

Need for transformational approach in tackling climate change – says UN Secretary-General

Madrid, 3 Dec (Perna Bomzan) – At the opening ceremony of the climate talks in Madrid, Spain on 2nd Dec, UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres said that what the world needed in tackling climate change was “not an incremental approach, but a transformational one”, that involved “rapid and deep change in the way we do business, how we generate power, how we build cities, how we move, and how we feed the world.” “If we don’t urgently change our way of life, we jeopardize life itself,” warned the UN-SG.

The UN-SG also called for “ambition in mitigation, ambition in adaptation, and ambition in finance,” adding that “we should ensure that at least \$100 billion a year are available to developing countries for mitigation and adaptation and take into account their legitimate expectations to have the resources necessary to build resilience and for disaster response and recovery”.

The annual climate talks under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol (KP) and the Paris Agreement (PA) opened with meetings of the 25th session of the Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 25), the 15th session of the Conference of Parties to the KP (CMP 15) and the 2nd session of the Conference of Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 2).

The talks in Madrid are being presided over by Chilean Minister of Environment, Carolina Schmidt, as the President of the COP.

The first day began with the smooth adoption of the provisional agendas of COP 25 and CMP 15. However, when it came to the adoption of the provisional agenda for CMA 2, disagreements arose in relation to proposals for inclusion onto the agenda by the **African Group** and the

Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC) regarding the ‘special needs and special circumstances of Africa’ and ‘the Latin American States’ respectively. The CMA 2 provisional agenda was eventually adopted, which then paved the way for the opening ceremony of the talks, which was presided over by the by **Schmidt**. (See details below on the CMA 2 proceedings).

Following the opening ceremony, a roundtable on climate ambition was held with the participation of nearly 50 heads of state and governments.

The first day of the talks also saw the opening of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) and the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), which launched their work.

A joint plenary meeting of the COP/CMP/CMA and the Subsidiary Bodies was also convened to hear opening statements from Parties and observer constituencies.

At the opening ceremony

Apart from the UNSG, the opening ceremony saw statements by Hoesung Lee, the Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), by Sebastian Pinera, the President of Chile via a video message and Pedro Sanchez, the President of Spain.

In his statement, UN Secretary-General **Antonio Guterres** said that “by the end of the coming decade we will be on one of two paths. One is the path of surrender, where we have sleepwalked past the point of no return, jeopardizing the health and safety of everyone on this planet...The other option is the path of hope. A path of resolve, of sustainable solutions. A path where more fossil

fuels remain where they should be – in the ground – and where we are on the way to carbon neutrality by 2050. That is the only way to limit global temperature rise to the necessary 1.5 degrees by the end of this century.”

Said the UNSG further, “The latest, just-released data from the World Meteorological Organization show that levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have reached another new record high. Global average levels of carbon dioxide reached 407.8 parts per million in 2018...The last time there was a comparable concentration of CO₂ was between 3 and 5 million years ago, when the temperature was between 2 and 3 degrees C warmer than now and sea levels were 10 to 20 m higher than today... The last five years have been the hottest ever recorded. The consequences are already making themselves felt in the form of more extreme weather events and associated disasters, from hurricanes to drought to floods to wildfires. Ice caps are melting. In Greenland alone, 179 billion tonnes of ice melted in July. Permafrost in the Arctic is thawing 70 years ahead of projections. Antarctica is melting three times as fast as a decade ago. Ocean levels are rising quicker than expected, putting some of our biggest and most economically important cities at risk. More than two-thirds of the world’s megacities are located by the sea. And while the oceans are rising, they are also being poisoned. Oceans absorb more than a quarter of all CO₂ in the atmosphere and generate more than half our oxygen. Absorbing more and more carbon dioxide acidifies the oceans and threatens all life within them.”

The UN-SG lamented further that “in several regions of the world, coal power plants continue to be planned and built in large numbers. Either we stop this addiction to coal or all our efforts to tackle climate change will be doomed. And, as the UN Environment Programme has just revealed, countries are planning to produce fossil fuels over the next decade at over double the level that is consistent with keeping temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C”.

He added further that “the fossil fuel industry is not alone. From agriculture to transportation, from urban planning and construction to cement, steel and other carbon-intensive industries, we are far from a sustainable path. We see some incremental steps towards sustainable business models, but nowhere near the scope and scale required. What we need is not an incremental

approach, but a transformational one. We need a rapid and deep change in the way we do business, how we generate power, how we build cities, how we move, and how we feed the world. If we don’t urgently change our way of life, we jeopardize life itself.”

The UNSG said further that “we need to make progress on carbon pricing, shift taxation from income to carbon, ensure no new coal plants are built after 2020, and end the allocation of taxpayers’ money for perverse fossil fuel subsidies. We must also ensure that the transition to a green economy is a just transition – one that recognizes the need to care for the future of negatively impacted workers, in terms of new jobs, lifelong education, and social safety nets.”

“To limit global temperature rise to the necessary 1.5 degrees by the end of this century, we must reduce emissions by 45 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030, and we must achieve climate neutrality by 2050. Ten years ago, if countries had acted on the science available, they would have needed to reduce emissions by 3.3 per cent each year. We didn’t. Today, we need to reduce emissions by 7.6 per cent each year to reach our goals,” he said further.

Recalling the UN Climate Summit in New York in Sept, the SG said that “some 70 countries announced their intention to submit enhanced national contributions in 2020, with 65 countries and major subnational economies committing to work for net zero emissions by 2050” adding that he was pleased to see governments and investors backing away from fossil fuels, giving the example of the European Investment Bank, which has announced it will stop funding fossil fuel projects by the end of 2021.

He added further that “we are still waiting for transformative movement from most G20 countries, which represent more than three-quarters of global emissions. Primarily, all the main emitters must do more. This means enhancing national determined contributions in 2020 under the Paris Agreement, presenting a carbon neutrality strategy for 2050, and embarking on the decarbonization of key sectors, particularly energy, industry, construction, and transport. Without the full engagement of the big emitters all our efforts will be completely undermined.”

Hoesung Lee, the Chair of the IPCC reminded delegates that “the IPCC assessments show that climate stabilisation implies greenhouse gas

emissions must start to peak from next year, but emissions are continuing to increase with no signs of peaking soon". He said that the IPCC's three special reports on 'warming of 1.5C', 'climate change and land' and 'oceans and cryosphere', indicated that the impacts of global warming are "much more severe than previously understood" with accelerating sea level rise, ocean warming, some key ecosystems becoming much more vulnerable and "increasing risk of reaching the limits of adaptation". "There will be little room for eco-system based adaptation, blue carbon ecosystems, sustainable fisheries and sustainable land management as these adaptation options are effective only on low-emission pathways", he added. He informed that the IPCC is now mid-way through the sixth assessment cycle that will be delivered in 2021 with the synthesis report expected in May 2022.

At the CMA 2 proceedings

When the CMA 2 provisional agenda was being considered for adoption, disagreements arose over the proposals for inclusion onto the agenda by **Egypt** on behalf of the **African Group**, as well as by **Honduras** on behalf of **AILAC** regarding the 'special needs and special circumstances of Africa' and the 'Latin American States', respectively.

A day before the commencement of the COP, the Chilean Presidency had been conducting consultations with Parties including on the agenda proposals by Egypt and Honduras, and an agreement had been reached midnight of 1 Dec not include the proposals on the agenda but with some "understandings".

According to sources, on the proposal by the African Group, the agreement reached was not to include the agenda item, on the "understanding" that "informal consultations" will be held with the Presidency during CMA 2 urging Parties to the PA to "recognize" the special circumstances and needs of African countries, "in line with previous

decisions of the COP". On the proposal by AILAC the understanding reached was to not include their proposal on the agenda.

During the CMA, when the provisional agenda was tabled for adoption, **Honduras** on behalf of **AILAC**, said that any outcome on the matter "must reflect an equal treatment with Africa". It urged the Presidency to hold informal consultations during CMA 2 on the matter of the special needs of Latin America as well. **Guatemala, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia** and **Argentina** echoed the proposal by Honduras.

Saudi Arabia for the **Arab Group** intervened saying "we only accept Africa's request and nothing else" while further remarking that if other countries or groups are to be considered then to "also include the Arab Group". It urged the CMA President to abide by the understandings reached the night before.

Switzerland for **Environmental Integrity Group (EIG)** also raised objections, as did **Belize** for the **Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)**. AOSIS also requested to "put on record" that it "will not support any discussions or consultations that will amount to renegotiation of the PA". **Nepal** and **Bhutan** meanwhile put forward "to consider the special circumstances of mountainous countries most vulnerable to climate change".

Egypt reiterated that the African proposal had been on the table since 2015 and that also wanted Parties to abide by the Presidency's proposal as was agreed the night before. **South Africa, Sudan, Morocco, Ghana, Nigeria, Mauritius, Algeria, Tanzania** and **Malawi** echoed Egypt's proposal.

Following the various interventions, **Schmidt** proposed the adoption of the provisional agenda as "as agreed last night" and gavelled the adoption of the decision.