

PATHWAYS TO PEACE (PTP)

Summary Report on the United Nations

60th Annual DPI/NGO Conference

September 5 – 7 2007

UNITED NATIONS – NEW YORK

As envisaged, approximately 2000 participants representing 491 NGOs attended this year's conference. The topic of the conference was CLIMATE CHANGE: How it impacts us all. On the opening day, which started with a plenary session in the chamber of the General Assembly, participants heard statements from the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, and key individuals in the UN Secretariat, as well as the NGO Executive committee.

Deputy Secretary-General, Asha-Rose Migiro, who stood in for the Secretary-General, unavoidably absent having been called away as a result of developments in Dafu in the Sudan, drew the conference's attention to how "CLIMATE CHANGE, IMPACTS US ALL". Reiterating the words of Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, she said that the impact of Climate Change is grave and growing and its effect on Arctic ice threatens peoples and ecosystems everywhere, in addition, it imperils low-lying lands and coastal cities half the world away. Under Secretary-General, Migiro, underlined the importance and influence of Civil Society in moving critical action on Global issues such as Climate Change.

New York City's UN Commissioner, Majorie Tiven, in her remarks reminded the audience of the impact of Climate Change on the economic survival of the world. This, she said, calls for urgent action in containing and forestalling the vulnerability of the environment.

The President of the 60th session of the General Assembly, Haya Rasheid Al-Khalifa, in her remarks to the plenary, stressed on the inter-connectivity of the world. She also drew attention to the fact that it was of absolute necessity that there should be a balance between economic growth and social justice. She reminded the audience of the plight of the most vulnerable to Climate Change- the poor and disadvantaged, and

advocated that the tackling of the issue must be done from the standpoint of reality rather than from an outburst of rhetoric.

The Plenary's keynote speaker was the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), Achim Steiner. He prefaced his remarks with the declaration that the year 2007 has signified the awareness of the extreme importance of Climate Change. He went on to emphasize that the universal threat of Climate Change had taken on a transformative character with far-reaching consequences on the social structures of the world's communities, posing limitless threats to today's comforts of life and the simple pursuits of happiness. The UNEP Executive Director, in rounding up his keynote address called for a strong commitment to public policy that facilitates transition, development, and change.

The NGO Executive Committee's welcoming remarks to the Plenary were launched by Committee Chair, Joan Kirby, who said that the three choices open to the world in battling Climate Change are mitigation, adaptation, and suffering.

President of the conference of NGOs, Renate Bloom, called on governments and peoples everywhere to take seriously the phenomenon of Climate Change.

The Chair for the 60th NGO conference, Richard Jordan, called for the active engagement of Youth and the Media in the promotion of efforts aimed at assuaging the debilitating effects of Climate Change.

Under Secretary-General, Communications and Public Information, Kiyataka Akasaka, who presided over the Plenary, strongly underscored the serious challenges posed by Climate Change. These challenges, he said, made it imperative for governments, NGOs, and civil society to work hand in hand in mitigating the unfolding consequences of such an implacable world phenomenon.

MID-DAY WORKSHOP – Wednesday September 5th, 2007

SUMMARY

Topic: "Climate Change and Individual Responsibility:
The Franciscan Way"

Faculty members of the Felician College formed the panel for this workshop. Their approach was understandably rooted in the philosophy of the concept of Love with Nature and remaining in touch. Flowing from this concept, Art has opened up a medium through which the problems of Climate Change can be tackled. Through Art, threats to the environment that could result from Climate Change are mirrored serving as an early warning system.

Another aspect of individual awareness of Climate Change is commitment to the theology of the Sacramentalism of Creation leading to the desire of being in harmony with the environment and ecology. This culminates in the sanctification of work and worth.

Robert Collier's definition of visualization – “seeing things as they are and not as we wish” – summed up the thrust of the workshop's conclusions.

EVENING ROUNDTABLE SESSION – Wednesday September 5th, 2007

SUMMARY

Topic: “Climate Change: The Scientific Evidence”

Panelists spoke of the on-going changes occurring in the environment both globally and regionally, highlighting consequences for the ecosystem's health, human well-being, and economic development. These changes they contended are occurring at an accelerated pace in the ice- and snow-covered regions of the universe.

The environmental effects of ozone depletion and its interactions with Climate Change in a 2006 assessment were discussed at length. References were made to the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer. It was pointed out that since the 2002 assessment of the Technology and Economic Assessment Panel, a large number of technical developments have taken place, calling attention to the interactions between ozone depletion and Climate Change.

The panel concluded with an updated and concise review of the state of the environment and trends in the cryosphere.

MORNING ROUNDTABLE SESSION – Thursday September 6th, 2007

SUMMARY

Topic: “Water Security and Climate Change”

The discussions centered on two main themes: Access to clean water and sanitation and the importance of clean water security and Climate Change.

In relation to the water crisis in the world, the panel highlighted two aspects, 1) water for human consumption and, 2) water for life. These they said are essential for human development.

It was deemed an urgent necessity for both global and regional investment in science and education so as to come up with new and better water resources for sustainable development. The question of anthropogenic effects was also discussed.

The issue of water security and Climate Change was then examined from the standpoint of prevention of contamination through ecological water treatment, fragility of water supply systems, and land reclamation of water sites.

Conservation and recycling of water for maximum benefit was also examined. It was noted that this could be achieved by treatment through drip-irrigation and community involvement.

MID-DAY WORKSHOP – Thursday September 6th, 2007

SUMMARY

Topic: “Human Rights and Good Practices in the face of Climate Change”

At the very outset of the discussions the point was made that Human Rights was an issue that needed the full commitment of governments. Often, it was pointed out that it was the poor in society that are the victims of Climate Change.

The discussion emphasized that one of the outcomes of Climate Change is the creation of differences and inequalities regarding access. Such a scenario mirrors the inescapable fact that the poorer you are, the more deprived you become with regards to access.

Another issue of Human Rights concern is that of urbanization. Its consequences being that of creating vulnerable groups in society that become disadvantaged. This calls for close monitoring by both government and civil society for timely and appropriate action towards ameliorating such threats wherever and whenever they rear their ugly heads.

EVENING ROUNDTABLE SESSION – Thursday September 6th, 2007

SUMMARY

Topic: “The Economics and Politics of Climate Change”

The discussion kicked-off with the advance of the following leads:

- The ingenuity of fostering access to alternative energy
- Making aspiring aspirations workable policies
- Re-thinking impact assessments
- Consideration of the immense proportion of the planetary process
- Menacing distortions regarding fuel, subsidies, and taxes
- Geo-political realities

It was affirmed that there is solid scientific consensus that Climate Change is a reality demanding the attention of all. Developing countries, it was said, were fully aware of the looming consequences of Climate Change in the areas of economic growth and sustainable development. It was expressed that nations were now at the threshold of changing economic paradigms, requiring renewed commitment from developed countries to aid developing countries in coping with the inescapable effects of Climate Change.

Zeroing in on the realities of the scientific phenomenon of Climate Change was the growing evidence of CO₂ emissions. Add to this was the techno-economic realities of burning coal.

Emphasis was also laid on the need for substantial investments in ameliorating the incidence of deforestation resulting from Climate Change.

There was consensus among participants on the question of political realities obligating the developed countries in assuming leadership in the reduction of emission density globally.

The Kyoto Protocols were discussed at length, especially the provisions governing the fair climate deal, funding renewable energy, and commitment to a carbon trade system.

MORNING ROUNDTABLE SESSION – Friday September 7th, 2007

SUMMARY

Topic: “Streamlining the System”

Under Secretary-General, Kiyotaka Akasaka, moderated the session. His opening remarks cautioned participants to be aware of the complications that may stand in the way of well intentioned efforts at achieving a universal environmental framework.

It was generally agreed that whatever system currently existed reflected a multiplicity of fragmented and incoherent structures. Reasons for this apparently rest on the following:

- The system appears to be a victim of whatever its successes are so far
- A reluctance of states to agree to the creation of a functional enforcing body
- Absence of a treaty enforcing body

Next, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) was closely scrutinized in terms of its mandate and enforcing authority. The general view that emerged was that UNEP was designed as a program and not an agency. Its functions depended on contributions and not on allocated funding. While the work of UNEP continues to be appreciated worldwide, the emerging consensus pointed in the direction of much needed reform of its role and authority. There appeared to be a strong feeling that actions on international environmental issues were today dispersed rather than unified.

The session rounded up with calls for the establishment of an International Court of Compliance on environmental issues. Many stressed that now was the time for the creation of anchor institutions and not umbrellas if the menacing threats of the environment can be contained and managed effectively.

MID-DAY WORKSHOP – Friday September 7th, 2007

SUMMARY

Topic: "Biodiversity and Climate Change"

Providing a backdrop to the workshop's interaction was the concept that biodiversity was both life itself and the history of life. All species in their interaction with Climate Change were subject to reduction, fragmentation, and degradation. In terms of human activities that reshape biodiversity, it was agreed that the factors were dependency, distribution, and determination. Spin-offs from this are the growing awareness of the looming mass extinction of life's species.

EVENING CLOSING SESSION – Friday September 7th, 2007

SUMMARY

PROFILES FROM ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS

1. Scientific Evidence
 - Environmental degradation
 - Marine erosion
 - Depletion of the eco-system

2. Greenhouse Warming
 - Great effort needed in the next four years in measures to counter impact

3. Indigenous Peoples
 - Effect on lives and livelihoods

4. Water Security and Climate Change
 - The accelerating negative effects of CO₂ emissions
 - Unprecedented awareness

- Attitude of developed countries
- Call for leadership in efforts to assuage the problem

5. Compliance Failure

- Individuals cannot provide solutions
- Responsibility lays with institutions
- The role of governments crucial in some instances

6. Politics and its effects in mitigating Climate Change

- A problem for both developed and developing countries
- Necessity of holistic approach in tackling the problem

7. Water Security Goals

- Conservation
- Management
- Control

8. Preservation of Farmlands

- Awareness of harmful toxins
- Implementation of drastic innovative measures
- Preservation and conservation of biodiversity

9. Sustainable Development Accountability

- Reduction and control of CO₂ emissions
- Limiting population growth
- Management, control, and prevention of national disasters
- Adaptation of the Kyoto Protocol

KEYNOTE CLOSING ADDRESS – Rajendra K. Pachauri

The pith of Mr. Pachauri's address was a synopsis of the International Programme of Climate Change (IPCC) Last Report:

1. Eleven of the twelve warmest years in recent memory have already occurred.
2. The most vulnerable are the ones who suffer most from Climate Change.
3. Warmth of the last century has been unusual and unprecedented
4. Alarming evidence of anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentration.
5. Temperature increase from 1.5 °C to 2.5 °C places at risk certain species of livestock.
6. Human health becomes threatened in a warming situation.
7. Agriculture may benefit crop-wise in some instances, as a result of temperature increase.
8. Where there is a shortfall in crop production as a result of Climate Change, this could lead to scarcity and/or price increases.
9. The adverse effects of flooding due to Climate Change especially to coastal regions.
10. The continent of Africa by year 2020 will have a population of over 220 million necessitating water scarcity.
11. Inescapable necessity of careful management of water resources.
12. Measured awareness in the critical management and utilization of fossil fuel. Current projections stand at 6-7 years.
13. Urgency for review of international consumerism practice.
14. New technologies will be useless unless a change occurs in the global consciousness of Climate Change.
15. A willingness and openness for a development of partnerships across the globe in matters connected with the mitigation of the effects of Climate Change.

Mr. Pachauri ended his presentation with a quote from the writings of Ghandi, - “Technological societies have two choices: Checks and Balances”. The issue of global warming and Climate Change, Mr. Pachauri said, can benefit from Ghandi’s caution.

The final act of the conference was the adoption of a declaration by the NGO community on Militarism: The Elephant in the Room.

New York, September 7, 2007
Militarism: The Elephant in the Room.

Declaration by NGO military/nuclear matters breakfast networking meeting, and the NGO Peace Caucus at the DPI/NGO Climate Change Conference:

In 1992, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), most member states of the United Nations negotiated, subsequently signed and ratified the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, whose objective was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We

1. demand that the DPI not be silent and refer to military and nuclear matters in all its activities;
2. call upon the member states of the United Nations to act on the commitment in Chapter 33 of Agenda 21, to reallocate military expenses;
3. call upon the UNGA to acknowledge the inextricable link between climate change and conflict over resources, such as oil, water, etc.;
4. call upon member states of the United Nations to act on the commitments made in Beijing, in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, to ensure that all corporations, including transnationals, comply with international law, including international environmental law;
5. call upon the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to investigate and estimate the full impact on greenhouse gas emissions by the military and demand that each state release information related to the greenhouse gas emissions from the production of all weapons systems, military exercises, war games, weapons testing, military aviation, environmental warfare, troop transfer, military operations, waste generation, reconstruction after acts of violent interventions, etc.;
6. support the call for the disbanding of NATO, whose collective activities have contributed to, not only the perpetuation of the scourge of war and the violation of international peremptory norms, but also the substantial release of greenhouse gas emissions.

If citizens are willing to do their part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, member states of the United Nations must stop subsidizing the fossil fuel and military industries and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) must discontinue its promotion of nuclear energy – the most hazardous and expensive form of energy known – as the solution to climate change.

**THE CLIMATE AND THE WEB OF LIFE ARE IN A STATE OF CRISIS NOW.
“WE THE PEOPLES” MUST BE BOLD AND ACT NOW. WE CANNOT BE SILENT.**

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Prepared and Submitted

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