

National Statement of Singapore by Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, Masagos Zulkifli, at the UNFCCC COP-21 High Level Segment, 7 December 2015, Paris, France

Mr President,

Urgency of Action

Allow me to join others in expressing the solidarity of the people of Singapore with the citizens of France over the terrorist incidents in Paris in November. We live in a troubled world, but here at COP-21 we have a rare opportunity to work together to address one of the foremost challenges facing our planet. We should not underestimate the potential of a universal agreement that binds all Parties of the Convention to undertake climate action. Singapore strongly supports a rules-based multilateral system in this regard.

Universality of the Agreement

We have on the table the INDCs of more than 180 countries covering over 95% of global emissions. While we share the concern that these pledges do not yet limit temperature rise to below 2°C or 1.5°C, it serves as a strong foundation for structured international collaboration towards that goal. The innovative bottom-up approach that Parties agreed at COP-19 in Warsaw has managed to foster the confidence and trust needed for collective global action. We must now match these pledges with a global agreement that promotes the ability to raise ambition over time and bring our world closer towards climate safety. This means helping Parties achieve the ambition represented in the INDCs.

An ambitious agreement is only meaningful if all Parties are on board and act coherently, recognising the full spectrum of climate actions. Reducing GHG emissions is not only about mitigating emissions from our industrial sectors; it can also be about protecting our forests and preventing peat land fires. Peat lands are major carbon sinks, storing up to 20 times more carbon than tropical rainforests on normal mineral soils. However, with peat land fires caused by slash and burn practices of errant companies, they are no longer carbon sinks but a source of CO₂ emissions. Some studies have estimated that the peat fires in Southeast Asia this year alone have released over one Gigatonne of CO₂ into the atmosphere. This is almost 20% of the expected emissions reductions from INDCs in 2030 ¹. Another report estimated that the emissions of these fires by errant companies in Indonesia over this period are more than the total annual CO₂ emissions of Germany ². This is also comparable to the emissions of Japan.

Such peat land fires produce not only GHG emissions but also smoke, resulting in haze pollution. This haze pollution has had serious social, economic and health impacts in countries across Southeast Asia. Hundreds of thousands have been treated for acute respiratory infections; schools have had to close, and businesses, as well as air travel, have been adversely affected. The burning of forests and peat lands have also resulted in the loss of biodiversity and natural habitats.

Our region is not the only one to witness such deleterious transboundary effects on our global effort to cut emissions; therefore, we strongly support the emphasis for this agreement to bring a

robust measurement, reporting and verification system with a facilitative approach to build capacity. Amongst others, capacity to combat illegal burning and other forms of abuse in the land sectors will address this recurring problem.

Singapore's Efforts

As a responsible global citizen, Singapore is committed to play our part in the global fight against climate change. Our INDC pledges to reduce our Emissions Intensity by 36% from 2005 levels by 2030, and stabilise our emissions with the aim of peaking around the same time. Singapore already generates relatively low levels of carbon emissions per GDP dollar, ranking 113th out of 140 countries ³ worldwide. We only contribute 0.11% to global emissions, yet we continue to deepen and widen our South-South contributions in technical cooperation, sharing our sustainable development experiences. So far, almost 11,000 officials from developing countries have been trained in climate change issues in Singapore. We will continue to expand capacity building courses in both mitigation and adaptation, with a focus on helping fellow developing countries implement the Paris Agreement.

Mr President,

Forging a successful Paris outcome

It is our sincere hope, that with the five remaining days here in Paris, Parties can set aside differences and seize the rare opportunity we have to forge a meaningful global agreement. With 195 negotiating Parties, it is understandable that not all our aspirations will be similarly aligned. However, we believe it is possible to build on the unity of purpose to find the pragmatism we require to reach compromise. We need to recognise that a compromise at these negotiations does not necessarily come at the expense of a good outcome. We are building the foundations upon which to start a global journey, not negotiating an end-point.

Conclusion

Mr President, I conclude with an assurance to you of Singapore's commitment and support for a successful conclusion to this week's work. Please also accept the deep appreciation of our delegation to the government and people of France for the warm hospitality and arrangements at this Conference.

¹ According to the synthesis report on the aggregate effect of the intended nationally determined contributions by the UNFCCC secretariat, the level of global GHG emissions associated with the INDCs is expected to be lower than the emission level in pre-INDC trajectories, by 5.5 Gt CO₂ eq, when both conditional and unconditional INDCs are included.

² References: <http://www.wri.org/blog/2015/10/indonesia%E2%80%99s-fire-outbreaks-producing-more-daily-emissions-entire-us-economy>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2015/10/20/fueled-by-el-nino-carbon-emissions-from-indonesian-peat-fires-are-rising-fast/>. Estimates from Guido van der Werf from VU University Amsterdam.

3 Source: IEA Key World Energy Statistics, 2014.