

World leaders demonstrated energy, dynamism on climate change, says Ban



22 September 2009 – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon **commended** the world leaders who addressed the opening of today’s United Nations climate change gathering – including the leaders of the United States, China, Japan and the Maldives – for displaying “energy and dynamism” on the issue.

Some 100 heads of State and government have converged on UN Headquarters in New York for the largest-ever summit on climate change.

Mr. Ban said he appreciated the leaders’ demonstration of leadership “so that negotiators will get clear guidelines and directions” ahead of this December’s conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, where negotiations on an ambitious new climate change agreement on curbing greenhouse gas emissions are set to conclude.

The opening session of today’s summit heard from eight world leaders, with the officials from Japan, the European Union and other developed countries having reaffirmed their pledges to slash emissions by 25 per cent by 2020.

“It was an historic and strong commitment... particularly from Japan,” the Secretary-General pointed out.

To achieve the 2020 target, Japan’s newly-elected Prime Minister vowed in his address to introduce a domestic emission trading system and a tariff for renewable energy, as well as considering a global warming tax.

“You should remember how difficult it might have been for you, Prime Minister [Yukio Hatoyama] – who has been in his office only six days – and has changed the whole dynamic!” Mr. Ban exclaimed.

For his part, Mr. Obama noted that the world has been too slow to act or even recognize the magnitude of the global warming threat.

“It is true of my own country as well. We recognize that. But this is a new day. It is a new era,” he added. “And I am proud to say that the United States has done more to promote clean energy and reduce carbon pollution in the last eight months than at any other time in our history.”

Also speaking at the opening session of the summit was Chinese President Hu Jintao, who emphasized the unique situation of developing countries. He said their top priorities are to grow their economies and wipe out poverty.

"The international community should pay close attention to the predicament of developing countries," he emphasized.

"It is important to listen to their voice and respect their wishes, and combine our efforts to address climate change with those to promote the growth of developing countries and build up their own dynamism for development and ability for sustainable development."

The leader of the Maldives – which consists of some 1,200 tropical coral islets, none of which rises more than 1.8 metres above sea level, leaving the 400,000 inhabitants at great risk of rising sea levels and storm surges – issued an impassioned plea for urgent action today.

President Mohamed Nasheed expressed hope that this summit will not fall into the predictable pattern whereby nations pledge action at international gatherings, only to forget about their commitments.

"We at the Maldives desperately want to believe that one day our words will have an effect, and so we continue to shout them even though, deep down, we know that you are not really listening," he said.

Other leaders who addressed the opening session were President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt of Sweden, President Óscar Arias Sánchez of Costa Rica, and President Nicolas Sarkozy of France.

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