rich country.

- The poorest countries will be hardest hit. Adaptation and Development can be mutually supportive.
- Costs of adaptation will be \$10-50 billions (per year) higher than anticipated.
- The arguments for the 0.7% ODA agreed are now **overwhelming**. The development agenda will be much more costly than thought 10 years ago.

**Kenrick Leslie, Director Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre:
The impact in the Caribbean.**

- Climate change has different impacts in different parts of the world. The Caribbean is a high-impact region. The diurnal temperature (variation between day and night) difference is decreasing. This will lead to use of more energy.
- Hurricanes are forming at lower latitudes and growing in intensity faster.
- There is a difference in the scale of impact from one place to another.
- A rise in temperature of 1C will affect the habitat of the yellow fin tuna and the dolphin. These will disappear from the Caribbean.
- Rise of 2C will lead to food security problem with a decrease in basic crop output up to 20%
- The EU is talking of a 2C increase being a target for mitigation. This is not acceptable in the Caribbean.
- Impact is differential. There has been increased flooding in Suriname and Guyana for 3 of the last 4 years; the same period has seen 3 years of drought in Cuba.

The impact is differential. Always it is the poor who are the worst victims of climate change.

Even if we could stop instantly any further increase in sea temperature, the impact of the present 0.7% rise will continue.

If we prescind from the human tragedy, loss of life and general disruption of life and look solely at the economic impact of hurricanes:

- ♣ Hurricane Katrina resulted in a loss of 1% of GDP for the United States.
- ♣ Hurricane Ivan 2004 (the strongest known hurricane so far south-east of the Lesser Antilles) was rated 6th most intense Atlantic hurricane (by 2007 had dropped to 9th place). It caused catastrophic damage to Grenada and heavy damage to Jamaica, Grand Cayman and Cuba. It resulted in a loss of 200% of the GDP of Grenada.

Sunita Narain, Director of Centre for Science and Environment, India NGO

Urgent, decisive action is needed. Following the report of the IPCC, even if we stop NOW pumping CO₂ into the atmosphere, we will continue to suffer the cumulative impact from emissions already there.

The poor didn't create the problem, but they are the worst victims. People who live at the margins of survival are devastatingly vulnerable to climate change.

We need political sagacity and leadership of a sort we have not yet seen.

No country has yet learned to be a low-carbon economy. Cooperation is needed as never before. It was the rich world that pumped the CO₂ into the atmosphere. New agreements must be based on fairness and justice and equity.

Neroni Slade, Ambassador of Samoa, Small Island Developing State was Respondent.

- ♣ He spoke of the increased vulnerability of SIDS.
- ♣ The way forward must be marked by proportionality, equity and fairness. It is critical that the principle of common but differentiated responsibility is the basis of inter-governmental negotiation for issues of adaptation, mitigation and economic development.
- ♣ The International Red Cross reckons that in the 1990s there were 200 natural disasters each year. In the present decade this has increased to 300 per year.
- ♣ The EU is willing to accept an increase of 2°C. for global temperatures, but this is already too high.
- ♣ Growing economies of emerging countries want to be able to produce more emissions. The Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibility is there because of what has been done in the past 150 years!! The polluting has been done by a small number of countries. Now is the time for reckoning.
- ♣ Even if we cut emissions to zero, we will still have a 1.5°C rise by the end of the 21st century.

Comments and questions:

A major reason for non progress is because we have put climate in one basket and development in a separate basket. We need to bring them together so that they are considered at the same time.

In response to several questions on what is the way forward, Sir Nicholas Stern offered 9 points.

Set of Targets:

1. Agree to cut emissions by 50% by 2050
2. Rich countries should commit to 75% reduction in emissions by 2050; poorer countries with developing economies commit to 50% reduction.
3. Intermediate targets for 2020 – should see a 20-30% reduction.

Action on Mitigation:

1. World Carbon Markets must be beefed up and simplified.
2. There must be massive investment in energy technology through private/public partnerships.
3. There must be programmes to support action to address deforestation by those countries affected by it.

Action on Adaptation:

1. Information must be made available to all on what can be done.
2. We need even more resources. The rich countries MUST deliver on the promises of Monterrey and Gleneagles on ODA.
3. Technology – there will be a need for different crops and an infrastructure to support the changes.

Regarding Politics:

1. We cannot take an EITHER/OR approach to development and climate. Solutions must be sought for both at the same time.
2. Heads of Governments must take the reins. It is not sufficient or appropriate to expect that Ministers of Environment can find the resources or the rally the decision-making power left to their own devices.
3. The role of “the people” - NGOs, civil society – is critical. You are needed to call governments and the private sector to account. You are vital to act as drivers of this change of mentality and of commitment.

Further comments:

- ♣ We must explore the limits to growth. The concept of sufficiency as an alternative to uncontrolled consumption must be examined.
- ♣ Personal lifestyles are a key factor in addressing the crisis.
- ♣ We cannot just leave it to the governments.
- ♣ What once seemed too difficult must simply be done if we are to have a future.
- ♣ The only appropriate body that can deal with the climate change crisis is the United Nations. This is not a matter for bi-lateral agreements.

- ♣ **It falls to every individual, every business, every institution and every government to work out how it will reduce its carbon footprint**