



**Swiss re high-level adaptation event on risk and resiliency
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**Address by Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you on this increasingly critical topic.

This year has seen no shortage of extreme weather events - be that the excessive snow fall in the US at the beginning of this year, the heatwave and wildfires in Russia, the tragic floods in Pakistan that have affected more than 18 million people, or the tornado in Brooklyn.

Of course one cannot say with absolute scientific certainty that these events are direct climate change impacts, although they fall squarely into scientific projections of possible impacts.

The bottom line is that these events illustrate what could come with much greater frequency and intensity in the future.

As such, they are a loud and clear wake-up call with the urgent message that the world needs to do three things simultaneously: 1) reduce emissions quickly to avoid the worst, 2) adapt to the already inevitable in order to minimize the loss of life and livelihoods today and 3) increase resilience in order to protect the quality of life in the future.

According to science, expected climate change impacts include decreased water availability, decreased crop productivity in many parts of the world, increased frequency and intensity of storms, and loss of biodiversity and associated ecosystem services. Next to impacts on life and livelihoods, impacts could drive unprecedented migration and lead to precarious security situations.

Even under the most ambitious mitigation scenarios, adapting to the adverse effects and increased risk of climate change is a necessity for all countries.

For developing countries, such measures are critical to safeguard progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and to prevent poverty levels from worsening due to climate impacts. The need is, of course, most apparent and most urgent in small island states, which are already facing salt water intrusion and loss of land due to rising sea levels.

But that doesn't mean that adaptation is only necessary in developing countries. In fact, in the US, the military is already planning for climate-related security situations.

There is a crucial need to increase the resilience of societies and economic sectors. And this is true for both developing and industrialized countries.

I would like to illustrate this point by highlighting three sectors as examples that apply to both industrialized and developing countries: health, agriculture and water.

Health systems need to be adapted to dealing with increases in climate-sensitive diseases.

According to the Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC), several infectious diseases have increased in incidence and have spread into new geographical areas in the US. Climate change threatens to further exacerbate the spread of diseases such as dengue fever or malaria in the US. In fact, the NRDC found that dengue fever transmitting mosquitoes can now be found across at least 28 states in the US.

The spread of tropical diseases has also been monitored in developing countries. In Kenya, for example, malaria has now spread to the highland areas which had previously been too cold for the disease to take hold.

To date, health systems in most countries are ill-prepared for increases in tropical diseases. A comprehensive response, involving health departments and non-traditional partners including communities and scientists, is urgently needed.

A second sector where adaptation is also urgently needed is agriculture. This can involve a range of possibilities depending on local conditions, including greater water efficiency or switching crops.

In Ethiopia, many farmers are switching to more drought-resistant crop varieties, with good results. In many parts of the developing world, such measures will be increasingly essential to ensure food security.

In the US, research on adaptation in agriculture is expanding. One of the latest efforts includes DuPont's work on drought tolerant technologies, which, according to the company, need to be part of future agriculture to ensure that production can meet growing demand under changed circumstances.

The water sector is the last example that I would like to mention here. Climate change will affect all aspects of water supply, including agricultural and urban water supplies. This has the potential to strangle economic growth and agricultural production across the world.

At present, some 1.1 billion people already lack access to safe drinking water and this figure is set to rise as the world's population grows and precipitation patterns change. To make matters worse, water is already being badly managed in most countries. Improved water management and adaptation measures such as increased water efficiency are urgently needed across the globe.

These examples show that many adaptation options exist, but also, that many more need to be explored and accelerated. They also show that adapting to climate change impacts needs to be based on detailed assessments and robust planning for each sector. No sector will be immune to climate change impacts and all forces need to be mobilized to ensure comprehensive risk reduction and resilience.

Traditional thinking would have us believe that adaptation is the exclusive ambit of the public sector. This is false on two levels: 1) Business needs to adapt itself, and 2) adaptation holds investment opportunities for the private sector.

To the first:

Sooner or later, all businesses will have to climate-proof their operations, from supply-chain to point of sale, from place of production to place of investment. Adaptation will be imperative if businesses want to avoid climate change impacts driving them out of business.

One example here is Walmart's excellent initiative to climate-proof agricultural operations that are part of its supply chain.

To the second:

Global adaptation needs open new opportunities for private sector engagement. The most obvious is the insurance industry. Even when all possible adaptation measures have been taken, the risk of still enduring losses due to climate-related extreme events will not be ruled out entirely.

The insurance industry is developing products to hedge these risks and must push forward quickly. One option is to spread the risks across multiple countries or regions through innovative risk-sharing and transfer mechanisms.

One existing risk-sharing scheme is the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, a risk pooling facility, owned and operated by regional governments in the Caribbean. The chairman of this facility is amongst us, and I congratulate you on this important work.

Risk-sharing mechanisms can help countries to get back on their feet after insuring catastrophic events, which often overwhelm national budgets.

Beyond the insurance industry, there are countless opportunities for investment in climate resilient products, including improved food production, water management and resistant buildings.

These and other issues related to adaptation are being taken forward by Governments in the climate change negotiations.

The Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in December last year made important progress on identifying methods and means for the worldwide implementation of adaptation. This work has been taken forward in 2010.

The next Climate Change Conference is set to take place in Cancun, Mexico, at the end of this year. Cancun presents Governments with another opportunity for making progress and for moving the world towards the comprehensive implementation of adaptation measures.

Negotiations currently include the following aspects: A possible adaptation framework to boost all aspects necessary for implementation, including assessments, planning and support. This would include the establishment of medium- and long-term adaptation plans as part of countries' overall development planning.

Governments are also considering the establishment of an international insurance mechanism. This could help countries to address risks - and it could offer opportunities for the public and private sector to work cooperatively.

The conclusion of negotiations will provide greater clarity on these issues. In the meantime, however, I urge you to advance adaptation in your respective fields as quickly as possible.

Given the increasing number of extreme events all over the world, adaptation cannot come soon enough - and money spent on adaptation today will be money well invested in our future. Comprehensive adaptation measures will help save lives, livelihoods and, ultimately, prevent increased costs due to damages.

Aggressive adaptation today needs to become the economic and societal global insurance programme of the 21st century.

Thank you
