

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Speech by

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United Nations General Assembly

New York, 28 March 2019

Madam President,
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Secretary General of the United Nations rightly described climate change as the "major challenge of our time". I welcome the convening of this high-level meeting at the initiative of the President of the General Assembly and hope that it will strengthen the political momentum needed to address climate change, also in the context of the implementation of the development goals. Cyclone Idai and the growing number of victims in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe remind us of the urgent need for action.

I will focus on **three elements**: ambitious climate action, the relationship between the oceans and climate and, lastly, the link between climate and security.

1. In recent years, we have made significant progress in the fight against climate change. **The Paris Agreement** is a key milestone. COP21 was followed by broad and rapid ratification. COP24 in Katowice finalised the regulation that transformed the Paris Agreement into a fully operational agreement ensuring full transparency in climate efforts. This all proves that multilateralism can be a success.

However, let us not be complacent. **Scientific research and the IPCC Special Report** on the impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C make it extremely clear that we are doing only half of what is necessary to reduce climate change to manageable levels. The obvious conclusion is that in 2019 and 2020, we must shift our focus to implementing and **increasing our ambition**. Recent popular climate change demonstrations - led by young people - illustrate the public interest in ambitious action.

Climate ambition offers **many opportunities**. Yes, we will all need to invest deeply in the transition of our economies and the resilience of our societies as a result of climate change. But these costs are surmountable. The European economy has grown by more than 50% since 1990, and also since then we have reduced emissions by 22%, which shows that economic growth and emission reduction can go hand in hand. The European Commission has presented a proposal for a climate-neutral economy by 2050. Its analysis shows that climate neutrality is achievable and that an additional 0.8% of the GNP of investments in our economy makes it environmentally-friendly and provides health benefits. We will see a positive impact on employment and innovation.

The European Union is determined to help promote this global ambition and lead the way in accelerated climate action on all fronts. Last week's European Council meeting in Brussels confirmed that the EU will

seek to present an ambitious long-term strategy by 2020, consistent with the objectives set out in the Paris Agreement. We encourage all members of the United Nations to propose equally ambitious climate targets and long-term strategies.

2. The **oceans** cover more than 70% of the Earth's surface, but we have explored less than 5% of them. We have better maps of the moon than we do of the oceans. It is surprising that the spheres of negotiation on climate and oceans have until now had only limited interaction, while the synergies between all the Sustainable Development Goals, including climate and oceans, are so clear. That is why Belgium organised a high-level conference on oceans and climate change in Brussels on 19 February. Thirty countries and international organisations have joined the Brussels Declaration.

We were the first country to implement Maritime Spatial Planning, because we wanted to find answers to questions such as the reconciliation of economic activity with the preservation of our ecosystem. We have installed a large-scale wind-energy capacity in the North Sea. We have also strongly supported a legally binding instrument on biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and, in particular, the establishment of protected marine areas on the high seas, which will contribute significantly to the resilience of the oceans. As a maritime nation, we will ensure that international shipping also plays its part in the fight against CO2 emissions. Although this mode of transport was not included in the Paris Agreement, we helped to create the High Ambition Coalition to reduce CO2 emissions from international shipping.

We encourage the United Nations Secretary General and Chile, as President of COP25, to strengthen synergies between the oceans and climate change.

3. Lastly, let me briefly discuss the link between **climate and security**. There is ample evidence that climate change is a threat multiplier. We had an in-depth debate on this issue last January in the Security Council and we advocate sustained interest at this level. While the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement provide the appropriate framework for combating climate change and the entire United Nations system is involved in the implementation of this framework, we must invest in **a climate-related early warning system**, including at Security Council level where appropriate. We do not lack substantial information on climate-related security risks, but the mechanism for bringing them to the attention of the Council in a timely and operational manner could be improved. Belgium suggested a clearing house bringing together the institutional expertise of the United Nations and the analytical capacities of Member States to help the Council successfully address the risks associated with the effects of climate change on international peace and security.

Thank you for your attention.