

PRESS RELEASE

SMALL ISLANDS AND LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES JOIN FORCES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Vulnerable countries say more than 1.5 degrees of climate change is unacceptable

14 August, Bonn - Two major blocs of the world's most vulnerable countries today joined forces in demanding that the new Copenhagen climate agreement limit temperature increases to as far below 1.5 degrees Celsius as possible.

Speaking today at a press conference in the margins of this week's talks in Bonn in preparation for the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December, negotiators and envoys representing the world's small island developing states and least developed countries (LDCs) joined together in expressing dismay at the current lack of progress and ambition in the talks.

"With less than 115 days left to Copenhagen, the time for posturing and pretension is over", said Ambassador Dessima Williams, Permanent Representative of Grenada to the United Nations and Chair of the Alliance of Small Island States. "Current pledges by industrialized countries add up to emission reductions in the range of 10 to 16 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020. This risks taking us on a path to temperature increases in excess of 3 degrees above pre-industrial levels. Such a path would be catastrophic for all countries."

Consistent with their 1.5 degree temperature target, the 80 countries that make up the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Group of LDCs are now united in calling for industrialized countries to together reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020.

To achieve these goals, AOSIS and the Group of LDCs are demanding that global emissions peak by 2015, and fall quickly thereafter to ensure that total global emissions are reduced to at least 85 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050. This would make it possible to return atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations to below 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Adverse impacts are already being felt with the current temperature increase of 0.8 degrees Celsius. Further temperature increases will only aggravate and accelerate the impacts already occurring in the world's most vulnerable countries.

These impacts include sea-level rise, ocean acidification, coral bleaching, land loss, coastal erosion, flooding, drought, desertification, loss of fresh water supplies, biodiversity loss and more frequent and intense extreme weather events including hurricanes. Warming so far has already led the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to declare in a submission to the UNFCCC that some particularly low-lying island States are 'very likely to become entirely uninhabitable'.

"Climate change is here, and already delivering damage" said Bruno Sekoli from Lesotho, the Chair of the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs). "We will not allow negotiators and governments to continue to ignore the human costs of climate change – hunger, disease, poverty and lost livelihoods are all on our doorstep. These impacts have the potential to threaten social and political stability, and in some cases, the very survival of low-lying island states".

A report released in May by the Global Humanitarian Forum, led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, found that climate change already delivers global economic losses of US\$125 billion per year, with 90 per cent of the burden falling to developing countries.

To help address the need to both mitigate emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change, developing countries have called for financial support to the tune of 1 per cent of the industrialized world's GDP, or approximately US\$400 billion annually, in addition to current development aid. Total finance currently available for climate-related projects is estimated at less than US\$10 billion a year. So far, less than \$1 billion has been made available to address the urgent need for adaptation in developing countries.

“Reducing emissions is in everyone's interests, and many of the necessary tools are already available”, said Ambassador Williams. Recent studies show that the cost for developed countries of achieving a 40 per cent reduction by 2020 is as low as 0.5 to 1.5% of GDP by 2020. This is a small price to pay when compared with the anticipated skyrocketing of costs for developing countries to adapt to a warmer world.

Looking forward, Bruno Sekoli said that upcoming meetings in the US in late September – including the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Event on Climate Change and the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh – are crucial opportunities for the announcement of higher targets on both the mitigation and adaptation finance fronts.

“We need to see the leadership and ambition that is often claimed in the media, but in reality, has yet to emerge in the negotiating room”, said Ambassador Williams. “The window of opportunity is closing quickly. Copenhagen is the last chance to avoid a global human tragedy.”

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