
President COP 18 : Mr. Abdullah Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah (Qatar)



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Salutation

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. Allow me, on behalf of the Government and people of Saint Lucia, to thank you for the opportunity to address this Conference. I also wish to thank the Government and people of Qatar for the excellent arrangements in the hosting of this Conference and for their warm hospitality.

Mr. President, for some people, the issue of Climate Change is little more than an academic discussion, a scientific theory to be proven or disproven, depending on your persuasion or your interpretation of scientific evidence. For many others, it is a passion, an enduring quest to do something about the changes that are unfolding and threatening to harm our planet before the window of opportunity slams shut on us. However, for the vast majority of the people who live in Small Island Developing States like mine, climate change is an inseparable part of life. It is not theory, debate topic, passionate pursuit or subject of international negotiations; it is simply life.

Climate Change – Real Life for Many

In my island nation of Saint Lucia, those who are old enough speak of the dramatic changes to their environment that they have witnessed over the last five decades. They speak of changing seasons, where the dry season starts earlier every year or where major hurricanes appear to strike later each year. They speak of vibrant rivers in which they bathed and fished but which are now little more than streams that struggle to maintain a constant flow. Our older fishers speak longingly and wistfully of the “good old days” when fish catches were plentiful and seldom was a trip to sea in vain, only now to see their fish takings significantly diminished as ocean temperatures change and fish migration patterns alter. Almost everyone now speaks with a certain degree of dread about sharper and more intense droughts and stronger hurricanes. Yes, Mr. President, for people in Saint Lucia and the rest of the Caribbean, the things that are predicted to happen with climate change, sometime in the future, have already become our presentday reality.

Our Government’s Response

And that fact, in itself poses another serious problem. It means that our Governments have had to divert scarce financial resources, in a period of serious financial stress and economic downturn, from core social and economic development initiatives, toward climate change adaptation and mitigation and disaster recovery efforts.

Our Government, and indeed all of the Governments in the Caribbean Community, take our responsibilities to our global environment very seriously. We continue to participate actively in the international negotiations aimed at ensuring that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is effectively implemented for the benefit and welfare of all mankind. While we endeavour to adapt to the changes in our climate because, unlike others, we have no choice, we are also pursuing initiatives aimed at reducing our carbon footprint. However, unfortunately, on the issue of climate change, our destiny does not lie in our hands. It lies in the hands of the industrialized countries that are historically responsible for causing climate change. They have to make good on their pledges to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and assist developing countries in addressing climate change, as called for under this Convention.

Empathy and Understanding

It has been said that it is only when you experience pain and devastation first hand that its true meaning comes to life. This is why it is so easy for us in the Caribbean to empathize with our brothers and sisters in the United States in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, in October 2012. We hope that if there is to be a silver lining to those dark clouds that brought severe damage, devastation and destruction to the eastern seaboard of the United States, it will be the emergence of a greater understanding that Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Hurricane Irene in 2011 were not Black Swans, but really a sign of things to come - a new environmental order. Perhaps, with the occurrence of these recent extreme weather events in developed countries that did not traditionally have to deal with such phenomena, the grim reality of climate change will truly be appreciated and in turn, meaningful action will be catalyzed.

Doha Delivery

Mr. President, the situation is very serious. To deliver in Doha, we must put forward amendments to the Kyoto Protocol that will establish a five-year second commitment period, to run from 1st January 2013 to 31st December 2017. Kyoto commitments must be ambitious, they must be free of conditionalities, and they must be provisionally applied, pending their entry into force from 1st January 2013, to ensure that there is no legal gap between the first and second commitment periods. Further, the use of surplus units from the first commitment period must be dramatically curbed in the second commitment period, to protect the environmental integrity of the Kyoto Protocol. We must also ensure that we do not create new surplus in the second commitment period through the pledging of insufficiently ambitious new commitments.

Moreover, the level of mitigation ambition pledged to date, from Annex I Parties, is not consistent with the goal of remaining below 2 degrees Celsius, much less the AOSIS goal, shared by over 100 Parties in this process, of staying well below 1.5 degrees Celsius. These are the realities, in the face of which delaying, detouring or dithering will have devastating and perhaps deadly consequences.

Sometimes, we get so caught up in the dialogue and debate that we forget that the very reason for which we travel vast distances, away from the comfort of our homes and families, and endure the endless, brutal hours of negotiation, is to agree on, and effectively implement approaches to address loss and damage arising from the adverse effects of climate change. It is the proper role of this Convention to provide leadership on a global strategic response and a policy forum to minimize and address loss and damage from the impacts of anthropogenic climate change, through the establishment of a coordinating, coherence-enhancing international mechanism here, in Doha, to be maintained under the UNFCCC. That mechanism must have both technical and financial components and must address the slow-onset impacts of climate change, including the effects of sea level rise and ocean acidification on small island States.

Mr. President, it is not enough to dialogue and make progress on paper. A commitment is required by developed countries to ensure that there is no gap in the provision of scaled-up, new and additional, predictable and adequate climate finance to developing countries after the end of the fast-start finance period in 2012.

Conclusion

This Convention made a pact to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of present and future generations. Let us not be part of the generation that could have taken action to avert or minimize a global catastrophe, but did not. Let Doha be remembered as the place where we turned promises and pledges into the concrete, urgent and meaningful responses that made a real, positive difference in the lives of millions of people in developing countries like mine and saved our planet from a very uncertain future. The world is depending on us. We cannot let it down.

I thank you.