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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE  
Moscow, 29 September 2003**

*Delivered by Mr. Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director,  
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*

Scientists and others have been sounding the alarm about climate change for many years now. By the end of this century, as a result of ever-increasing emissions of greenhouse gases, our planet may look very different: with many small islands gone, the Arctic Ocean free of ice for many months of the year, agricultural regions dramatically altered, and our ecological life-support systems under stress as never before. Developing countries are especially vulnerable. If this forecast comes true, our children and grandchildren will not understand how we allowed this to happen.

Fortunately, many governments are listening to the warnings. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change enjoys nearly universal membership. Almost 120 nations have ratified the Kyoto Protocol, an essential first step in tackling this planetary challenge. I join people throughout the world in eagerly awaiting ratification by the Russian Federation, which will bring the Protocol into force and further galvanize global action.

Scientists, for their part, are coordinating and assessing research through organizations such as the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Many civil society groups are doing their part to sound the alert and advocate for change. In several countries, local authorities are leading the way in reducing emissions. And a number of enlightened corporate leaders are seizing the opportunity to use and develop newer, greener technologies.

Yet we need to do a lot more. Developing countries need help in building up the capacity to adapt to climate change. We must invest in research and develop new technologies. Soon -- very soon -- we should begin thinking about what must be done beyond the first steps set out in the Kyoto Protocol. And as we do all of this, we must also improve the lives of millions of people by fighting poverty, as an overriding priority, and doing so in a way that will not exacerbate climate change but, instead, contribute to abating it.

I congratulate the Russian Federation for organizing this World Conference. Meeting the challenge of climate change can be a uniting force for the world, but it will require vision, leadership and hard work. Please accept my best wishes for the success of this important meeting.