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PRESS RELEASE

UN Climate Chief says IEA estimate of record 2010 emissions is stark warning to governments to make rapid climate progress this year

(Bonn, 30 May 2011) Latest estimates from the International Energy Agency (IEA) showing that greenhouse gas emissions from world energy generation reached record levels in 2010 are a stark warning to governments to provide strong new progress this year towards global solutions to climate change, UN Climate Chief Christiana Figueres said on Monday.

"This is the inconvenient truth of where human-generated greenhouse gas emissions are projected to go without much stronger international action now ... and into the future," said the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

"Governments are meeting next week in Bonn to prepare for the next major international climate conference to be held in Durban at the end of the year. It is clear that they need to push the world further down the right track to avoid dangerous climate change," the UN's top climate change official said. "I won't hear that this is impossible. Governments must make it possible for society, business and science to get this job done," she added.

The latest IEA estimates published today show that energy-related CO₂ emissions in 2010 were at their highest level in history, following a brief dip in 2009 due to the economic impacts of the global financial crisis.

The Paris-based organization also estimated that 80% of all projected 2020 greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector are already locked into the global system of power generation by plants that already exist or are under construction.

Dr. Fatih Birol, Chief Economist at the IEA who oversees the annual World Energy Outlook, today called the latest estimates a "wake-up call" for the international community.

"The world has edged incredibly close to the level of emissions that should not be reached until 2020 if the 2°C target is to be attained," he said. "Given the shrinking room for manoeuvre in 2020, unless bold and decisive decisions are made very soon, it will be extremely challenging to succeed in achieving this global goal agreed [at the UN climate change conference] in Cancun," he added.

Alluding to the upcoming round of UN climate change negotiations in Bonn, Germany (6 - 17 June), UNFCCC Executive Secretary Ms. Figueres said:



“No nation will solve climate change alone. And no nation is alone in feeling its impacts. We’re only a few days away now from the mid-year climate negotiations and governments need to pick up speed.”

In Cancun, governments launched the most comprehensive package ever agreed to help developing nations deal with climate change, including a set of new international institutions to deliver that support.

They also agreed a major effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but left open the question of how to raise their collective level of ambition to keep the global temperature rise at least below two degrees.

Ms Figueres said that, in Durban, governments will have two main challenges that they have agreed to resolve:

First, to strengthen the international conditions that will allow nations to work together to make deeper global emission cuts. This includes the question of deciding the future of the Kyoto Protocol.

Second, to agree on the effective designs of the new climate institutions that will provide adequate and efficient climate support to developing countries. This includes the Green Climate Fund, Technology Mechanism and establishing the Adaptation Committee.

“In the wider world, I see two very encouraging trends,” said Ms Figueres. “Countries, including the biggest economies, are moving forward with new policies that promote low-carbon prosperous growth, even if they don’t always attach climate labels to these policies. And the private sector continues to increase its investment in low-carbon business and renewable energy and wants to do more.”

“In Durban at the end of the year, governments need to take the new steps that will drive both these trends forward and much faster,” she said. “The meeting in Bonn is a major opportunity to prepare these essential steps,” she added.

About the UNFCCC

With 195 Parties, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has near universal membership and is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. The Kyoto Protocol has been ratified by 193 of the UNFCCC Parties. Under the Protocol, 37 States, consisting of highly industrialized countries and countries undergoing the process of transition to a market economy, have legally binding emission limitation and reduction commitments. The ultimate objective of both treaties is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.

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