

Hollande calls for “universal, differentiated and binding” agreement, highlights historical responsibility.

1 Dec, Paris (Hilary Chiew) – French President Françoise Hollande said the agreement from the Paris climate talks can be universal, differentiated and binding where developed countries must assume their historical responsibility as they are the ones that for years had emitted the most greenhouse gases, while emerging economies must accelerate their economic transition, and developing countries must be supported to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Hollande also said that accordingly, finance needs to be freed up for technology transfer, stressing that in Copenhagen the objective of US\$100 billion was set but now in Paris financial resources must be freed up with guarantees on their sources and availability (for developing countries).

Hollande had presided over the opening of the Leader’s Event segment on the first day of the 21st meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that is taking place from 30 November to 11 December.

He also highlighted the links between the effects of climate change on the poorest countries that are least responsible for climate change, causing conflicts and mass migration.

Coming close on the heels of the 13 November Paris attacks and the migration crisis in European countries, Hollande said what is essentially at stake at the Paris climate talks is peace and urged countries to act in the name of climate justice.

“I am not choosing the fight between terrorism and the fight against global warming. These are two major challenges that we must overcome. We must leave our children a world free of terror but also a planet free of disasters ... a viable and liveable planet,” he said.

“No countries or regions are spared the event of climate change but how can we accept that it is the poorest countries with the lowest greenhouse gas emission that are the most vulnerable and they are even further affected?” he asked.

“Therefore, it is in the name of climate justice that I am speaking before you and in that name we must act. We need to wake up to the severity of challenges brought to the world,” stressed Hollande.

He said climate change brings conflicts just like clouds bring storms, causing migration and refugees to take flight, alluding to the fact that States that are no longer able to meet basic needs of their population are faced with conflicts where people are clashing over increasingly scarce resources like food and water, resulting in many being forced to migrate.

Describing the day as historic where 150 Heads of State and Government and thousands of delegates had gathered for the COP, Hollande said it is a recognition that at stake is the future of the planet and lives.

He expressed gratitude on behalf of the French people for the show of support in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, stressing that the tragic event “forced us to focus on what is important” and that “we do not have the right to disappoint as billions of human beings are watching us now”.

He set out three conditions for the success of the Paris COP.

First, the need to determine and sketch out a credible path allowing for limiting global warming to below 2°C or 1.5°C if possible. To be sure of being on the right path, Hollande said there is a need to provide for regular assessment of progress with a revision mechanism that corresponds to a five-year cycle.

Secondly, the response to that challenge requires solidarity of all States, and no State can abstain from its commitment even if there is a differentiation mechanism that takes into account the different levels of development. Stressing that no territories should be left alone to combat climate change and he wanted to be the voice of the vulnerable countries, Hollande said the agreement can be universal, differentiated and binding.

With regard to finance for technology, Hollande said that Copenhagen had set the US\$100 billion a year by 2020 objective, and now in Paris financial resources should be freed up with guarantees on their sources and availability (for developing countries).

Thirdly, all actors of society, State and non-State actors, who contribute to forming the global public mindset must understand that things have changed and they have to start moving.

Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, said Parties must take advantage of the political momentum presented by the presence of the 150 leaders and he urged the leaders to instruct their ministers and negotiators to choose the path of compromise, consensus and if necessary flexibilities.

He said Paris must mark a turning point and build a durable climate regime with clear rules that all countries can follow, noting that the national climate plans submitted so far (referring to the 183 Intended Nationally Determined Contributions), represent close to 90% of global emissions and it is a good start.

“But we need to go faster as the science has made plain that even with 2C temperature rise, we will have serious consequences,” he added.

Ban said the agreement must be dynamic and able to adapt to changes posed by global economics and without the necessity to renegotiate the commitment continuously. It is desirable that many of the provisions of the agreement can be addressed in different way without jeopardising collective efforts. He also said that the agreement must preserve the balance between the leading role of developed countries and the growing responsibilities of developing countries according to their resources and level of development.

Ban further said the current ambition level must be the floor and not the ceiling and a five-year cycle (of review) from 2020 is crucial and that all countries must move towards quantified economy-wide reduction target over time with flexibilities for developing countries with limited capacity.

“Developed countries must keep promises to mobilise US\$100 billion per year by 2020 and the amount should serve as a floor for post-2020 finance commitment. The new agreement must include a single transparency framework for monitoring, reporting and verification of progress. Countries with low capacity must be supported to meet requirement for this new system.

(According to several observers Ban appeared to mainly reflect the views of developed countries.)

Earlier, at the opening ceremony of the COP21 and the 11th session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP11), invited royal guest Prince Charles of the United Kingdom said rarely in the human history had so many people place their trust in the hands of so few.

“Your deliberations will decide the fate of not only those alive today but also generations yet unborn. I can only urge you to think of your grandchildren like I think of mine and those billions of people without voices ... those for whom hope is the rarest of sensation, those for whom secured lives is a distant prospect.

“On an increasingly crowded planet, humanity face many threats but none greater than climate change which can magnify every hazard and threaten our ability to feed ourselves, to remain healthy and safe from extreme weather, to manage natural resources that support our economies and to avert humanitarian disaster and mass migration and increasing conflicts.

“In damaging the climate, we become the architect of our own destruction. While the planet can survive the scorching of the earth and rising water, the human race cannot. The absurd thing is that we know what can be done, we know we cannot adapt sufficiently to go on as we are nor can we build ourselves a new atmosphere,” he warned.

Prince Charles said drastic emission reduction can be done with the knowledge, tools and money where only 1.7% of global annual consumption can put us on the low carbon pathway, noting that governments spent more than a trillion a year on subsidies for energy, agriculture and fisheries rather than using this vast sum to support sustainable energy rather than fossil fuel, deforestation and overexploitation of the sea.

He further lamented that when it comes to climate change, good science is ignored, adding that “if the planet is a patient, you would have treated her long ago. You have the power to put her on life support.

You must surely start the emergency procedure without further procrastination”.

“So today after far too long an interval, you are all here to set us on a road to a saner future. If at last the moment has arrived to take those long awaited steps to rescue us from impending catastrophe let us pursue that vital goal in a spirit of enlightened and humane collaboration,” he concluded.

Newly-elected President of COP21, French Foreign Affairs Minister Laurent Fabius underscored that the Paris COP is a special one as at the end of it, it must fulfil the mandate of the Durabn COP (2011) which is to adopt a new protocol, another legal instrument or an outcome with legal force applicable to all Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

“To achieve this, we have just 11 short days before us ... in fact, fewer, given the time necessary for some final legal verification and translation into the six UN languages. And we are obliged to succeed,” he said.

He emphasised that the role of the French Presidency and the success of the Paris COP lie on his ability to listen, ensure transparency of the process and Parties’ vision for an ambitious agreement and willingness to compromise.

“I should be and will be open to everything you have to say. From the start, I will make sure all points of view are taken into account and all countries are independent countries. I will be impartial and respect all till the end,” Fabius assured.

On transparency of the process, he reiterated that France has no hidden agenda, no secret plan and “no text in our pockets” and that his presidency will be inclusive and engender trust among Parties. “I will make sure I am deserving of your trust and I ask you to be frank and tell me on a day to day basis where there are still points which need agreement.”

He said the stakes are far too high and the threats to climate change are far too great for a minimalist

agreement and he would seek to meet the request for ambition.

Fabius also said there are many options in the draft agreement and the tasks of Parties are to deal with these options until the Co-Chairs of the Adhoc Working Group on Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP) submit the draft to him. Following that, he said his objective is to concentrate with heads of states and ministers on the final political points that still need to be determined and work quickly with the support of the UNFCCC secretariat to facilitate convergence.

He noted that success is not yet assured but is within grasp and there are lots of work to do.

“Therefore, it is for us to meet our responsibilities head on so that in the evening of 11 December, we can say to the world that our mission is accomplished,” he concluded.

Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC Christiana Figueres said Paris is now more than ever a beacon of hope for the world. Living up to its title as the city of light, it is lighting the way for betterment of humanity.

“There is no doubt that the global climate agreement that we seek must be part of what Paris has become in the face of adversity and threat of many kinds. Paris must be where the world unite as one ... determined to collectively commit ourselves for the common good for global safety and enduring well being for all.

“The eyes of the world have been on Paris for weeks. Now the eyes of billions of people around the world are on you not just figuratively but literally. You have the opportunity, in fact, the responsibilities to finalise an agreement that enable the achievement of national climate change goals that deliver the necessary support for the developing world and the catalysing continuous ambition and actions by all. The world is counting on you,” she added.