

World Climate Conference-3
Geneva, Switzerland
High Level Statement
Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Head of the United States Delegation
September 3, 2009

Excellencies, Ministers, Colleagues and Friends,

It is an honor for me to be here today on behalf of President Obama at the third World Climate Conference. In just over six months, President Obama has dramatically shifted US policy on climate change. He has emphasized that good government depends on good science, and that the scientific evidence of climate change is compelling. He is committed to reducing green house gas pollution, creating clean energy jobs and adapting to climate change already underway. As one of the scientists on the President's team, and as head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce, it is a special privilege for me to participate in this landmark conference.

Past World Climate Conferences have been both prescient and bold, tackling critically important climate issues before they were broadly appreciated. Decisions taken at the first and second World Climate Conferences set in motion what is now recognized as an impressive legacy – this includes the core scientific capacity that enabled our understanding of the climate system, and contributed to the establishment of the Nobel-prize winning IPCC, and a global climate observing system that serves as the backbone for national and international climate assessments and provides a baseline for research and modeling efforts. This is a powerful legacy.

Through these and other efforts, we now know that there is unequivocal evidence that the Earth is warming and that most of the observed increases in global temperatures since the mid-20th century are very likely due to human-induced emissions of greenhouse gases.

The second World Climate Conference also laid the foundation for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change -- the international treaty that guides our collective commitments to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and that, in recent years, has taken a leadership role in efforts to adapt to climate changes that cannot be avoided. As we know, the UN Framework Convention is working intensely towards an agreement in Copenhagen later this year. This agreement is built on the pillars of mitigation and adaptation. I am here to confirm that President Obama is unwavering in his commitment to this process, and that the United States is working actively towards a successful agreement, through both ambitious domestic actions and international cooperation.

The need for aggressive action on climate change is abundantly clear from the impacts of warming that we have already seen. Within the United States, extensive climate-related perturbations have been documented over the last century, many of which are summarized in our recently-released report entitled *Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States*. Documented changes in the U.S. include increases in continental-average temperatures, rising sea levels in many coastal locations, an increased frequency of heavy rainfall events, longer growing seasons, earlier snowmelt, and altered river flow volumes. Water is a pervasive issue in every region of the United States, but the nature of the impact varies. Drought is a serious problem, especially in the West and Southeast; floods and water quality problems are expected to increase in most regions. In parallel to these climate changes, the ocean is becoming more acidic as it absorbs much of the excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

These and other changes have profound implications for society. They underscore the urgent need for useful scientific information to aid decision-makers in developing and evaluating options for addressing climate variability, mitigating climate change and adapting to a climate-changed world. For example, this past spring, our Red River of the North far exceeded flood stage for over 2 months. Scientific analyses

anticipated the unprecedented flooding months earlier, in time to provide alerts and enable communities to prepare for and avoid the worst consequences of what could have been devastating floods.

Today, user demands for climate information are increasing rapidly. Decision-makers at all levels of government, business leaders, civil society and individual citizens are asking how they can best prepare their communities, businesses or lives for the impacts of climate change. In particular, users need climate information and assessments at the scale that is relevant to their concerns. Scientists are increasingly able to provide the “right scale” information.

Lives, prosperity and social stability are at stake.

We must now seize the opportunity to use the wealth of science-based information about climate change and variability and translate it into meaningful information that can be used to inform critical decisions at right scale, across multiple sectors and around the globe.

Imagine farmers able to determine what to plant and where, based on drought forecasts 3-5 years out.

Imagine coastal communities able to plan for sea level rise and storm intensity.

Imagine city planners or water resources managers able to ensure the availability of water for drinking, energy production, agriculture and many other uses.

Imagine public health officials being ready for, or even able to avoid, outbreaks of malaria based on longer-term forecasts of precipitation.

These and other ‘climate services’ would clearly be immensely helpful.

The concept of ‘Climate services’ is an idea that has been gestating for some time.

But, today marks the day that ‘climate services’ was born.

Even though the term is still foreign to many, I predict that it will become part of our lexicon, as ‘weather services’ is today. Just as we depend on all types of weather services now, we eagerly await the creation of a range of science-based climate forecasts and other services.

Inspired and empowered by the successes of the two previous World Climate Conferences, recognizing the reality and urgency of addressing climate change, understanding the imperative of grounding decisions in the best available science, and appreciating that users and providers of climate services must work together, this World Climate Conference is creating a new legacy. Improving development and delivery of climate services offers untold economic, environmental, human health, and national security benefits. For these reasons, the Obama Administration strongly supports the establishment of a Global Framework for Climate Services as an outcome of this Conference.

As with any infant, climate services will require careful nurturing. The Framework should be structured to engage users and ensure their needs are understood and addressed in an integrated, iterative manner. It should be highly-responsive to evolving user needs and based upon expert evaluation of current data and knowledge.

The framework should enable effective action on climate change and variability to increase resilience and implement cost-effective climate change mitigation and adaptation.

We will need an objective, authoritative, and consistent source of consolidated, reliable, and timely climate information to support decision-making.

Our understanding of the climate system will need to continue to improve. Continued investments in research, observations, modeling, decision-support tools and communication are needed. This new

knowledge will strengthen the utility of climate services, thus increasing the sustainability and resilience of our communities.

To work, solutions must fit local circumstances and produce results that people can use. Climate services must be relevant, accessible, timely, open, reliable and sustainable.

This is a time of rapid change. The pace and nature of changes in the Earth's climate reinforce the need for delivering targeted climate services at appropriate scales.

In closing, I offer sincere compliments to the Organizing Committee and our hosts, the World Meteorological Organization. It is our expectation that the World Climate Conference – 3 will take its place among its predecessors and usher in a new generation of international climate collaboration.

Thank you.