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ADDRESS TO 16th CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

BY

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Madame President

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

In this building over the past two weeks, we have seen yet again how hard our negotiators work, and how genuinely dedicated they are to averting human catastrophe on a scale never seen before. Despite the specific differences that are an inevitability of any international endeavour, the vast majority of our negotiators – from all countries – have been steadfast in their sincere conviction that we can create a better world for our children and future generations. We should be grateful for their work.

But we have known for some time that negotiations grounded in rigid country positions can only go so far. Our negotiators have helped us to reach a point where we know the issues, we have the analysis we need, and we know each other's considerations. But this is not enough. What is long overdue is translating negotiating positions into meaningful collective action. And we have long known that this can

only happen if political leaders make the necessary decisions and stick to them. Last year we saw an unprecedented level of high level political attendance at a COP, this year that has dwindled. If this process of down-grading political leadership on climate change continues, the decisions needed to create a better future for our planet will not be made. Future generations will not forgive us if this happens.

Yet the foundations for making those decisions are in place. Thanks to the excellent work of the Mexican Presidency and others, we once more have the basis for international collective action on climate change.

We all accept – most of us reluctantly – that we cannot secure a global, legally binding climate agreement here. But what we can secure are decisions to make progress across a number of areas that advance our work towards such an agreement. We can make progress on addressing deforestation and forest degradation, we can make progress on the mechanics of a green fund to help invest in mitigation and in adaptation to help the most vulnerable, we can make progress on technology transfer and we can make progress on financing.

But ultimately, the question at Cancun is more profound than might be implied by simply listing these areas for action.

Ultimately the question at Cancun is a question of sincerity. And I think that there are 3 ways in which that sincerity is being tested today.

One, even if we accept we cannot secure a legally binding agreement here, are we sincere in our commitment to securing one as soon as possible? Can we find a way through our differences on the form of that agreement, and can we leave here having set out a specific path to achieve a legally binding agreement?

Two, is the developed world sincere in its commitment to provide immediate action on financing for the developing world? In many ways, this is the defining test of international sincerity. I recognise that not every country here supports the Copenhagen Accord, and that many associated themselves with the accord reluctantly. But even those that chose for their own legitimate reasons not to support the Accord can welcome some of its elements, especially those that relate to financing.

Therefore, it would be a mistake of profound historical consequence if this test of sincerity was failed by those who pledged to provide the financing. If individual members of the developed world cheat even on the financing commitments of the Copenhagen Accord, they will send a disastrous signal that they are not up to the challenge of defeating climate change. The potential for progress will rapidly dwindle, and those of us who have expended extensive political

capital in trying to mobilise public support for action on climate change will see that support retreat.

Specifically, and most immediately, we must see a stop to the re-packaging of existing aid commitments as part of the US$30 billion that was promised for the period 2010-2012. The glossy brochures and propaganda, implying progress where there is none, are corrosive to progress. We have not even collectively defined the eligibility criteria that are consistent with the Copenhagen Accord for how this money will be invested – if we do not know something as basic as that, how can we pretend that the money is being disbursed? This is very, very serious. If the US$30 billion promised at Copenhagen for the period 2010 to 2012 starts to resemble the kind of dubious accounting that created the financial crisis, then it will worsen, not help solve, the climate crisis.

The third test of international sincerity is whether we reassert our commitment to being driven by science – and specifically by the analysis contained in the IPCC reports. As things stand, we are a long way off delivering against a set of commitments that are aligned with any meaningful reading of the scientific facts. The recent gap report by the United Nations Environment Programme showed that even with the upper end of the commitments in the Copenhagen Accord, annual emissions by 2020 will still be between 5Gt and 9Gt short of the Accord's goal of getting onto a 2 degree trajectory. Let us think about this – and think about how history looks at previous generations who ignored science. Will history judge us as the stupid

generation that ignored the unassailable facts about climate change, because we caved in to ignorance and political expedience?

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we do not need to be the stupid generation. We do not need to destroy the wonderful vision of international action that we can deliver together.

Instead, through the political resolve of the world's leaders, we can turn climate change from being a catastrophic threat to our way of life into the biggest opportunity for collective human advancement in history. The low carbon revolution that a fair, balanced global deal will create can be of benefit to all, it can lift billions in the developing world out of poverty by enabling them to participate in a new, global economy, and it can create a better future for our children and future generations.

But leaders can only lead when their populations are with them. I urge all those activists of the environmental movement, who have contributed so much to the progress we have made thus far, to keep working. If you care about the future of our planet, you must not give up. The goals we aspire to are too important.

We know what we need to do. And it falls to us to take this process forward. If we demonstrate sincerity on the key issues now, and make the decisions we need to make, the next year can be the year that the world finally got serious about the climate threat. The choice is ours. Thank you.