THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS AT HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON THE THEME CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

New York, 28 March 2019, 10:00
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Colleagues,

I am pleased to be with you today to discuss this most momentous and urgent topic.

I thank the President of the General Assembly for choosing to place the focus of this event on present and future generations.

Climate change is happening now and to all of us.

Every week brings a new example of climate-related devastation.

No country or community is immune.
And, as is always the case, the poor and vulnerable are the first to suffer and the worst hit.

My heart goes out to the hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – of people affected by the recent cyclone Idai in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe.

Such events are becoming more frequent, more severe and more widespread and will become worse unless we act urgently, now.

It is clear that climate change threatens decades of development progress and places in jeopardy all our plans for inclusive, sustainable development.
From increased poverty and food insecurity, to growing water stress and accelerated environmental damage, climate change is a clear and present threat.

Yet it is also true that tackling climate change provides an opportunity to consolidate and accelerate development gains through cleaner air, improved public health and greater security for nations and economies.

We have no excuse not to act.

We have the tools to answer the questions posed by climate change, environmental pressure, poverty and inequality.
They lie in the great agreements of 2015 – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

But tools are no use if you don’t use them.

So, today, and every day, my appeal is clear and simple.

We need action, ambition and political will.

Last December, in Katowice, Poland, Parties to the United Nations climate convention agreed a work plan for the Paris Agreement so it can unleash its full potential.
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said we have less than 12 years to avoid potentially irreversible climate disruption.

Last year’s IPCC special report found that limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels will require “rapid and far-reaching transitions” in how we manage land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities.

To help generate ambition, and to show that our goals are feasible, I am convening a climate action summit.

I am telling leaders: “Don’t come with a speech; come with a plan.”
I am calling on leaders to come to New York on 23 September with concrete, realistic plans to put us, once and for all, on a sustainable path.

These plans must show how to enhance Nationally Determined Contributions by 2020.

The United Nations, with its new generation of country teams stands ready to assist.

I also want leaders to demonstrate how we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent over the next decade and get to net zero emissions globally by 2050.

This is what science says is needed.
I will also ask leaders to address issues such as a just transition – where no one is left disadvantaged by necessary climate action.

And I will ask them to demonstrate the many benefits of climate action, such as job creation, reduced air pollution and improved public health.

We all know that the green economy is the future, but we must make sure everyone benefits, and no one is left behind.

I am also counting on leaders to make sure their plans include women as key decision-makers.
Only gender-diverse decision-making has the capacity to tackle the different needs that will emerge in this coming period of critical transformation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The climate action summit will bring together governments, the private sector, civil society, local authorities and other international organizations to showcase and develop the ambitious solutions we need.

It will focus on the energy transition; sustainable infrastructure; sustainable agriculture; forests and oceans; resilience to climate impacts; and investing in the green economy.
We can already see a growing momentum for transformational change.

A growing number of governments, cities and businesses understand that climate solutions can strengthen our economies and protect our environment at the same time.

New technologies are already delivering energy at a lower cost than the fossil-fuel driven economy.

Solar and onshore wind are now the cheapest sources of new power in virtually all major economies.

But we must set radical change in motion.
This means ending subsidies for fossil fuels and high-emitting, unsustainable agriculture and shifting towards renewable energy, electric vehicles and climate-smart practices.

It means carbon pricing that reflects the true cost of emissions, from climate risk to the health hazards of air pollution.

And it means accelerating the closure of coal plants, halting the construction of new ones and replacing those jobs with healthier alternatives, so the transformation is just, inclusive and profitable.

The coming years will see vast investment in infrastructure around the world.
We must ensure it is sustainable and climate-friendly.

By doing so, we will march far down the road to realizing the 2030 Agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The time for action is now.

We need multilateral action by all governments.

And we need them to work hand-in-hand with the private sector and civil society.

Global climate marches are sending a clear message.
Young people are demanding that today’s leaders act on behalf of future generations.

I echo that demand.

The youth are torchbearers and the future is now.

We must address this global emergency with ambition and urgency.

There really is only one choice to be made.

Thank you.

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