

Development and Climate Change

By

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Madam President, your Excellencies, honored guests and friends.

Like many of you here in this room, I come before you today as someone who has spent a lifetime focused on crises, even as a child in the Middle East when I was evacuated at night in a war. Nothing focuses the mind better than a bullet landing close to your head. You begin to ask “why did that happen, and can I do something about it?”

A failure to ask questions like that is an invitation to have the problem get worse or repeat itself; so that event led to a career of examining emergencies and trying to drive action.

Today, the planet is in dire danger; and there is no doubt as to why. What is missing is an agreed framework for action between civil society, governments and industry as relates to development.

Symbols are useful when thinking of public policy. Consider the Polar Bear. In a few weeks, the king of the Arctic will be declared endangered or threatened in the United States under the Endangered Species Act; but the truth is that unless the current Arctic ice melt is reversed, they will be extinct in Alaska by 2050.

Now consider the indigenous people that ring the arctic circle. They depend on Arctic fish and mammals for food, for clothing – for their very culture. So we are also talking about the eventual extinction of a group of vibrant cultures unless we take new decisive development policies that help them adapt.

Most of the crises I’ve studied were caused by a failure to seek understanding or adapt, such as in war and other forms of conflict.

Certainly with climate change, this is true since the forces at work are mainly anthropogenic – caused by man’s failure to adapt to the rules of nature.

Everything about our development policies the search for food on land and in the ocean, early warning science, development policies, agriculture, economic investment and risk reduction strategies, sometimes even religion – all “human centric.” Did you know by the way that the gasses from Mr. Ford’s Model T’s still roam the air and might be in this room right now. Emissions last.

200 years of industrial development have brought great prosperity to be sure; but because we have always used unsustainable development policies that are not Earth-centric, we now risk our very existence as a species – to say nothing of the other species, like our friend the polar bear.

Behind me on the screen is the home page of ClimateCaucus.net, introduced earlier by my good friend, Jeffery Huffines. It is one of a number of efforts by civil society to Advocate for political change.

At the 60th DPI/NGO Conference hosted by the UN Department of Public Information in New York last September, we focused on Climate Change and drafted a Declaration calling for action – the first time such a Declaration had come out of these conferences since the founding of the UN. Usually people come and talk, share information and then leave. We chose to take responsibility for past policies and seek new ones.

Climatecaucus.net is a tool. It allows civil society to identify what it is already doing to fight climate change -- individual responsibility - - as well as what more must be done on clean up, risk reduction and advocacy.

That analysis will be transformed into recommendations in a report to the Secretary General of the United Nations, which he has agreed to receive in about 12 months. I invite all of you to participate.

Working Group will manage the effort by focusing on topics impacted by climate change, gender, fire, animal welfare, water and the indigenous, many others. All of this relates to development. For more information, go to www.climatecaucus.net.

Climatecaucus.net will also be a permanent location for networking on climate change – not to replace other networks; instead, we hope to stimulate the creation of networks and augment those now in existence as full partners. We want the gender community to talk to the water community, and the water folks to talk to the indigenous NGO community, etc. No stovepipes, only horizontal communication.

Good development of course requires that we also work with those who don't agree with us. Some people honestly worry that a green economy will hurt jobs and retirements. Many with huge energy demands are genuinely not convinced that green technologies are ready to replace oil, gas and coal. Some have proposed nuclear power as an alternative; but that has its own safety and political problems.

In my opinion, the inherent human inventiveness that built the industrial revolution will provide us the scientific discovery required to solve climate change if we make the investments, and we must not only because of the long-term threat to the climate but because oil wells and nuclear reactors pose threats as well in their own rights from spills and leaks. All we need is a political framework for action, and success will happen, jobs will grow, new, commercial and business opportunities. We know from the Stern Report and the work of Al Gore and others that this is apt to be true -- that while we need to phase out troublesome technologies, we also do not want to shock the world economy. Instead, we are talking about the sensible evolution of development policy.

We have to do two things at a minimum.

First of all, we must minimize pollution and advocate for investments in green technologies – as well as a sharing of those technologies with the developing world. I happen to believe we also need a carbon tax and carbon trading so that there is a price on carbon.

Our development loans and grants need to force a cap and a declining rate on green house gases, such as done by California and NY. The truth is we are making unsustainable demands on energy in part because we allow our population to rise beyond sustainable levels. How many humans do we need on Earth? And how much do we really need in the way of energy? There must be a price.

Second, climate change is here. No matter what we do today to end harmful emissions, we will still see rising oceans, more bad storms, more droughts and more misery unless we immediately alter our development policies and invest in sustainable infrastructure and sustainable agriculture for example.

The need is critical. BY 2099 we may see:

- A reduction by half in water in southern Africa and the Mediterranean.
- A significant drop in marine species and African agricultural decline by perhaps 35%
- Perhaps another 80 million Africans exposed to malaria.
- Perhaps 300 million people affected by coastal flooding.
- Hundreds of millions of migrants forced from home by disasters.
- Entire island nations destroyed.

How about the marine food chain. We already know that changes in the ocean temperature kill off food stock. Small fish die, starving middle sized ones, starving off larger ones, which means humans go hungry. Also with our rising population, demand for fish is up, so at the same time the ocean is changing for the worse, we over-fish. Atlantic Blue Fin Tuna, a favorite for sushi, is bordering on collapse because of a perfect storm of over fishing and changes in the ocean. We need to adapt.

The entire planet is vulnerable to climate change; but the poorest nations are most vulnerable, precisely because lack of resources means an inability to build a disaster resistant society.

In addition, their economies are often based on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture, livestock and fishing. These nations have a responsibility to spend money wisely; but if we really want the south to develop, then climate change must be part of every development package so that their economic sectors are more disaster resistant and don't pollute.

In other words, we need to increase overseas development assistance as part of a grand bargain that preserves sustainable agriculture and other economic factors.

I recommend investments in sustainable infrastructure, and investments in flood and drought resistant crops. In addition, we need to avoid intensive farming, advancing instead free range techniques.

Climatecaucus.net has a fire chapter which is looking into the pollution caused by wild fires. We must curb deforestation, whether from fires or industry as a tool to curb emissions.

It is worth noting that of Earth's billion poorest people, fully 800 million totally depend on animals for a living. Most are in southern economies in remote rural locations or increasingly in squatter slums.

If they lose their animals, 800 million people move from poverty to desperation. Hundreds of millions more of course depend on animals for food or cultural identification. Ladies and gentlemen, those animals are directly threatened by the impact of climate change, from being flooded in low lying areas, from being crushed in shelters blown down by storms, from dying a slow, terrible death for lack of water.

A failure to include sustainable animal care in our development policies will endanger entire cultures like the people of Bangladesh, Darfur, the Kenyan Highlands or in my own country the Navajo Indians.

This brings me back my call for us to be Ambassadors for Action on Climate Change. We are civil society after all. Governments work for us, not the other way round. We have a legitimate role – more than that, we have a duty to influence development policy in inter-governmental and associated United Nations bodies, as well as National and local governments.

We also have an advantage because we can reach down to the local level and force a bottom up strategy. It really is the only way to guarantee sustainable development; by pulling in local populations.

We know with virtual certainty that natural climate variability isn't causing the current crisis. The models have proved it.

Greenhouse gasses last for decades, even centuries. Some last for thousands of years. I like thinking about climate change as a disaster management topic; disasters are dramatic and drama moves politicians.

It has been said that_ 70% of natural disasters are attributed to climate-related hazards (droughts, floods, windstorms) with global climate change expected to increase the intensity and frequency of these hazards. Believe it.

But getting on the right course will be slow. Think of Earth's climate as a super tanker. It is very hard to steer because of its size. Our super tanker is on a collision course with a Tipping Point where the climate goes out of control – so much warming that the ice sheets disintegrate. It might happen by the end of the century and the last time the poles were that warm was 125,000 years ago. That could bring ocean rises of 6 to 12 inches. The Journal of Science thinks it will be worse.

Think of lost island nations! Much of Bangladesh gone. Goodbye Florida, Hong Kong, Tokyo, New York, as we know them. Development clearly will mean investments in green technologies; but because the crisis is already upon us, it also means spending billions to keep the water away and make cities resistant to high winds and storm surges. We don't know if there will be more hurricanes, but they will get worse. Katrina will happen again.

So in conclusion ladies and gentlemen, my message verifies what you already know – that our planet is in peril; but I am optimistic. No one country or NGO can resolve climate change. It has no definable boundaries. What is needed is a partnership between governments, NGO's, academia and industry to seek common development policies for our common good. If we work together and are sensitive to the cultures and political forces involved, we can save our planet and its many species. Otherwise, we all fail.

Thank you very much.

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