



INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE



Speech by Mr Rajendra K. Pachauri

**at the Opening Ceremony of the UNFCCC COP 14, Poznań, Poland
(1 December 2008)**

Honorable Prime Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm here to submit that there is a wealth of information in the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC, a large part of which has still not received adequate attention and precise understanding. Hence, impacts of climate change are still seen as distant and undefined. But science has given us precise answers and robust conclusions.

May I in this context inform you of the unique nature of the IPCC. The Panel mobilizes thousands of the best scientists in the world for its assessment of various aspects of climate change. This work is carried out with complete transparency and objectivity in all the procedures followed and peer reviews carried out at each stage of the process by experts as well as governments; the approval and acceptance of the Summary for Policymakers involves all the governments, which gives them direct participation in the process and a full sense of ownership in the work of the IPCC.

From the Fourth Assessment Report we now know the serious impacts of climate change, which would accrue as a result of inaction. We also know the nature of their worldwide implications.

Some examples of these impacts are:

- the number of people living in severely stressed river basins would go up from 1.4 to 1.6 billion in 1995 to 4.3 to 6.9 billion in 2050.
- Roughly 20-30% of species assessed are likely to be at increasingly high risk of extinction as global mean temperatures exceed 2°-3° above pre-industrial levels. We are getting close to that range.
- Abrupt and irreversible changes are possible, such as collapse of the Greenland or West Antarctic ice sheets, which can lead to Sea Level Rise of several meters. For Greenland, the temperature threshold for breakdown is estimated to be about 1.1° to 3.8° C above today's global average temperature. Again we are close to that range too.
- Climate change currently contributes to the global burden of disease and premature deaths. Adverse health impacts will be greatest in low income countries.
- Smallholder and subsistence farmers, who are generally dependent on rainfed agriculture, pastoralists and artisan fisherfolk are likely to suffer complex, localized impacts of climate change.
- Small islands, whether located in the tropics or higher latitudes, have characteristics which make them especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, sea level rise and extreme events.
- In some countries of Africa, yields from rainfed agriculture could be reduced by 50% by 2020. At the local level many people are likely to suffer additional losses to their livelihoods when climate change and variability occur together with other stresses, such as conflict.

- If current warming rates are maintained, Himalayan glaciers could decay at very rapid rates. Decline in river flows as a result could affect 500 million people in South Asia and 250 million in China.

The differential nature of climate change impacts and the existence of other stresses leave the poor of the world particularly vulnerable. The ethical aspects of this reality need to be accepted in devising the implementing mitigation actions.

Our collective record of mitigation of GHG emissions has not been very inspiring. Global greenhouse gas emissions have grown, of course, since pre-industrial times, but there has been an increase of 70% between 1970 and 2004. Hence, the record of global action at mitigation has been very weak, even though the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was agreed on in 1992. This record goes against the spirit and intent of the UNFCCC.

Mitigation of emissions of GHGs has various merits and is in itself desirable and feasible in several respects.

If global mean temperature increase is to be stabilized between 2.0-2.4°C, then CO₂ emissions must peak by 2015. The cost of such a stringent path of stabilization of the earth's climate would be very modest, if at all a cost would be incurred. For instance, for this trajectory the cost to the global economy would at most be less than 3% of the global GDP in 2030. In fact there are so many co-benefits from such action that if these were to be fully accounted for then these might actually result in a negative cost, or a net increase in economic output and economic welfare.

Large co-benefits of mitigation would include health benefits on account of lower air pollution at the local level, higher energy security, higher yields in agriculture, and greater employment opportunities. The record of those countries that have proactively pursued greater use of renewable energy major improvements in energy efficiency have been able to increase employment in the economy.

But even the trajectory of stabilisation described above would leave some serious problems in the nature of impacts of climate change. We would need to consider whether the effort to limit increase in global mean temperature to about 2 degrees C would be adequate because sea level rise due to thermal expansion alone with this trajectory would be between 0.4 to 1.4 meters. Add to this the melting of ice bodies, and we would have serious effects of sea level rise on low lying coastal areas and small islands.

My plea to this august body would be to please listen to and reflect on the voice of science, and please act with determination and a sense of urgency. We in the IPCC do not prescribe any specific action, but action is a must.