

Opening of the 34th Session of the
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

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Address from Mr. Achim Steiner
UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director

Delivered by:

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**Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dr. Pachauri and Members of the IPCC,
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

May I begin by thanking the Government of the Republic of Uganda for hosting this important meeting. Your collaboration has been a success in furthering awareness of the science of climate change in this region and beyond.

During the pre-sessions and the Plenary, delegates to this 34th Session of the IPCC will discuss complex issues and adopt important decisions.

- The progress in implementation of the IPCC fifth assessment report is of course on the top of the agenda.
- The plenary is also an important moment in terms of understanding the linkages between extreme weather events and climate change and how to adapt to such events, with the launch of the Summary for Policymakers of the Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events.
- Finally, the Plenary will make decisions following the InterAcademy Council's review of the IPCC's rules and procedures.

As a parent organization of the IPCC, together with WMO, it is my great pleasure to renew UNEP's commitment to IPCC's admirable work on risk assessment.

- Work that is essential in unraveling the complexities of climate change, where new science, requesting and requiring new understanding, emerges almost daily.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

There have been many moments when world attention has focused on the IPCC – this week is one of the moments.

From the droughts in the Horn of Africa and Texas to the severe floods in Bangladesh the public perceives that the climate and the risks are changing.

Earlier this year Norwegian Refugee Council and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimated that "sudden natural disasters" displaced 42 million people in 2010.

Last July the German government organized a debate at the UN Security Council on climate change and security at which I was invited to speak—the first time that a UNEP Executive Director has been given this honour.

There was very little questioning of the validity of the issue by member states, rather whether the Security Council is the appropriate body to address such manifest concerns.

It is within this context, and within the context of a world that is currently struggling in the formal UN climate negotiations to find a clear and cooperative path to the deep emission reductions needed to keep a global temperature rise under 2 degrees C, that you meet here in Uganda.

The Summary for Policymakers of the *Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation* (SREX) set to be approved by governments today needs to be a clear risk assessment that balances all the uncertainties.

Nobody would support a speculative report—but neither should it underplay the implications of the wealth of climate science almost daily emerging from all corners of the globe if it is to serve the needs of more than 190 UN member states and now seven billion people.

The summary for policymakers and the eventual final report has the potential to be a foundation upon which the risk and disaster management community and the climate adaptation community can build stronger bridges.

And in doing so assist vulnerable communities and countries to buffer themselves against likely increases in extremes now and over the 21st century.

UNEP places utmost importance on pulling from the science of IPCC reports to develop its Programme of Work.

- For example, we intend to use the findings from the extreme events special report to support the Programme for Research on Vulnerability, Impacts and Adaptation (PRO-VIA) to help the scientific community coordinate its research on climate impacts, vulnerability and adaptation. We are in the process of strengthening our partnership with WMO and other actors and have identified the first set of reports that will be published. Further information on PRO-VIA is available from the UNEP website.
- UNEP has created a unit within its Division of Environmental Policy Implementation to support countries in climate change adaptation. Again, the science presented in the extreme events special report and ultimately from IPCC's fifth assessment report, will contribute to its Programme of Work.

I would also like to specify that there are more UNEP assessment activities which have direct connections to climate science and policy. These include:

- The fifth in the series of UNEP's Global Environment Outlook, or GEO-5, which is UNEP's authoritative, synthesis report on the global state of the environment, and for which IPCC reports are the source of information to chapters related to atmosphere. The GEO 5 report will be launched in May 2012 and is positioned to inform the global community in advance of the Rio+20 conference in June 2012. Here is an important opportunity for the findings of IPCC to influence international policy setting.

Other UNEP science related assessments include:

- The 'Emissions Gap Assessment' which is bringing together the views of over 20 scientific groups about the possible "emissions gap" in 2020; meaning here the gap between expected emissions

after pledges are taken into account, and emission limits for staying within the two degree target of the Copenhagen Accord.

- This year's assessment will be launched next Wednesday at the Royal Society in London.
- An Integrated Assessment of Black Carbon and Tropospheric Ozone and its Precursors, with the full assessment to be completed by the end of this year
- And a forthcoming report on policy options and the costs of fast action on these Short Lived Climate Forcers, funded with the support of governments including Sweden, in advance of the Durban UNFCCC conference—again this report will also be launched next week in London on the 25th.
- This body of work is also a contribution to catalyzing a global low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy—a key theme of Rio+20 next June in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

- UNEP welcomes the important steps taken by the IPCC in the previous two plenary meetings towards the implementation of the IAC recommendations, especially the revision of the Principles Governing IPCC Work, the approval of the Conflict of Interest Policy and of the Guidance on Communications and Information, and the measures for strengthening the IPCC governance and management.
- It is important to conclude the review process swiftly and decisively, so that the Panel may devote the entirety of its capacities and energies to the important tasks that lay ahead with respect to the Fifth Assessment period. UNEP looks forward to the remaining decisions to be taken - in this regards, UNEP is ready to provide support as required by this Plenary.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention and important initiative championed by the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and UNEP in collaboration with the European Environment Agency, US State Department, IUCN, and others which will build partnerships to improve access to environmental information. The initiative is called Eye on Earth and will hold its inaugural Summit in Abu Dhabi from 12-15 December.

What is unique in this initiative is its demand-driven approach to sharing environmental data and information through networks of partners. Most importantly, the Summit will launch special initiatives to improve data access in water and land management. UNEP strongly encourages

participation from Governments at the Summit and in the special initiatives that will follow.

Finally, UNEP would like to thank Ms. Renate Christ, Secretary to the IPCC, for her contributions during recent intergovernmental deliberations on the founding of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. On one hand, I believe her insights from IPCC's experience have helped guide the biodiversity community to craft its scientific platform, and on the other hand the debate within the biodiversity community on matters such as capacity building to conduct scientific assessments can enrich IPCC processes as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am confident you will make the kinds of decisive and definitive decisions that will open a new and transformational chapter in the history of this extraordinary and unprecedented scientific effort which is the IPCC. UNEP stands ready to support you in this Endeavour.

My best wishes for a successful Plenary and I thank you.