

A Special Report on Selected Side Events at the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Fifth Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP 15 and COP/MOP 5)

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Events convened on Wednesday, 16 December 2009

The United Nations Delivering as One on Climate Change

Presented by the United Nations



Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, stated that the attendance at COP 15 by an unprecedented number of heads of state and government is a good indication of a meaningful outcome.

The event outlined the UN's commitment to "deliver as one," and consisted of a number of presentations by UN Chief Executives, followed by a discussion. Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, provided an update on the negotiations, stating that he senses clear determination from the delegates. He underscored the need for fast track financial support that is new and additional and to guarantee long-term financial support for developing countries. He stated that never in his life had he seen such heightened expectations on the outcome of a UN meeting which, he underscored, puts increased pressure on the UN to deliver as one.

Referencing Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, Lykke Friis, Minister for Climate and Energy, Denmark, described the COP as a "miracle unfolding" where characters are cooperating against a dangerous force to live "happily ever after." Yet, she said, delivering climate change programmes constitutes a significant challenge which will be best overcome by adopting an integrated approach.

Henning Wuester, UNFCCC Secretariat, on behalf of Yvo de Boer, UNFCCC Executive Secretary, expressed confidence that parties will reach a fair, comprehensive and ambitious agreement towards a safer future.

Mohammed El-Ashry, Senior Fellow, UN Foundation, facilitated a discussion among UN Chief Executives, senior UN system participants and the audience. A number of the UN representatives responded to questions. Helen Clark, UNDP, stated that climate change is a threat to sustainable development and that it must be tackled as a central element of national development strategies. Margareta Wahlstrom, UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, outlined an initiative to distribute low-emission stoves to help refugees mitigate climate change and to develop "climate-proof food" for people in disaster areas.

Jan Kubis, UN Economic Commission for Europe, suggested that it is important to design projects that are attractive to the private sector in order to augment finances invested by the public sector. Maria Neira, World Health Organization, stated that the COP's outcome will be the most important health treaty ever to have been negotiated. Achim Steiner, UNEP, argued that a paradigm shift is required away from the concept that environmental gains are necessarily at the cost of the economy. Instead, he continued, the green economy can create economic opportunity while also driving sustainable development.

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Women as Agents of Change

Presented by Iceland

Svandís Svavarsdóttir, Minister for the Environment, Iceland, stated that it is imperative to integrate a gender perspective into all aspects of climate change. She called for representation by women at all levels to increase the active participation of women in finding a solution to climate change. Women, she affirmed, are not victims, but agents of climate change whose role in developing and implementing mitigation and adaptation must be increased.

Sherry Ayittey, Minister for Environment, Science and Technology, Ghana, stated that because women's lives are inextricably connected to natural resources, they are most affected by climate change. To empower women as agents of change, she said, requires: including women in decision-making processes; improving women's access to natural resources; increasing female education levels; and providing training on climate change.

Jato Sillah, Minister for Forestry and Environment, the Gambia, explained that his country's efforts on climate change are driven by the National Climate Committee. He stated that the percentage of women on the Committee has greatly increased since its establishment and that its work is focusing to a larger extent on women's concerns.

Ulla Tørnæs, Minister for Development Cooperation, Denmark, highlighted the negative effects of climate change on efforts to promote sustainable development. She referenced research showing that existing inequalities are exacerbated by natural disasters. She concluded by urging participants to continue to promote gender as part of the COP agenda.

Paula Lehtomäki, Minister for Environment, Finland, summarized the event's message and announced her country's support for women's participation at the COP. Participants discussed gender equity in climate financing, women's involvement in the UNFCCC negotiations, and the establishment of a women's fund for climate adaptation.



Sherry Ayittey, Minister for Environment, Science and Technology, Ghana, suggested that if women had a more prominent role in the climate change negotiations, a fair agreement would already have been reached.

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Local Government Climate Roadmap - "From Bali to Poznan to Copenhagen"

Presented by the ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability

David Cadman, President of ICLEI, explained that the event would address local-level climate actions. Ritt Bjerregaard, Lord Mayor of Copenhagen, stressed that cities represent more than half of the world's population and can lead the way to a solution with ambitious policies and strategies. British economist Lord Nicholas Stern noted that 80% of the world's energy is used in cities and that many actions are easier to achieve at the local level.

Robert Doyle, Mayor of Melbourne, stated that capital cities in Australia are already acting. Amos Masondo, Mayor of Johannesburg, emphasized the need for collaboration between all levels of government. Greg Nickels, Mayor of Seattle, highlighted that his city has reduced its emissions by 7% below 1990 levels, and that 1,060 US mayors have pledged to do the same.

Rakesh Mehta, Chief Secretary, Government of National Capital Territory Delhi, stressed the importance of involving communities in climate change actions. Bärbel Dieckmann, Chair of the World Mayors Council on Climate Change, said "without local governments, there will be no solution to climate change." Robert Ebrard, Mayor of Mexico City, said cities should demand to be included in the COP 16 negotiations in Mexico City next year. Jean-Marc Ayrault, President of Nantes Métropole, said national governments must agree on ambitious targets and start making reductions immediately.

Several speakers then delivered concluding remarks. Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-HABITAT, encouraged city-leaders to participate in the World Urban Forum. Dubravka Suica, Council of Europe, stressed that national governments must take advantage of the competencies of local authorities. David Cadman, President of ICLEI, stressed the importance of diverting funds away from oil, gas and coal subsidies, and from military budgets towards cities for climate action.



British economist Lord Nicholas Stern stressed that: cities are where the leadership is, they are the right size and structure, and they can be more radical in their actions than national governments.

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Addressing Clean Energy and Climate Change Action in North America - A Coordinated Approach

Presented by IISD and Pembina Institute

Dan Gagnier, IISD, explained that the event would discuss implementation of clean energy and climate action in Canada, the US and Mexico.

Premier Jean Charest, Quebec, highlighted that state, provincial and municipal governments will be major implementers of commitments made in Copenhagen.

Gabriel Quadri, EcoSecurities, highlighted keys areas for emission reductions in Mexico, namely transport, electricity production and deforestation. Noting that deforestation is responsible for 14% of Mexico's emissions, he suggested that REDD could help Mexico and other countries find solutions to address climate change and biodiversity loss.

Premier Greg Selinger, Manitoba, said collaboration across borders facilitates uptake of efficient solutions, social justice and equity. He highlighted the potential role of cooperative initiatives, including cap-and-trade and smart grids, to address climate change. Discussing the recent EPA endangerment finding, Shalini Vajjhala, US EPA, stressed that the finding is a regulatory tool that will act as a complement, not a substitute, to climate change legislation currently under discussion in the US. She said the finding has enabled new regulations in the US, including on motor vehicle fuel efficiency and on GHG reporting.

Clare Demerse, Pembina Institute, described a joint IISD-Pembina Institute project called Clean Energy and Climate Action: A North American Collaboration. She explained that it aims to deliver an ambitious and relevant joint policy framework on clean energy among Canada, the US and Mexico, and has identified four areas of interest: carbon pricing; high-carbon fossil fuels; sustainable transportation; and sustainable electricity.

Participants discussed, among other things: the extent to which sub-national governments can act without federal support; energy- and water-related partnerships; and related sources of dispute among Mexico, the US and Canada.



Shalini Vajjhala, US EPA, called the recent endangerment finding the "scaffolding" that will enable a future market-based climate policy.

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A Regional Perspective of the Economic Impacts of Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean

Presented by Chile

Antonio Prado, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), highlighted recent economic studies conducted by ECLAC. Joseluis Samaniego, ECLAC, presented the results of a study of the economic effects of climate change in the region for different mitigation scenarios. Noting that the impacts varied across sectors, including agriculture, water and biodiversity, he said the aggregate costs of climate change are significant, and called for both global and regional climate agreements.

Ana Lya Uriarte, Minister of Environment, Chile; Luis Ferrate, Minister of Environment, Guatemala; and Juan Manuel Torres Rojo, Director-General of the National Forestry Commission, on behalf of Juan Elvira Quezada, Secretary of the Environment, Mexico, discussed the impacts of climate change in various sectors within their countries. On economic and fiscal threats, Ferrate highlighted that market economic calculations do not internalize the real value of the climate as a global public good and pointed out the risk of serious perturbation to the economy before the end of the century. He also reflected on intergenerational responsibility.

Carlos Colacce, Minister of Housing, Land Planning and Environment, Uruguay, described national plans for responding to climate change. He highlighted emergency response plans for natural disasters, and emphasized the importance of political mobilization for these strategies. He also pointed to the detrimental impacts of climate change on the economy, including through impacts of variable water flows on hydroelectric energy generation.

Luis Moreno, President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), concluded the panel by emphasizing the high vulnerability of countries in the region to climate change, including in the Andean and coastal regions. He called for cooperation, noting the role that centralized regional institutions can play.



Joseluis Samaniego, ECLAC, noted that ECLAC's study on the economic impacts of climate change contributed to building national institutional capacities.

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Climate Adaptation Continuum, Migration and Displacement - Copenhagen and Beyond

Presented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations University (UNU), and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

This session addressed the nexus of climate change, migration and the environment, focusing on the movement and displacement of people as a result of, and as an adaptation to, the impacts of climate change.

Pointing to the increased frequency of extreme weather events and to more gradual processes of environmental degradation, William Lacy Swing, IOM, said the latter are afforded less attention but will likely have the most significant impacts on the movement of people. He explained that while the movement of people in response to changes in the environment is not a new phenomenon, climate change will increase the current and future relevance of the environment as a driver of migration. Swing noted that migration can be an adaptation strategy.

Finn Tarp, UNU, stressed that there is a “triple crisis,” involving the intersection of the climate, food and financial crises, lamenting that they are being analyzed and discussed separately. He explained that people move when economic conditions become “unbearable” and when climate conditions no longer sustain livelihoods.

Rolf Vestvik, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), presented results from a recent study on migration, stating that more than 20 million people, most of whom remained within the borders of their own countries, were displaced by climate change-related sudden-onset natural disasters in 2008. He stressed the need to explicitly recognize displacement in the negotiations.

António Guterres, UNHCR, highlighted the increasing overlap between climate change impacts and conflicts as drivers of displacement, and said this makes protection for displaced persons under international law more complicated and less effective. He described research predicting that the risk of civil war might increase by 50% between 1990-2030 because of climate change, noting that climate-induced resource scarcity and competition could trigger conflicts. He said the international community must discuss additional protection instruments, including temporary protection regimes, for climate change-induced migrants.

Walter Kälin, Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons (RSG), recalled the UN’s definition of internally displaced persons (IDPs), and noted that displacement involves not only moving from one place to another but also the loss of property, livelihoods and community ties. He emphasized the need for investment in national-level disaster management systems, and said progress is possible.

Mizan Khan, Bangladesh, commented that migration can be seen as an instrument of adaptation, but also as a failure of adaptation. He encouraged further research on how to integrate the human rights and climate change regimes in light of the difficulty of disaggregating the political, economic and environmental drivers of migration.

Participants discussed, among other things: migration and international security concerns; the need for more options for legal migration; mechanisms of protection for people forced to flee; the need for funding for climate-affected areas; the problematic use of the term “refugee”; the challenges and sensitivity of incorporating migration into adaptation strategies; human rights consequences of climate change response policies; and coordinated responses by the UN system.



António Guterres, UNHCR, emphasized the “asymmetric nature of globalization,” in which capital and goods flow freely, but people face obstacles to movement.

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Rolf Vestvik, NRC, said no reliable estimates are available for the number of people displaced by slow-onset climate change-related disasters.