

UN Leaders See New Role in Accelerating Action on Climate

Warsaw, 19 November 2013—Efforts to address climate change need to be vastly scaled up, UN leaders told participants at the Warsaw Climate Conference today, and promised that UN agencies would ratchet up their work to help reduce emissions and guide adaptation efforts.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, expressing solidarity with the Philippine people struggling to overcome the devastating aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, said the tragedy “was not a wake-up call, but an alarm bell.”

“Action must be taken urgently to usher in a low-carbon economy and advance sustainable development. All efforts must be expended to conclude a legal agreement by 2015.”

The Secretary-General made the comments at a special event of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, a group that coordinates the activities of 29 funds, programmes and specialized agencies, which jointly support the efforts of countries in transitioning to sustainable economies and societies.

Conference President Martin Korolec noted the UN was working toward a new sustainable development agenda, financing for development, and a climate agreement. “The main value of the UN system is the universal framework that can be adjusted to local requirements.”

The UN has played a key role in recent years in assessing the science, promoting concerted international action through negotiations, and assisting countries at the ground level in taking action on climate change.

But the UN leaders recognized that the efforts to date were far from sufficient. The time to act is now,” said UNFCCC Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres. “The science is clear, the impacts are upon us and the opportunities are there. Why aren’t we moving? We are running out of time. You represent the action that is taking place in the year when everything must happen.”

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP, asked “how do we scale up from these pilots?” adding, “if the economics have caught up with the science, when will the finance catch up to the economics?”

“Uncertainty used to be an excuse to do nothing,” said Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization. “Greenhouse gases are at their highest concentration in 800,000 years. The IPCC report says this is attributable to human activities and the uncertainty aspect is minimal.” He stressed that actions on mitigation and adaptation needed to be informed by science, but that some countries lacked the necessary infrastructure to deliver the best information to decision-makers.

The UN is helping countries with “big picture thinking,” according to UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, who noted that environment and sustainable development — with a focus on climate change — were among the areas where countries were requesting most support from the UN system. “Countries look to the UN system to act in an integrated way on these issues.”

The World Bank also reported being inundated with client demand for help, said Rachel Kyte, Vice President, Sustainable Development Network, World Bank. “We need the right blend of fiscal policies, linked to climate projections, in order to ensure “green” public financing,” adding that, monetary and bank regulation policies were needed if funds were to be invested in areas that would lose value in decades to come.

Rene Castro Salazar, Minister of the Environment and Energy of Costa Rica, said UN assistance helped his country undertake major reforestation and sustainability projects, “UNEP brought the first wind energy project to Costa Rica and ten years later every Latin American country has this as part of the energy matrix.”

Harry Verhaar, Head of Global Public and Government Affairs at Philips Lighting said his company’s “en.lighten” initiative in partnership with UNEP, not only helped countries re-invest in other sectors, but also helped reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He noted that the increase in energy demand by a growing population was being compensated for by gains in energy efficiency as a result of the adoption of energy efficient lighting.

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