



THE WOODS HOLE RESEARCH CENTER

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Woods Hole Research Center Director John P. Holdren Addresses UN General Assembly

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John P. Holdren, director of the Woods Hole Research Center, spoke Tuesday, July 31, to the United Nations General Assembly as part of a first-ever thematic debate regarding the science of climate change and its implications for science policy.

According to Dr. Holdren, "Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has been raising the priority the climate-change challenge in the United Nations, and this extraordinary session is the most visible manifestation of that so far."

Dr. Holdren's fellow participants included Sir Nicholas Stern, the author of a widely released study of climate change released in the United Kingdom last year and Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

In his remarks, Holdren emphasized that "significant disruption of global climate by human activities is an observed fact, not just a theory or a prediction." He also argued that the term 'Global warming' is misleadingly mild. "It implies something uniform, gradual, and benign," he said, while "What is actually happening is nonuniform, rapid, and damaging."

Holdren suggested that society has only three options in the face of the climate challenge: mitigation, meaning measures to reduce the pace and magnitude of the changes in global climate; adaptation, meaning measures to reduce the adverse impacts on well-being resulting from the changes in climate that do occur; and suffering, from the adverse impacts that are not avoided by either mitigation or adaptation.

To successfully address the challenges of climate change, Holdren urged that far more serious mitigation efforts than seen so far must be started at once in industrial nations and soon in developing ones. "Even assuming great success in mitigation efforts, an immediate and large increase in adaptation efforts is required in North and South alike. Increased international cooperation in both domains, including an expanded role for the United Nations, will be crucial."

Holdren also gave the keynote remarks at the VIP luncheon hosted by the President of the General Assembly, Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, in conjunction with the session.

The Woods Hole Research Center is dedicated to science, education and public policy for a habitable Earth, seeking to conserve and sustain forests, soils, water, and energy by demonstrating their value to human health and economic prosperity. The Center has initiatives in the Amazon, the Arctic, Africa, Russia, Asia, Boreal North America, the Mid-Atlantic, and New England including Cape Cod. Center programs focus on the global carbon cycle, forest function, landcover/land use, water cycles and chemicals in the environment, science in public affairs, and education.

In addition to directing the Woods Hole Research Center, Dr. Holdren is the Teresa and John Heinz Professor of Environmental Policy at Harvard University. He is also the Co-Chair of the independent, bi-partisan National Commission on Energy Policy and the immediate past president and chair of the board of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.