

**Address by Kiyoko Akasaka, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for
Communications and Public Information at the Opening Session of
Global Development: Science and Policies for the Future
International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)
Conference 2007
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President Fischer,
Minister of Science and Research Dr. Hahn,
State Secretary Dr. Winkler,
Professor Hordijk,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to join you today. I would like to thank the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis – “IIASA” -- for inviting me to this important conference. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Government of Austria for their generous support and hospitality accorded to us. I am honoured to be here, on behalf of the United Nations.

“*Iiasa*” in Japanese means “a beautiful morning”. I would like, on this beautiful morning, to congratulate the Institute on its 35th anniversary. The focus of this conference, “Global Development: Science and Policies for the Future,” perfectly captures the urgent challenges that the Institute has sought to tackle ever since its founding.

This conference takes place as the United Nations and its partners seek solutions to increasingly complex global problems – first and foremost among them, global development, or, progress for all. This is a challenge that we have recently come to understand requires a multi-dimensional approach that brings together macro-economic, security, health,

environmental and scientific policy. It is the kind of challenge that, because of its multi-faceted character, IIASA is so well placed to address.

In the next two days, you will discuss the crucial question of how science can help policy makers solve global development challenges. It is a question that unites all of you here, you who have dedicated your work to expanding our knowledge of what is achievable in the pursuit of peace and security, development, and human rights, the three pillars of the United Nations.

In the 62 years since the creation of the Organization, the world has seen remarkable global economic progress and dramatic reductions in extreme poverty. Millions of men, women and children have been able to escape from deprivation and enjoy improved access to food, health care, education and housing. But despite these gains, huge challenges remain in dozens of countries as we struggle to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, with a deadline of 2015.

It is intolerable that one billion people still live on less than one dollar a day. Why, in this age of global abundance, do such massive divides persist between the rich and the poor? It is intolerable that roughly one billion people still lack access to clean drinking water. Why, when we know that demand will only increase, can we not find better ways to make clean drinking water available to all? It is intolerable that preventable diseases like diarrhea and measles kill 10 million children every year, and that malaria, a public health problem in more than 100 countries kills an estimated one million people worldwide every year. Why have scientists and policy makers failed to devote more time and energy to ending this terrible disease of poverty? And why must today's citizens in cities across the developing world suffer from air pollution and environmental hazards that many

developed countries have themselves already experienced and found solutions for? Have we not learned bitter lessons and developed the knowledge and expertise to manage these problems?

I believe that what is needed to confront these and other problems is a stronger partnership of developed and developing countries, a partnership that must include the scientific community.

From genetic research to new vaccines, from helping to protect the environment to security and nuclear disarmament, scientists play a crucial role in international affairs. Science has contributed enormously to the development of modern society, and the application of scientific knowledge has, and continues, to provide amazing solutions to so many of the challenges facing humanity.

Perhaps the most dramatic and recent example of science informing one of the most urgent issues of the day is the work of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which was awarded this year's Nobel Peace Prize, along with Al Gore. In addition to its authoritative findings, the panel is proof of the kind of bridges of knowledge that scientists can create across boundaries and borders, including on subjects that States themselves might not be able to agree upon. Just three days from now, on November 17th, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will be in Valencia, Spain to launch the fourth and final assessment report on climate change by the panel.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

How to ensure that advances in science are used for the advancement of humanity is an important question. But so is how to balance the need to act wisely, even in the absence of scientific certainty. In this difficult debate

we are guided by the precautionary principle, which, I understand, comes from the German word, “Vorsorgeprinzip” [for-zorgé-prin-cep]. “Vorsorge” [for-zorgé] in German means, literally, “forecaring”. It is an ethical concept that applies to human health and the environment. And it is a concept that tells us that if we wait for scientific certainty before we act to take protective measures, human beings and the natural world may suffer irreversibly. I believe the application of this approach is slowly gaining ground.

But still, the debate on this approach continues and action to protect our global health and global environment is painfully slow. Is this because the scientific community has been unable in some cases to press or persuade political leaders to act? Is it because political leaders have **failed to take into account** scientific knowledge or chosen to ignore the precautionary approach? I am sure you will shed light on some of these difficult questions in the course of your discussions over the next few days.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The United Nations, and its agencies like the World Health Organization, is well placed to encourage, coordinate and facilitate solutions and partnerships on those problems that you work on every day. Scientists and scientific organizations are critical members of global civil society with which we seek and nurture partnerships in order to address complex global issues. It is a particular mission of my department at the United Nations to be a forum where the scholarship and enquiry that is so integral to science can be expressed and shared, and, ultimately, lend itself to practical programmes of action.

But for this to happen, we will need inspiration, knowledge and support from all of you. Efforts like this conference organized by the Institute is proof that this spirit of partnership between the United Nations and the broader scientific community is alive and well. I look forward to our continued cooperation and wish you every success in the days ahead.

Thank you.