



**UNITED AMBASSADORS
MODEL UN CONFERENCE (UA-MUNC)
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE IN GENEVA, 12-15 MAY 2017
SECRETARY GENERAL REPORTS**





General Assembly

Economic and Financial Council

Distr: General
Date: 18 April 2017
Original: English

First Session
Agenda Item 2

Taking immediate, effective action against climate change while addressing the threat it poses to sustainable global development

Report of the UA-MUNC Secretary-General

SUMMARY

Pursuant to the vital General Assembly resolutions 63/32 of 28 January 2009, entitled “Protection of global climate for present and future generations” and 63/L.8 of 18 May 2009, entitled “Climate change and its possible security implications”, the present report, at the request of the Secretary-General, is based on information to be circulated to Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, and other organizations on measures to combat global warming. The report addresses current frameworks and identifies key shortcomings, considers the threats climate change poses to achieving the sustainable development goals, and makes recommendations for future actions.

Climate change has been recognized as a critical issue especially by Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which are vulnerable to increasing natural disasters and external shocks. Climate change, which is often viewed as a ‘threat multiplier’, exacerbates threats caused by persistent poverty, weak institutions for resource management and conflict resolution, political and socio-economic fault lines and a history of mistrust between communities and nations, and inadequate access to information or resources. Climate change poses an obstacle not only to ending extreme poverty (SDG 1), but also directly magnifies existing gender gaps (SDG 5). In addition, climate change poses risks to water and sanitation services (SDG 6) and effects how energy is produced, delivered and consumed (SDG 7).

This report will consider the extent to which climate change is slowing down or reversing the development process, as well as further exacerbating vulnerability and undermining the capacity of states to maintain stability. The report, which covers a list of potential threats and factors of how global warming affects the economy, encourages Member States to seek innovative solutions and come to a comprehensive, fair and effective deal that will help stabilize our climate, protect development gains, assist vulnerable nations to adapt to climate change, and build a more, sustainable and equitable society.

Beyond this, the report identifies a set of emerging climate change related challenges, problems followed by a list of recommendations. The crisis at hand illuminates the need for Member States to mobilize quickly and transcend the action taken thus far. Accordingly, this report will equip Member States with the comprehensive framework required to do so.



I. Context and concept

1. Climate change presents the single biggest threat to development, and its widespread, unprecedented impacts disproportionately burden the poorest and most vulnerable.¹
2. Moreover, climate plays an important role in shaping the environment, natural resources, infrastructure, economy, and other aspects of life in all countries of the world. Therefore, variations and changes in climate can have substantial environmental and socio-economic implications.²
3. Climate change often exacerbates disasters. Between 1990 and 2013, more than 1.6 million people died in internationally reported disasters, with annual deaths trending upwards. The European summer of 2003 was unusually hot. The prolonged and intense heat killed between 22,000 and 35,000 people, particularly elderly individuals, and caused economic losses of over USD 13 billion (IFRC, 2004).³
4. The global nature of climate change calls for broad international cooperation in (i) building resilience and adaptive capacity to tackle its adverse effects, (ii) developing sustainable low-carbon pathways to the future, and (iii) accelerating the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions.⁴
5. As climate change is already affecting the most vulnerable countries and populations, the Kyoto Protocol which was adopted in Kyoto, Japan on 11 December 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005, is an international agreement linked to the UNFCCC, which commits its Parties by setting internationally binding emission reduction targets. The Protocol places a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities."⁵
6. SDG 13 of Agenda 2030 requires urgent action to be taken to combat climate change and its impacts. This is integral to the successful achievement of the SDGs.
7. On 22 April 2016, 175 Member States signed the Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC. The new agreement aims to reduce the pace of climate change and to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future.⁶
8. The Paris Agreement⁷ entered into force on 4th November 2016. A global stocktaking was established to assess collective progress every five years. The process will begin in 2018, with a facilitative dialogue to review the efforts of parties towards emissions reductions and to inform the preparation of final nationally determined contributions.⁸

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg13>

² <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/sbsta/eng/misc21a01.pdf>

³ "The impacts of climate change on the risk of natural disasters." Maarten K. van Aalst, *Disasters* (2006), 30(1): 5-18

⁴ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2016/75&Lang=E

⁵ <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf>

⁶ http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php

⁷ http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf
<https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/handbook.pdf>

⁸ <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2017/apa/eng/info1.pdf>



II. The Economic and Financial Committee – a brief introduction

9. The Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee) is a forum for UN member states to discuss issue and possible solutions to improve national economies, the world economy, and the international financial system. The GA-2 meets each fall at the UN headquarters in New York, as well as in special sessions as deemed necessary⁹.
10. One of the major initiatives of the Second Committee has been to establish categories for the topics it addresses and to rotate consideration of those categories every other year. It is hoped this will enable the committee to focus on the most important issues, relate subsidiary issues to major topics, and create the opportunity for greater progress and implementation over time.

III. Challenges climate change poses to sustainable development¹⁰

11. The new set of 17 SDGs ranges from those that are critical to tackling poverty to those affecting natural resources. According to the evidence from the IPCC, every one of these goals could be affected by climate change, either directly or indirectly.
12. Global warming is not only a threat in itself, but a multiplier of other threats. Developing economies are more significantly impacted by climate change, and this adds to the cost of achieving the goals in these countries. Larger, more developed and diversified economies are better able to absorb climate impacts because the economic output of sectors and locations with low levels of vulnerability to climate change greatly exceeds that of sectors and locations with high levels of vulnerability¹¹.
13. Several global reports have highlighted that climate change can cause serious economic disruptions, negatively impacting growth, eroding the revenue base of governments and undermining governance capacities. Climate change may negatively affect an economy's output, as with crop losses from drought or flooding. Through its effects on nutrition and food security (SDG Target 12), the impacts in the short term can be linked to extreme weather events which contribute to casualties, household food insecurity, disease, increased population displacement and insecurity, and in the longer term, impacts on natural resources and therefore food availability and access. Climate change impacts have also contributed to land degradation (SDG Target 15.3) and damage to other natural capital and man-made infrastructure thereby diminishing an economy's productive potential.¹²
14. Sea-level rise, increased risk of extreme weather events and damage to coral reefs and other coastal ecosystems (SDG Target 14.2) will have an adverse effect on tourism and fisheries, on which many SIDS (Small Island Developing States) and other developing countries depend economically.¹³
15. The impacts of climate change on international trade (SDG Target 14) remain speculative but could be significant. Rising sea levels could require heavy investment

⁹ <http://www.un.org/ga/second/index.shtml>

¹⁰ https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg3/ipcc_wg3_ar5_full.pdf
http://www.climatechange2013.org/images/report/WGIAR5_ALL_FINAL.pdf
https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIAR5-PartA_FINAL.pdf
https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIAR5-PartB_FINAL.pdf
https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full_wcover.pdf

¹¹ http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar4_wg2_full_report.pdf

¹² http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/resources/res_pdfs/ga64/SGReport_on_climate_change_and_security.pdf

¹³ http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/cc_sids.pdf

in flood defences around ports, and major industrial installations located near such deep-water ports may need to be relocated inland. Stronger winds, storm surges and rainfall point to the need for sturdier ships and offshore oil and gas installations.¹⁴ All these factors are likely to raise transport costs. On the other hand, the melting of Arctic ice and opening of hitherto non-navigable sea lands could lower those costs for high-latitude countries.¹⁵

16. Government finances would likely be diminished if its economy depended on natural capital. As several reports have pointed out, increased climate-induced environmental stress could overstretch existing coping strategies and, in combination with a number of political, economic, and societal factors, result in:¹⁶
 - (i) growing tensions over increasingly scarce natural resources¹⁷ (SDG Target 12.1), which include the damages to forests and animals, biodiversity and water sanitation;
 - (ii) decreased state authority and increased risk of domestic strife¹⁸ (SDG Target 16.2), which has led to surges of violence and domestic assaults in India, ethnic conflict in Europe, and civil strife throughout the tropics;
 - (iii) political instability and radicalization¹⁹ (SDG Target 16), that if climate change is not brought under control, the world will face more humanitarian crises such as in Syria, which leads to violence

IV. Past international actions

17. From individual movements to political action, from the sub-national level to international agreements, most of the actions against climate change aim to build social awareness, political and financial support, and reduce the concentration of greenhouse gases. Other actions speak to the moral aspects of climate justice.
18. Many NGOs from diverse fields of work have united on this issue. A coalition of 50 NGOs launched Stop Climate Chaos in Britain in September 2005, to highlight common ground in climate change mitigation efforts. Groups such as NextGen Climate and Climate Hawks Vote are working in the US to elect officials who will make action on climate change a high priority. On the other hand, activists from organizing campaigns such as Critical Mass, Campaign against Climate Change focuses on pressuring governments into action by building a protest movement of sufficient magnitude to effect political change.
19. The Paris Agreement²⁰ is an agreement within the UNFCCC focussing on climate change mitigation, adaptation and climate finance activities until the year 2020. The language of the agreement was negotiated by representatives of 195 countries at the 21st Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (COP21) in Paris and adopted by consensus on 12 December 2015. The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Additionally, the agreement aims to strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change. To reach these ambitious goals, appropriate financial flows, a new technology framework and an enhanced capacity building framework

¹⁴ http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/08/sternreview_report_complete.pdf
"Potential impacts of climate change on trade routes and patterns." Box 5.7

¹⁵ http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_full_report.pdf

¹⁶ http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg3/ar4_wg3_full_report.pdf

¹⁷ http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar4_wg2_full_report.pdf

¹⁸ H. Buhaug et al., Implications of Climate Change for Armed Conflict, Social Dimensions of Climate Change, World Bank, 25 February 2008.

¹⁹ http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg1/ar4_wg1_full_report.pdf

²⁰ <http://bigpicture.unfccc.int/#content-the-paris-agreement>



will be put in place, thus supporting action by developing countries and the most vulnerable countries, in line with their own national objectives²¹.

20. The European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) was the first large greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme in the world, and remains the biggest. It was launched in 2005 to combat global warming²².
21. The Kyoto Protocol²³ was adopted unanimously in 1997 and it entered into force on 16 February 2005. The protocol's major feature is that it has mandatory targets on greenhouse-gas emissions for the world's leading economies, which have accepted it²⁴.

V. Recommendations and priorities for future action

In preparation for this Conference, and during Committee discussions, delegates are urged to consider the following priority areas and strategies. These should be reflected in the Committee's outcomes, as well as in the development and implementation of national adaptation policies and programmes ²⁵.

1. Promoting the integration of a gender perspective into environmental and climate change policies, strengthening mechanisms and providing adequate resources towards achieving the full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels on environmental issues²⁶;
2. Further strengthening collaborative efforts at all levels
3. Priority areas for future action:²⁷
 - (i) Supporting transformative policies and strengthening institutions
Member States should increase resilience and achieve climate commitments by enabling a policy and investment environment and institutions to implement deep economic transformations
 - (ii) Leveraging resources
Delivering on climate ambitions will require significant increases in investments in resilient and low-carbon infrastructure, in the context of pre-existing gaps in financing
 - (iii) Scaling up climate action
It is important to deepen and scale up the action plan into high-impact areas so each area can be selected and prioritised into future actions
 - (iv) Working with others and aligning internal processes and organizations
Member States are recommended to seek other partnerships in the climate change domain

²¹ http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php

²² https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/ets_en

²³ <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf>

²⁴ http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/background/items/2879.php

²⁵ <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/smsn/igo/054.pdf>

²⁶ "Sustainable development: protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind"
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/472/Add.4&Lang=E

²⁷ <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/677331460056382875/WBG-Climate-Change-Action-Plan-public-version.pdf>



4. Climate financing: strategies moving forward must recognize the importance of mobilizing funding from a variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, including innovative sources of finance, to support nationally appropriate mitigation actions, adaptation measures, technology development and transfer and capacity-building in developing countries²⁸.
5. Existing commitments: parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Kyoto Protocol must continue to work towards the full implementation of their commitments, as well as decisions adopted under those agreements, in order to build upon progress achieved thus far.²⁹
6. This Conference will focus on both climate change mitigation³⁰ which refers to efforts to reduce or prevent the emission of greenhouse gases, and adaptation³¹ which involves adjusting to actual or expected future climatic conditions.

VI. Questions to Consider

The following questions should be used as a guide for your research, as you write your position papers and prepare for the Conference. These questions will also serve as a launchpad for our committee discussions, helping us focus on devising innovative, concrete solutions to tackling climate change and the threats it poses to sustainable global development.

1. Does the Paris Agreement go far enough in terms of commitments from member states on adaptation and mitigation efforts? How much progress has your country made in implementing measures agreed upon under the Paris Agreement?
2. What have we learned from the negotiations of the Paris Agreement? How can we improve upon commitments under the Agreement in the upcoming years? Are there any dimensions of the issue that were left out of the Paris Agreement?
3. How can we strengthen existing international efforts on climate change? Does your country have any innovative solutions (at the local, national, regional, international levels) to addressing climate change impacts that would build on existing international commitments such as the Paris Agreement? (Here be specific on particular innovations/solutions your country is currently exploring to address the impacts of climate change – this could range from clean energy to building more resilient cities to innovative design for coastal areas etc....)
4. What specific threats is climate change posing to the achievement of the SDGs in your country? Detail particular goals, and the impacts of climate change on the achievement of these individual goals.
5. As countries work to implement their commitments under the Paris Agreement (and prior climate agreements e.g. Kyoto), what possible tensions might arise between implementation of these commitments, and the achievement of the SDGs? (i.e. is the implementation of particular mitigation or adaptation strategies having/expected to have negative impacts on efforts already underway in your country to advance the SDGs?)

²⁸ http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/WYR2010Final_online_version.pdf

²⁹ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/Go4/617/20/PDF/Go461720.pdf>

³⁰ <http://web.unep.org/climatechange/mitigation/>

³¹ <http://web.unep.org/climatechange/adaptation/>



How do we ensure that particular mitigation or adaptation efforts, contribute both to commitments under the Paris Agreement, and at the same time, the advancement of the 2030 Agenda? E.g. consider a water infrastructure project in your country contributing to climate change adaptation efforts along a coastline – how is it positively/negatively contributing to furthering SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), and other SDGs?

6. Climate Change is a cross-cutting issue: essentially, no SDG can be achieved without considering the links with climate change. As you research, consider what measures we should take, and what strategies we should implement to ensure that climate change is treated as a cross-cutting issue across our efforts to achieve the various SDGs and their targets.

Consider importantly:

What are the connections between gender equality (SDG 5) and climate action? How can the work on closing the gender gap contribute positively to actions to combat climate change and its impacts, and vice versa?

What are the connections between climate action and SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation)?

Why is combating climate change and its impacts, crucial to building peaceful and just societies (SDG 16)

Why is it so important we tackle these goals together? What is your country doing in this regard?

What strategies should be adopted at the local, national, regional and international levels to further existing efforts on these goals in a collaborative manner? (Here you can also consider links between other goals and actions to combat climate change)



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VIII. Further Reading

Recommended sources for further reading include but are not limited to the UNDESA, UNFCCC, UNEP, UNDP and IPCC, COP Global Reports referenced in this SG report, as well as reports drafted by other organizations such as the United States Government, Asia and the Pacific and the aforementioned NGOs.

Moreover, of course, it is strongly recommended to review and reference the UN climate change frameworks and resolutions that have been cited throughout this report.

http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_and_data_reports.shtml

These are published materials composed of the full scientific and technical assessments of climate change, generally in three volumes, one for each of the Working Groups of the IPCC

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/climate-and-disaster-resilience/climate-change.html>

UNDP's main page including recent updates on climate change and connected issues

<http://web.unep.org/climatechange/> (UNEP)

UNEP's main page on climate change

<http://newsroom.unfccc.int/>

UNFCCC and the updates on COP 22