

## **Our Opportunity is Now**

By Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern

On September 22, U.S. President Barack Obama spoke to world leaders on climate change during a special U.N. summit in New York on the eve of the 64th session of the U.N. General Assembly.

The nations of the world are working hard right now to negotiate a new international agreement to combat climate change.

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing our world today. Already its impacts are apparent and consequences severe. Arctic sea ice is disappearing faster than expected. The Greenland Ice Sheet is shrinking. Sea levels threaten to rise higher than previously anticipated. And water supplies are increasingly at risk from both melting glaciers and extreme climate events, such as droughts and floods. These changes threaten not only the environment, but also security and stability.

The science sends a simple and stark message: all countries must work together to combat climate change, and the time for action is now.

President Obama recognizes that the United States must be a leader in the global effort to combat climate change. We have a responsibility as the world's largest historic emitter of greenhouse gases. We know that without U.S. emissions reductions no solution to climate change is possible, so the U.S. will take the lead in building a 21<sup>st</sup> century clean energy economy.

When it comes to climate change, President Obama is taking the U.S. in a new direction. The President called on the U.S. Congress to develop comprehensive clean energy legislation to cut emissions 14 percent from 2005 levels and 83 percent in 2050. A bill has passed the House of Representatives and is making its way through Congress. The President's economic stimulus package includes over \$80 billion for clean energy. And recently instituted vehicle standards will increase fuel economy and reduce emissions.

From an environmental perspective, the EU and U.S. climate packages are comparable and lead to emissions reductions that are consistent with the science. Rather than debate on negligible differences between EU and U.S. policies, it is far more critical to work together to prevent unchecked emissions growth among key emerging economies.

To preserve a safe and livable planet, all major emitting nations have to join together to take strong action. There is no other way to contain climate change – the International Energy Agency estimates 97 percent of future emissions growth will come from the developing world.

The U.S. is pursuing a global strategy to combat climate change through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiating process, the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate and key bilateral relationships.

To achieve a strong international agreement and meet the climate challenge all countries must be fully engaged. Developed countries need to reduce their emissions substantially by 2020 on an absolute basis, compared to a 2005 or 1990 baseline. Major developing nations must take actions that will substantially reduce their emissions by 2020 on a relative basis, compared to their so-called “business as usual” path. Other developing countries should focus on preparing low-carbon growth plans – with financial and technical assistance where needed – to guide their longer-term development path. It is important to ensure that a new agreement will not require developing countries to take steps that would stifle their capacity to develop and grow.

Ultimately, a climate change agreement must be about not only limiting carbon emissions but about providing a pathway for sustainable development. Clean energy development is the only sustainable way forward. To facilitate this path, countries with advanced capabilities must stand ready to develop and disseminate technologies to countries in need. If we work together, the effort to build a clean energy global economy can provide significant opportunity, driving investment, economic growth and job creation around the world.

Slovenia, both at home and as a member of the international community of developed countries, has demonstrated that it understands the need to take action now to address climate change. As President of the European Union in the first half of 2008, Slovenia worked hard to significantly raise the profile of this issue within Europe and with the U.S. We in our turn have responded to Slovenian leadership

on this issue by increasing our engagement with and support of NGOs and local communities, on the essential issues of carbon emissions, energy efficiency, renewable energies and sustainable development. We look forward to continuing this “green partnership” with Slovenia.

The U.S. is clear in its intent to secure a strong international agreement, and I am confident that together we can meet the climate change challenge.