

Dealing with THE GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE



How can we attain the level of international cooperation, particularly between the developed and developing world, which will enable us to meet the challenge of climate change?

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Many things have changed since last year. We find ourselves in a very difficult position. The environment is changing much more quickly than expected. The financial situation potentially hampers much of our response. That is the bad news, and it is easy to talk about the bad news. The good news is that there is an opening, an opportunity to speak to groups with which, in the past, we had nothing in common. Now we can sit at the same table and discuss the collective security risks.

This is urgent. I have to admit my own complacency in the past – thinking that this issue could wait until later in the 21st century. But abrupt changes do happen, and not simply abrupt geophysical changes. Abrupt change may be gradual in terms of temperature but can be abrupt in terms of precipitation, or in terms of impacts on ecosystems or in terms of what happens to the affected societies. We need to communicate these risks properly, responsibly, not simply scare people. We need to acknowledge that we don't have all the expertise ourselves. We have to reach out to people in other disciplines, other regions, who normally we haven't spoken to, and who may have different perspectives from us. We need to be inclusive, ensuring that people most affected are sitting at the table, that we are not simply talking with those who have the most money or the most political clout.

Environment is a security issue. But we can't think of the security implications simply in terms of violent conflict over resources. It is much more common for violent conflicts to harm the environment than for the environment to cause violent conflicts. That relationship often gets lost in the popular literature. What we are discussing is stability. Our environment is crucial for

the maintenance of food security, for maintenance of our livelihoods, for energy security. These are the things on which we have to focus. Think of the impact of environmental migration, for instance. Most people will say that if migration occurs, that will cause instability. We don't ask the deeper questions, why are they moving? Often it is the instability that causes people to move. And we have to remember the people who are left behind, those who are too vulnerable or too poor to move.

Climatologists tell us that these abrupt changes are happening, just as they happened often in the past. It is quite normal for climate to go through sudden shifts in precipitation, in temperature, in the stability of forests and grasslands, in the ability of animals and fish to survive. All these shifts can happen much more quickly than our ability to adapt to such changes. The fourth report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which won the Nobel Peace prize, was very valuable, but we now know it was overly conservative and led us to believe that these changes would be gradual.

We need to take a precautionary approach to security. We can't wait for bad things to happen. We can't wait for people to start migrating, for droughts to occur, for people to lose their sense of cooperation. We have to imagine what is possible in the future, and then prepare for these possibilities. We can't simply say that because these things have not happened in the past they will not happen in the future. Certain things such as tropical storms in the Caribbean may increase in intensity, but the wider concern is that we will encounter a future of which we have no experience. We have to imagine what this future will look like and whose help we will need to meet its challenges.

We have to create win-win situations. Solutions have to be created that address not just climate change but environmental change in general. We have to do this in a way that is positive for everyone. As an example, if we change urban planning so as to create communities in which transportation doesn't have to rely on cars, in which people can walk to schools, in which people know their communities much better, this could create benefits in terms of reduced crime, improved public education and public health, increased real estate values and economic opportunities – and lower stress from having been caught in traffic!

So I urge everyone to think about what sort of solutions we can provide. In the workshops this is the topic we would like to address. We want to focus on what people in this room can take home and present to their friends, their colleagues, their neighbours, as ways to address these issues for the sake of our future.

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