

Speech Delivered by Maria Otero
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H.R.H Crown Prince Haakon, Minister of Research and Higher Education Ms. Tora Aasland, Former Norwegian Prime Minister Ms. Gro Harlem Brundtland, distinguished scientists, members of the private sector, fellow diplomats:

Being here at Ny-Alesund, the northernmost research station on our planet, and sharing two days with some of the finest minds addressing climate change today is a unique privilege. On behalf of the United States I want to express my appreciation. We have engaged in a frank exchange of ideas, information and research, and we have also witnessed the unfolding drama of the Arctic Ocean in action. Our “field trip” yesterday to see glaciers close up made clear that this is a dynamic region whose changes, already apparent to the naked eye, are affecting and will continue to affect, the whole world. Indeed, the data that many of you have been gathering and the careful analysis you are providing presents a critical perspective on both the present and future. As Dr. Katherine Richardson stated when the symposium began, the Arctic is one of the “tipping points” in our efforts to address climate change. In fact, I was intrigued that in many of your presentations, your slides of the Arctic showed it as a pulsating heart at the center of every map. And from a climate change perspective it should be at the center. Climate change is having a greater impact in the Arctic than in the rest of the world– it is the place where changes are first observable and therefore a forecast of what is to come.

As the title of my talk indicates, I will be addressing the role of the United Nations in addressing climate change. We have talked a great deal about the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change, UNFCCC. Most of you are intimately knowledgeable about its operations and some have worked directly with our Special Envoy for Climate Change, Todd Stern or his Deputy, Jonathan Pershing. We also have noted that there are varying views about the UNFCCC’s effectiveness, including those of us who have been encouraged by the outcome of Copenhagen or COP-15 as a necessary first step towards a global agreement. In our case, the generally positive view of the United States comes partly from the post-Copenhagen activity we have observed, in which over 130 countries have signed up to the accord and more than 80 have presented their targets for reducing carbon emissions. In addition to the UNFCCC, there are other very important ways in which the UN is playing a role through its many agencies, addressing a variety of related issues. It is also developing mechanisms to respond to some of the challenges emerging from Copenhagen, for example, the creation of the High-level Advisory Group on Climate Change Financing, chaired by Norway’s Prime Minister Stoltenberg. As I speak today, I will make reference to additional ways in which the UN is making a contribution to climate change.

Let me also use this opportunity to address one issue of particular interest to this group – the Arctic Council and the U.S.’s view of this body – and to present the scientists and researchers here with one challenge as they increase our scientific knowledge about climate change.

The Arctic Council is a policy shaping body in which coastal states are collaborating to address the many issues confronting the Arctic Ocean, especially in light of climate change. There is much common ground among the Council’s members, which is reflective in the setting of agenda items for deliberation and defining priorities. Among these is the interest on the part of its members to strengthen the Arctic Council and to expand its work.

From the perspective of the United States the following is worth noting:

First, we consider the Arctic Council the best mechanism to advance our collective ability to develop responses to environmental protection and to other matters that require definition and agreement. It is the primary forum to conduct Arctic related discussions. Its member countries, as well as the indigenous communities of the Arctic, have been working effectively together.

Second, we consider it important to work together with other member states. Even when total agreement is not present, we believe it is key to develop agreements to which all can abide. In fact, the Arctic Council can become a means to reach binding agreements among countries.

Third, we agree on the need to support and strengthen the work of the Arctic Council. We have stated that we would be open to providing some of the needed resources, and to contribute to the improvement of its communication and outreach. There are other areas that we are also considering and are still under review for us, such as the establishment of a permanent secretariat.

We recognize also the leadership role that Norway has played in the activities of the Arctic Council, and we very much appreciate our close collaboration with Norway as co-chairs of one of the Council’s key Task Forces, the Short-Lived Climate Forces Task Force, SLCFTF. I am pleased that Hivard Torsen, Norway’s co-chair of this Task Force, is with us today and can provide more details on its work. Clearly SLCF issues, such as Black Carbon, affects countries differently. However, it is important to establish recommendations on the mitigation of Black Carbon that all Arctic states can work towards. This is something that the Task Force is undertaking, as it oversees the work of an experts’ group and engages high level officials from all member states.

I should also note that the US has pledged US\$5 million to catalyze efforts to mitigate emissions of Black Carbon, and other countries – Norway, Canada, Sweden, Denmark and Finland – have joined in this effort and may also pledge contributions.

The Arctic Council Task Forces span issues beyond climate change. The Search and Rescue Task Force (SAR), chaired by the U.S. and Russia, was set up in April 2009 to develop and

complete negotiations that will lead to a SAR agreement for signature at the 2011 Ministerial meeting.

The second topic I wish to address in this symposium is related directly to climate change, but I present it as a challenge to researchers. Let me use a personal anecdote to begin.

I was born and raised in La Paz, Bolivia, where I spent the first twelve years of my life. It is the highest capital in the world – Bolivians are very proud of this piece of data – about 12,000 feet or 3,800 meters above sea level. The city of La Paz is surrounded by the most majestic and spectacular mountains of the Andes, some jutting up more than 23,000 feet. These snow covered mountains – the Illimani, the Huayna Potosi, white and stunning at that altitude against a brilliant sun, are among the most vivid memories of my childhood. During my youth, with cousins, we made day trips to the snow covered Chacaltaya, one hour outside the city, and at the outrageous altitude of 15,000 or 16,000 feet we skied and had snowball fights.

Earlier this year I was stunned to see a photograph in the *Washington Post* of the Chacaltaya Mountain, still majestic but no longer covered with snow. There is no more snow on the Chacaltaya.

It is the melting of these glaciers in the Andes that provide water for cities like La Paz or Lima, Peru, a city of over 6 million, set in the sands bordering the Pacific, a city with little rainfall that keeps policymakers awake at night. These and other cities will be severely impacted by the role climate change has on glacial melt. Other glaciers, such as in the Himalayas, provide fresh water to billions of people in more than half a dozen countries, including China and India.

With this anecdote I want to draw your attention to the connection between climate change and water, and the importance of understanding how water, its shortage, its sharing and its management, impacts on the lives of billions of people, most of them in the south. Secretary Clinton elevated this issue when she delivered a speech on World Water Day, March 22, in which she highlighted, among other things, the importance of helping countries equip themselves to address water-related topics. Countries share river basins; yet not all have mechanisms to manage the sharing. In some regions water is already scarce. Issues such as watershed management, water use management, and the capacity to plan long-term either receive little attention or are allocated few resources, or both. In my recent travels I have been to many countries confronting water use management. For example, a country with one of the world's largest structures of irrigation canals, currently has very poor maintenance, and its deteriorating infrastructure means that nearly 60% of the available water is wasted through seepage; Worldwide agricultural irrigation uses 72% of freshwater, yet some of the most efficient countries have gotten this figure down below 40%. I have visited a desalination plant that in 20 minutes converts sea water into delicious drinking water, but next to it sits a mountain of coal needed to power this incredibly energy intensive technology.

More research is needed in areas such as waste water treatment, and on introducing new technologies for irrigation. Greater focus on how climate change will lead to more floods and more drought, what seeds can survive in floods, or which can grow in salt water are two examples of how research can address more purposefully the relationship between climate change and adaptation. This is a concern for most countries. The private sector is engaging as well: we heard from the participant from India, S. Ramadorai, how his company, TATA, after incorporating the impact of climate change into its planning, is retrofitting its business model and innovating its product offering in very significant and creative ways.

Interestingly, it is in the issues that affect developing countries that the UN is dedicating resources and making an important contribution. There are well over a dozen UN agencies that address water related issues, from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), which tracks weather patterns, to the UNEP and UNDP. Not surprisingly, several UN agencies, such as UNICEF, are addressing one of the biggest challenges that countries face, increasing access to safe drinking water and sanitation for their people. The UN, as in the case of UNIFEM, is also focusing on how women are affected by lack of access to water and by climate change. Women are at the forefront of agricultural activity. They are also the ones responsible for fetching water for the family, and they are the ones that seek a healthy environment for their children, in a world where most children dying before the age of five do so because of water-borne diseases. The role of women and climate change is particularly important, and it is one which Secretary Clinton has also elevated, creating a new office at the State Department, Global Women's Issues (GWI), headed by highly respected Ambassador Melanne Verveer.

President Obama has said that he wants his administration's policies to be "evidenced-based," to use verifiable data and facts as the foundation for setting policy. Secretary Clinton has highlighted the importance of science diplomacy, not only because scientists speak a common language that transcends national boundaries and politics, but because they provide essential knowledge and measurable data to help us understand the present and plan for the future. Linking research more closely to some of the most pressing issues developing countries face as a result of climate change is a challenge before every scientist who seeks to contribute through effective responses to climate change.

Thank you.