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Secretary General

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Statement

TO MASTER THE THREATS OF CLIMATE CHANGE WE HAVE TO REDEFINE AND REORIENT ECONOMIC GROWTH

We are heading into a perfect storm of crises which are so intimately connected that they cannot be resolved separately. Climate change is only one of an array of emerging challenges: The ecosystems on which we absolutely depend are being degraded at an alarming rate; humanity is grossly overusing the resources of the planet; rising stress on water and productive land, compounded by the effects of climate change, is reducing food security; levels of hunger, poverty and deprivation are again increasing; the global economic and financial systems have proved to be unstable and inequitable; the division between rich and poor is widening; millions cannot find employment; and, in this complex and dangerous situation, it is estimated that an additional 2.3 billion people will arrive on this planet by 2050. The root causes are our current concepts of growth, development and globalization, which must be changed.

The UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen demonstrated that concepts, assumptions and processes which determine our policies and action are inadequate to manage the challenges of the 21st century. In common with previous civilisations which have collapsed, we see the threats deepening but we are unable to agree on strong action.

Why have we failed so far?

- We fail because our ideas have been overtaken by reality: we insist on trying to solve connected, systemic problems through partial, incremental and short-term measures.
- We fail because our institutions and policies, designed for a different age, are not adapted to a world in rapid transformation and to the scale of the dynamic, connected challenges of the 21st Century.
- We fail because our model of economic growth, directed to never-ending increases in demand-driven consumption, destroys the natural systems on which we depend;
- We fail because we have not yet accepted that substantial changes in attitudes and beliefs, values and behaviour are necessary if we are to resolve critical global issues.
- And we fail because we have not yet recognised in practice, the reality and urgency of the threats which are fast approaching: we therefore cannot find the will and the public understanding and support to take the necessary action.

It will be essential to restructure national economies onto a new path of growth to address the root causes of climate change, and of the other crises which threaten the future. This is a deeper and more extensive issue than moving towards a low carbon economy.

We must change present strategies and policies for economic growth, e.g. by adapting the GDP to become a measure of real welfare and progress and by taking proper account of the value of natural capital by assigning a value to ecosystems services and biodiversity.

We cannot manage the scale, complexity and dynamics of the 21st Century with the tools of the 20th. We are at a turning point in world history where new ideas, new values, new strategies and new institutional arrangements are needed. We have learned that we cannot rely solely on "the magic of the market place." Nor can we rely on technological solutions to save us from ourselves. We know that business as usual will lead to disaster. We must find the vision, the leadership and the creativity to collaborate in developing constructive solutions to offer a decent future to present and succeeding generations. We have the capabilities: we must find the will.

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