

From Polar ice rim, Ban issues call for urgent action on climate change



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Norway's Environment Minister, Erik Solheim, with "Seal the Deal" banner on the Polar Ice Rim

2 September 2009 – Standing on rapidly melting polar ice, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appealed to the world for urgent measures to be taken to combat climate change to protect the planet for future generations.

"I feel the power of nature, and at the same time, a sense of vulnerability," Mr. Ban **told reporters** from the Polar ice rim yesterday. "This is a common resource for human beings, and we must do all we can to preserve this Arctic ice."

Witnessing the impacts of climate change on icebergs and glaciers first-hand, he said that he was informed by scientists that global warming is altering the Arctic faster than any other area, with glaciers melting at a rate of 150 cubic kilometers per year.

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"We must stop this from further happening," the Secretary-General stressed. "Unless we fight climate change, unless we stop this trend, we'll have devastating consequences for humanity."

With fewer than 100 days remaining until the start of the climate change conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, where nations are set to wrap up talks on a new agreement to slash greenhouse gas emissions, he is convening a high-level gathering in New York on 22 September to shore up political will.

"We do not have any time to lose," Mr. Ban underscored. "We must seal the deal in Copenhagen in December, a deal which will be comprehensive, equitable and balanced, so that both industrialized and developing countries, and all citizens of the world can live in an environmentally sustainable way."

Reaching an agreement – intended to go into effect when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012 – in the Danish capital is "the moral and political responsibility required of the leaders of the world," he added.

The loss of ice in the Arctic, the Secretary-General **told reporters** who accompanied him on the Norwegian vessel, the Svalbard, to the Polar ice rim, is happening at a rate 30 years ahead of schedule. "Our foot is on the gas pedal, and it is time we put it off," he said.

In the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard today, the Secretary-General visited the Global Seed Vault, which was established early last year to protect seed samples from the threats of climate change, disease and disasters.

Located near the village of Longyearbyen – some 1,120 kilometres from the North Pole – the vault houses duplicates of unique varieties of the world's most important crops. Permafrost and thick rock ensure that even without electricity, the genetic material stored in the vault will remain frozen and protected.

One of the greatest global challenges is "how to feed a growing world population in the context of climate change," Mr. Ban said at the vault.

The seeds stored in the facility, he said, are part of a larger long-term strategy to boost food security in the face of global warming.

"Sustainable food production may not begin in this cold Arctic environment, but it does begin by conserving crop diversity," the Secretary-General **noted**.

"This gift to humanity and symbol of peace will continue to inspire and serve for generations to come."

While in Norway, Mr. Ban met with Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, as well as with King Harald V.

He also **attended** a wreath-laying ceremony at the memorial of Trygve Lie, a Norwegian who was the first elected UN Secretary-General.

Climate change will again be the focus of the Secretary-General's remarks tomorrow when he addresses the World Climate Conference in Geneva, where he also plans to meet with several world leaders on the event's sidelines.

The week-long gathering, which kicked off on Monday, aims to boost access to climate information to help the world's poor and promote development.

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