

**Remarks by Ambassador Elizabeth Cousens, U.S.
Representative to ECOSOC, for the US/Canada/Israel Team,
7th Session of the SDG Open Working Group, on Climate
Change and DRR**

Elizabeth Cousens

U.S. Representative to ECOSOC

New York, NY

January 10, 2014

AS DELIVERED

Thank you Mr. Co-Chair, and thanks again to the UN Task Team and colleagues for the discussions to date. We are happy to speak on behalf of Canada, Israel, and the United States.

Climate change could not be a more critical global priority for every one of us here today. It is vital that we take meaningful action at home and abroad, and continue to work with partners around the world to create and promote low-emissions, climate-resilient development solutions, using all relevant platforms to promote ambitious action.

Development progress can only be sustained if it takes place in a manner that protects the resources – food, water, eco-systems, etc. – and climate upon which development and life itself depend.

We are all aware of the clear and stark warnings from the scientific community. If we – all of us – fail to act on climate with vigor and commitment, the projected impacts from climate change are likely to disrupt our best efforts to overcome poverty and build a better world.

Broadly speaking, we can address climate change in three major ways.

First, we can progressively transform the energy base of our economies from high to low carbon through a combination of enhanced energy efficiency and the increased use of low- and no-carbon fuels and existing low- or zero-emissions technologies.

Second, we can promote low-carbon development in land use by reducing deforestation and increasing our forest stocks; improving our land management and agricultural methods; and promoting water efficiency to conserve energy.

Third, we can take action to build resilience in our economies and societies to withstand the impacts of climate change that will intensify in the coming years and decades, even if we are successful in our efforts to mitigate emissions.

Here in the Open Working Group, our task is to forge a next-generation set of goals that can make enduring gains against extreme poverty and exclusion, and promote sustainability for future generations. How, then, should we treat climate change in the context of this work? The goals and objectives for managing climate change itself are rightly the focus of deliberations in a different venue – the UNFCCC – and it would not make sense to have a parallel debate of the same nature here.

For example, there is robust discussion going on in that venue about the appropriate application, over time, of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, and we do not think it would be productive to have the same debate in relation to SDGs.

We strongly believe, however, that a post-2015 development framework will only be successful if it takes climate change fully into account as we have heard from numerous speakers.

We see a number of constructive ways to achieve this, including in an eventual post-2015 narrative. For our purposes in the Open Working Group, we would highlight the potential to integrate climate considerations into key goals and targets that have the greatest impact on climate.

Let's take sustainable energy. We have already discussed this in November but it is important to revisit in this context. Ambitious efforts to bring sustainable modern energy services to the billion people who now live in energy poverty is one of the surest ways possible to promote climate-resilient development. Targets to increase energy efficiency and renewable energy could also be critical, as would a commitment to fulfil the 2009 G20 pledge to phase out fossil fuel subsidies and free up hundreds of billions of dollars for sustainable, productive, pro-development needs.

We could also look to targets on forests, sustainable agriculture and food systems, efficient and resilient infrastructure, or oceans. Indeed, as a general matter, we believe that it will be important to identify targets that have maximum relevance to multiple goals and that allow us both to keep our agenda focused and to have greatest impact.

Let me now turn to Disaster Risk Reduction, or DRR, and the broader issue of resilience, which are obviously related to, but also go beyond climate change adaptation.

DRR, climate adaptation, and wider development efforts are mutually reinforcing and should be tackled in an integrated manner. Basic development investments, such as in poverty reduction, education, good governance, or land use planning, will be essential to reducing vulnerability to disasters and stresses of all kinds, including the impacts of climate change.

Some of the actions needed are likely to go beyond the ambit of our discussions here but include better integration of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction into development; risk assessments that use the best available science together with traditional and indigenous knowledge; prioritizing people, ecosystems, infrastructure and sectors that are most vulnerable to climate change and disaster impacts; and stronger governance and enabling environments for effective adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Building resilience doesn't simply mean "doing development better" in any one sector. Real resilience means that people at every level, and the systems on which they depend, are able to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces vulnerability.

We would also note that women, in particular those in developing countries, make their living in sectors that are especially vulnerable to climate change, such as agriculture. However, as Peru rightly mentioned yesterday, women can also be powerful agents of change. Empowering women and enhancing their livelihoods should thus be foundational to our approach to resilience and, indeed, to sustainable development in general.

Therefore, we see substantial scope to integrate climate change, as well as disaster risk reduction and broader resilience, into our goal framework in a dynamic and relevant way, as the multiple intersections between climate and development are clear and compelling.

Thank you.

###