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IPCC agrees on Acting Chair after R.K. Pachauri steps down

NAIROBI, Feb 24 – The Bureau of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) agreed on Tuesday, in accordance with its procedures, to designate Vice-Chair Ismail El Gizouli as Acting IPCC Chair. The designation of El Gizouli follows the decision by Rajendra K Pachauri, PhD, to step down as Chairman of the IPCC effective today.

The decision to name El Gizouli was taken at a Session of the Bureau ahead of the 41st Session of the IPCC, which is being held on 24-27 February 2015.

“The actions taken today will ensure that the IPCC’s mission to assess climate change continues without interruption,” said Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), who facilitated the Bureau meeting. “We look forward to a productive session in Nairobi this week.”

Elections for a new Bureau, including the IPCC Chair, for the next assessment cycle are already scheduled at the 42nd Session of the IPCC in October 2015.

Dr Pachauri was elected to the first of two terms as Chair of the IPCC in April 2002 and had been scheduled to complete his second term in October.

Among other questions to be dealt with by this week’s Session, the Panel will consider the recommendations of the Task Group on the Future Work of the IPCC, and take decisions on the size, structure and composition of the IPCC Bureau and any Task Force Bureau.

This is the first meeting of the IPCC since the IPCC completed the Fifth Assessment Report. It will help determine how the IPCC works in future, the kind of reports it produces and how it can draw on the contributions of all its members.

The 41st Session of the Panel is being held at the United Nations office in Nairobi, Kenya, and is being hosted by UNEP, one of the IPCC’s two sponsoring organizations, together with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Information about the IPCC’s election procedures can be found here:
<http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/ipcc-principles/ipcc-principles-elections-rules.pdf>

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Notes for editors

What is the IPCC?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the world body for assessing the science related to climate change. The IPCC was set up in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly, to provide policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.

The members of the IPCC, comprising the Panel, are its 195 member governments. They work by consensus to endorse the reports of the IPCC and set its procedures and budget in plenary meetings of the Panel. The word “Intergovernmental” in the organization’s name reflects this. It is not a United Nations agency, but is sponsored by two UN organizations – WMO and UNEP.

The Bureau is composed of senior elected officials of the IPCC. The Bureau provides guidance to the Panel on the scientific and technical aspects of the Panel’s work, advises it on related management and strategic issues, and takes decisions on specific issues within its mandate. Its terms of reference can be found here: http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/tor/TOR_Bureau.pdf . The Bureau is elected for a term of usually five-seven years during which the IPCC produces an assessment report and other products.

The IPCC does not do its own research, conduct climate measurements or produce its own climate models; it assesses the thousands of scientific papers published each year to tell policymakers what we know and don’t know about the risks related to climate change. The IPCC identifies where there is agreement in the scientific community, where there are differences of opinion, and where further research is needed.

Thus the IPCC offers policymakers a snapshot of what the scientific community understands about climate change rather than promoting a particular view. IPCC reports are policy-relevant without being policy-prescriptive. The IPCC may set out options for policymakers to choose from in pursuit of goals decided by policymakers, but it does not tell governments what to do.

To produce its reports, the IPCC mobilizes hundreds of scientists who – like the Chair and other elected officials – work as volunteers. These scientists and officials are drawn from diverse backgrounds. They are not paid for their work at the IPCC. Only a dozen permanent staff work in the IPCC’s Secretariat.

IPCC reports are requested by the member governments and developed by authors drawn from the scientific community in an extensive process of repeated drafting and review. Scientists and other experts participate in this review process through a self-declaration of expertise. The Panel endorses these reports in a dialogue between the governments that request the reports and will work with them and the scientists that write them. In this discussion the scientists have the last word on any additions or changes, although the Panel may agree by consensus to delete something.

The Fifth Assessment Report

The IPCC produces comprehensive assessment reports on climate change every six years or so. Among its other products it also issues special reports on particular topics requested by its members, and methodology reports and software to help members report their greenhouse gas inventories (emissions minus removals).

The IPCC completed the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) with the release of the Synthesis Report on 2 November 2014. AR5 is the most comprehensive assessment of climate change ever undertaken. Over 830 scientists from over 80 countries were selected to form the author teams producing the report. They in turn drew on the work of over 1,000 contributing authors and over 1,000 expert reviewers. AR5 assessed over 30,000 scientific papers.

Besides the Synthesis Report, AR5 includes the contributions of IPCC Working Group I (the physical science basis of climate change), finalized in September 2013, of Working Group II (impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability), finalized in March 2014, and of Working Group III (mitigation of climate change), finalized in April 2014.

The Synthesis Report distills, synthesizes and integrates the findings of the working group contributions into a concise document. This integrated approach allows the Synthesis Report to draw together the assessment of past changes in climate as well as projections for the future from the three working group reports as well as the two Special Reports brought out in 2011. It covers both adaptation and mitigation to provide an overview of possible risks and solutions.

Future work of the IPCC

At the conclusion of each assessment cycle, the IPCC generally reflects on the report preparation process and draws lessons to inform consideration of the IPCC's future work programme and processes. This can include examining questions such as the mandate of the IPCC working groups, the structure and scope of future reports, and the timing of IPCC products.

In October 2013 the Panel set up a Task Group to help the IPCC continue to improve its operation and products. The Task Group was asked to develop options and recommendations for consideration by the Panel on future products of the IPCC, the appropriate structure and ways of operating for the production of these products, and ways to enhance the participation and contribution of developing countries in the future work of the IPCC.

This process will be completed at the 41st Session of the IPCC on 24-27 February 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya, when, according to IPCC procedures, the Panel will have to agree on the size, structure and composition of the next IPCC Bureau, to be elected later in 2015.