

**Speech by Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of
the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to the 20th Anniversary of the
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).**

31 August, 2008 Geneva-It was 1988 and a leap year: the Summer Olympics games were held in Seoul; the first Fair Trade label was launched in the Netherlands and UN Peacekeepers won the Nobel Peace Prize.

But perhaps one of the greatest leaps occurred not in time but in environmental science with the establishment by UNEP and the World Meteorological Organisation of the IPCC.

Over 20 years, thousands of scientists have selflessly come together to periodically sift, to weigh and to validate the scientific evidence on the links between rising greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on the global climate.

- The likely impacts too of climate change on humans and vital ecosystems from glaciers and forests to river systems and coastal settlements.
- And increasingly, the price tag of lethargy and indifference if these emissions are left unchecked.
- Contrasting too with the likely economic benefits of swift and decisive action-- and adaptation-- to this most over arching of human-made threats.

In doing so the IPCC has put the sharpest and most potent lens possible on the unsustainable development paths of the past few centuries.

It has also however shone a bright light on the choices and down the path to the opportunities we have for a greener, fairer and ultimately more sustainable world.

The fourth assessment report, launched last year, was a milestone and was crowned with the IPCC being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

It was a prize not just for the fourth assessment and the current and past Panel scientists but also for the previous and current Chair Dr Pachauri and his staff.

For undoubtedly the findings rolled out in 2007 underlined that climate change is an environmental change phenomenon but one that goes to the core of the UN's mandate.

A point recognized not just by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee but in the statements by retired and serving senior-ranking military in Australia, the United States, the UK and elsewhere.

Undoubtedly the IPCC science also underpinned and fostered the UN Security Council debate in April 2007 when it held its first ever discussion on climate change, peace and security.

In recognizing all this we must also recognize two very special people--Mostafa Tolba and Godwin Olu Patrick Obasi who, as heads of their respective UN agencies in 1988 had the vision and the determination to establish the IPCC.

Indeed one wonders whether the Kyoto Protocol, its inventive market mechanisms and the current UN Framework Convention negotiations towards a post 2102 regime, would even be a reality if it had not been for foresight of these two parents of the Panel.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a mark of the Panel's veracity, transparency and courage that such an active and wide-ranging political process is underway and that the debate is on how to deal with climate change not whether it is a reality or a chimera—that has been empirically and scientifically laid to rest.

It would be an even greater tribute to the Panel's scientists, both past and present, if governments can find their own courage, tenacity and collective will to rise above their differences and seize the moment.

There are just some 500 days for governments to deliver what the world is waiting for in Copenhagen in 2009—the facts and figures from IPCC delivered in 2007, and which powered the Bali climate convention meeting into high gear, remain as valid and as sobering today as they did just over six months ago.

Indeed the science emerging recently from a wide variety of respected institutes is in many ways even more sobering and certainly not less.

So there is no need to idle, slide into reverse or take detours on the Bali Road Map—there is a need to find the highest gear possible to speed all countries on their way to a landmark deal.

What of the future?

It is clear that there is an urgent need to translate the IPCC's global and regional assessments onto the sub-national, national and even local level in order to focus developing country and donor country efforts on climate-proofing vulnerable economies.

So I am delighted to that UNEP is now cooperating with the IPCC and other partners on a European Commission-funded project with these very aims.

It is part of a wider effort of outreach aimed at bridging the knowledge gap on the implications and actions needed as a result of the fourth assessment reports.

Under this umbrella UNEP is taking a lead in the next phase of the Assessments of Impacts and Adaptation of Climate Change --with the guidance and assistance of you: the current IPCC scientists.

This is aimed at encouraging the research of the future IPCC scientists from developing countries while bringing focus to impacts and thus adaptation measures at the level of the ecosystem and river catchment basin.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are here to celebrate 20 years of the IPCC—its place in the history books is clear in terms of climate science.

The final entry as a result of the Panel’s work may however prove to be far larger.

For if that science can be fully and frankly translated into political action we will have gone a long way to not only overcoming climate change.

The international community will have also embarked on a path that will also address other persistent and emerging concerns-- from overcoming poverty and biodiversity loss to one where tensions and conflicts over scarce resources can at best be managed and at the very best, overcome.

Science is knowledge and thus it is power but also empowerment of politicians, business men and woman, civic leaders, the UN and the public.

The dictionary defines an imperative as a “plea”; a “duty”; something that is “impossible to evade or ignore” and an “obligation”.

This is what the IPCC has handed to this generation of presidents, prime ministers and politicians, indeed to this generation overall—facts and figures that cannot be ignored and a duty and an obligation to act, and to act fast.

Thank you