



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

24 July 2015

Excellency,

I have the honour to transmit herewith a Summary of the key messages, initiatives and proposals from the High-Level Event on Climate Change which I convened on 29-30 June 2015, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam K. Kutesa', with a large, stylized initial 'S' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Sam K. Kutesa

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York

# High-Level Event on Climate Change

29-30 June 2015

United Nations Headquarters

## President's Summary

### Introduction

The President of the General Assembly convened a High-level Event on Climate Change on 29-30 June 2015. The main objective of the Event was to contribute to building political momentum for an ambitious climate agreement, by keeping the issue high on the agenda at the mid-point between the twentieth and twenty-first Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Lima, Peru and Paris, France respectively. It also aimed at providing a platform for Member States and relevant stakeholders to make concrete announcements and commitments to address the issue of climate change.

The High-level Event consisted of an opening segment, two Panel discussions focusing on the following themes: “*Mobilizing political momentum for ambitious actions on mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation*” and “*Mobilizing stakeholders for ambitious actions on mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation*” respectively; and a closing segment.

### Key messages, initiatives and recommendations

The following is a summary of key messages, initiatives and recommendations from the Event.

1. Participants noted that the High-level event provided a unique opportunity to take stock of the progress made and to provide momentum towards reaching a universal climate agreement at COP21, in December in Paris. They underscored that not a single citizen, nation, or eco-system is immune to the devastating impacts of climate change, which affects indiscriminately all countries and peoples, albeit its impacts are much more pronounced on the most vulnerable including women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly.
2. Speakers pointed out that many regions of the world have suffered from the adverse impacts of climate change, including persistent droughts, flooding, rising sea levels, coastal erosion and ocean acidification, ferocious storms and unprecedented heat waves, which have claimed many lives. They stressed that the foregoing impacts, among others, further threaten food security, water, energy and health. Speakers referred to Africa and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which contribute less but suffer most from the devastating impacts of climate change. Likewise, speakers noted the particular vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), especially the threat of rising sea-level, which requires urgent action to prevent coastal erosion, encroachment of fresh water sources and the destruction of marine eco-systems. They called for urgent measures to support their adaptation efforts.
3. Participants underscored that 2015 is a crucial year for the global sustainable development agenda and for the future of planet Earth, and noted that it is fitting that climate change is among the priorities for the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly, as it requires urgent global action.

They stressed that while the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be seen as the new “investments pipeline” for both the public and the private sector, on core priority issues that include essential areas for tackling climate change, the climate agenda will mobilize public and private financing for projects that contribute to the achievement of many other SDGs.

4. Speakers underlined the need to act with wisdom and urgency in order to fulfill a long-term vision of achieving climate neutrality and success for both the Post-2015 development and climate agendas, while providing a clear framework for means of implementation. They noted in this regard that adoption of an ambitious financing for development outcome FFD outcome in July in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and a successful post-2015 development agenda Summit in New York in September as well as the conclusion of a global climate change agreement in December will be monumental milestones towards improving the livelihoods of people around the world. As such, they underscored that climate change must continue to feature prominently in all of these multilateral processes. They also called on governments and other stakeholders to promote an inclusive, people-centered and transparent process that would make Paris a success.

5. Many speakers welcomed the growing commitments from many governments around the world and from other stakeholders to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They acknowledged in particular ambitious climate action announcements by the world’s biggest emitters. Developing countries that are Parties to the UNFCCC and that have submitted their intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) were also commended. States Parties that have not yet submitted theirs were urged to do so at the earliest opportunity. It was underscored that while INDCs merely provide a floor rather than a ceiling for ambition, they were critical for building trust. Speakers underlined in this regard that ambitious INDCs should meet the target of keeping the global temperature rise below 2° C. Many delegations informed that their Governments are willing to submit their INDCs before the Paris Conference as agreed, and that some of these contributions are in final stages of preparation.

6. Many participants underscored the urgency of concluding an ambitious, legally binding, balanced and rules-based agreement under the UNFCCC in Paris. They underlined that the Paris agreement would need to strike a balance on all key issues, including adaptation, mitigation and means of implementation; and uphold principles of *equity* and *common but differentiated responsibility*. Moreover, it should establish a mechanism for measuring and monitoring progress, in an open and transparent manner, showing efforts made by Parties in terms of mitigation, adaptation as well as the provision of adequate means of implementation. It should also ensure that each Party contributes to the achievement of the agreed objectives and targets, within the principles and provisions of the Convention.

7. With only 5 months until the COP21, Heads of State and Governments, as well as Ministers, were called upon to give political direction to their negotiators in the UNFCCC process in order to be successful in reaching a durable, comprehensive, flexible and scientifically based agreement, with nationally determined targets and objectives. Speakers also underlined the importance of transforming political will into leadership, while building trust and confidence in the process leading up to the post-2020 period. In this regard, they stressed that the agreement for the post-2020 period must be matched with a strong dedication to scaling up ambitious solutions in the pre-2020 period.

Participants noted that such an agreement would steer countries into a low-carbon emission and highly resilient global economy. They expressed optimism and underlined the importance of accelerating negotiations, with a view to finalizing an agreement in Paris. Other speakers reminded that Paris is not the ultimate goal in itself, but a milestone towards achieving the goal of limiting the increase in global average temperature to less than 2° C, or 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels.

8. Many participants highlighted the importance of differentiation of responsibilities and urged each party to offer a fair share of its mitigation and adaptation measures. They also recalled that since the new agreement would fall under the UNFCCC framework, it would need to honour and facilitate the implementation of commitments already undertaken, within the principles of the Convention, including the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, and equity. They acknowledged in this regard, the important role of developed countries in leading these efforts.

9. Speakers pointed out the challenge of concerted global action for emissions reduction while allowing space for eradication of poverty and promoting growth in developing countries. They noted that the process will offer an opportunity to guide the international community on a collective path to sustainable development. Many delegations made presentations on their national efforts and policies in terms of achieving their targets of reducing the emissions intensity. They also identified areas for actions, including investment in sustainable land management, transport, promotion of sustainable energy options, such as renewable energy, elimination of fossil fuels subsidies, as well as the reduction of deforestation, and the use of forests as an asset for sustainable development.

10. Participants also underlined the critical importance of resilience to addressing climate change impact and risk. They stressed, in this regard, that Paris would play a major role in making sure that adaptation is addressed, through identifying adequate strategies and actions to enhance resilience capabilities to the adverse impacts of climate change. They noted further that addressing loss and damage associated with climate change, particularly in the most vulnerable countries is crucial, including thorough an effective operationalization of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage.

11. Speakers emphasized that the efforts of developing countries towards mitigation, adaptation and building resilience would require international financial, technological support and capacity building. In this regard, they welcomed the initial capitalization of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and underscored that in the context of the Paris Conference, pledges would need to be translated into concrete climate projects. Similarly, several speakers emphasized the need for the GCF to approve concrete projects and disburse available funds to developing countries, with a particular focus on LDCs, SIDS and Africa, as soon as possible.

12. Participants underlined the need to scale up finance mobilization in order to forge a credible and effective pathway and trajectory to mobilize the 100 billion USD annually by 2020, including in terms of the public finance component, to support efforts of developing countries. They also stressed the critical importance of continued mobilization of finances from a variety of sources, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, including innovative sources of finance towards a low-carbon world.

They noted in this regard that new opportunities must be identified to reinvigorate interest in public-private-partnerships and for initiatives to leverage technical support and financial resources for a wide range of actions worldwide.

13. Speakers underscored that the poor and vulnerable are severely affected by the impacts of climate change. They suggested therefore that these should be prioritized and assisted, including through the adoption of gender sensitive climate action; while also taking into account the challenges of accessibility and the translation of pledges into effective support. Speakers also stressed that any assistance should not be eroded in the process of getting to its intended destination.

14. Participants emphasized that current technologies and business-as-usual technological advances are not adequate to deliver a low-carbon transition at the scale and pace required to stay within the 2°C target. They suggested that there should be faster increases in performance standards in technologies as well as reductions in capital and operating costs. They noted that delivering these improvements would require leadership and improved international collaboration from governments, business and scientific community. In this vein, they welcomed the establishment of the Technology Mechanism under the UNFCCC and expressed appreciation for the work conducted by the Technology Executive Committee (TEC) and the Climate Technology Center and Network (CTCN). Nevertheless, they considered that the current institutional arrangements on technology development and transfer under the UNFCCC did not allow for adequate provision of implementation funding for sustainable access to technology development and transfer in developing countries.

15. Speakers stressed that finding solutions to address climate change, including in the context of the SDGs and the UNFCCC is no longer a responsibility confined to governments alone, but one that involves many stakeholders. They highlighted therefore, the need to embrace robust partnerships to address the challenges posed by climate change, including with the active engagement of the civil society, private sector, the scientific community, and by creating an enabling environment and availing appropriate incentives. In view of this, they noted that the Lima-Paris Action Agenda is an essential component and a platform in the creation of synergies of efforts between States, cities and regions as well as companies and investors and other relevant actors.

16. Speakers underscored the strong potential of sustainable land management and restoration of degraded land, which can ensure food security, increase resilience of the most vulnerable people and eco-systems and enhance adaptation capabilities, while contributing to the sequestration of carbon dioxide. In this context, they stressed the need to work towards achieving the target of land degradation neutrality by 2030. Some speakers also stressed that smallholder farmers are a key part of the solution to the climate change challenge, if provided with adequate support as well as the right investments and incentives. They underlined that reducing environmental degradation would require the human community to seriously review the dominant models of production and consumption.

17. Many speakers underlined the need to address energy, which is a big contributor to global GHG emissions, through achieving a fundamental transformation of global energy systems, while taking into account national circumstances and needs of different countries.

They acknowledged the recent advancements in the renewable energy sector in many parts of the world and noted that during the last few years, renewable energy contribution has increased – wind, solar and geothermal generation are cost competitive with other forms of energy, creating further opportunities. Speakers noted that the expansion of renewable energy in tandem with energy efficiency measures and the reduction of fossil fuels subsidies would be an important contribution to limit the global temperatures below 2° C. To this end, they encouraged increased investment in new research, with a view to boosting the potential for economic growth and poverty eradication as mutually reinforcing endeavors. Likewise, they emphasized the need for the provision of adequate financial support as well as technology transfer and capacity building for developing countries.

18. Some participants noted that prices of renewable energy sources are falling dramatically and investors are starting to integrate climate risk into their decision-making. Moreover, some leaders from across government and business sector are sending a clear message to the world that climate change is a risk that cannot be ignored and subsequently, it is necessary to put a price on carbon. They noted, in this regard, that carbon pricing, if expanded, would have the potential of bringing down emissions in a way that supports clean energy and low-carbon growth while giving businesses the flexibility to innovate and find the most efficient choices. In this context, some participants stressed that developing a mechanism for carbon pricing is very important in the context of the Paris agreement.

19. Participants emphasized that religious leaders have an important role to play in lending their moral voice towards addressing climate change. In this regard, many participants welcomed His Holiness Pope Francis's Encyclical letter, which highlights that climate change is a global common challenge that needs to be urgently addressed. They noted that the Pope called for action and reminded the whole humanity of the moral imperative of acting on climate change, which is a global problem with serious implications. Furthermore, the Pope pointed out that lack of effective responses to tragedies involving and affecting people around the world demonstrates a loss of moral obligation. As such he encouraged nations and communities to make courageous choices aimed at reversing the trend of global warming and reducing the negative impact of climate change.

20. The speakers further welcomed the important role played by the civil society. A youth representative gave a passionate presentation, which noted that every generation leaves behind a mark on the planet, and that this generation, which is at a tipping point, would either be remembered for destroying or preserving the Earth. As such, he pointed out that we are being called upon to use our creativity and our passion to preserve the planet.

21. The High Level event constituted also an opportunity for many delegations and other actors to make announcements and inform about initiatives; namely:

- The PGA-elect for the 70th session announced that if deemed beneficial to the negotiations, he is willing to convene another High-level meeting in November, before COP 21 in Paris. Furthermore, a High Level event on the implementation of the SDGs will be convened in April 2016, which will catalyze climate action as one important

component. Some speakers also announced their intention to convene other events related to climate change.

- Some delegations informed of their financial pledges to the Green Climate Fund as well as their intentions for future contributions. Furthermore, many speakers stressed the need to enhance South-South and triangular cooperation, including through the provision of appropriate financial support.
- Many delegations announced their intention to submit soon their INDCs. They made announcement of their emission reduction targets, trajectory as well as policies and actions to achieve it. This included investments in the development of renewable energy and the creation of appropriate incentives.
- Some speakers proposed a global partnership on renewable energy, which would include an initiative between developed and developing countries as well as other relevant stakeholders such as UN agencies, development banks and the private sector.
- Many other initiatives were presented, including inter alia: “SIDS Lighthouse initiative”, “The Africa clean energy corridor”, “Global Geothermal Alliance”, “The G7 climate risk insurance for the most vulnerable countries”, “The World Bank Carbon Pricing initiative”, “One hundred Smart Cities’ as well as the creation of clubs of countries, cities and businesses around different objectives such as carbon pricing and green technologies.

## **Conclusion**

The High Level Event on Climate Change provided a unique opportunity for Member States and other relevant stakeholders to exchange views on the progress made in the ongoing process under the UNFCCC, and to build the much needed political momentum ahead of Paris in order to speed up negotiations towards adopting a new, ambitious and universally binding agreement. The urgent need to engage in a constructive spirit and make the needed compromises in order to meet the high expectations was highlighted. In this regard, it was underscored that making significant progress in the next two negotiating sessions would be crucial.