

**Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, addressing Sydney University students, Australia,
8 September 2011**

Vice-Chancellor, Members of Faculty, Dear Students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your warm welcome. This is the last day of my trip and I can think of no better place to spend it than with all of you – the young people of Australia ... the future of this great country.

The issue I would like to address today is a priority on the UN agenda for the 21st century, and it is the issue of sustainable development. As Australia knows too well, extreme weather events such as increased floods, rains and droughts continue to grow more frequent and intense as climate change accelerates. They not only devastate lives, but wipe out infrastructure, institutions, and budgets. Some economists predicted the flood damage could exceed \$30 billion. From the Horn of Africa to Western Europe, from Pakistan to the Pacific Islands we see the urgency for action.

I know there are the sceptics. Those who say climate change is not real. But the facts are clear: Global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. Millions of people are suffering today from climate impacts. Climate change is in fact very real. For those still in doubt, I invite them to take a trip to Kiribati and look into the eyes of the young boy who told me: “I am afraid to sleep at night” because of the rising water.

Again the sceptics may say: Why bother? No one else is acting on this challenge, why should we? But scores of countries have already taken a lower-carbon path because they know it is good for their economies and good for the health and well-being of their people. China now produces half of the world's wind and solar equipment. The European Union has committed to cut emissions by at least 20 per cent of 1990 levels by 2020, regardless of what actions other countries take. The EU's commitment has not waived, even in the face of tough economic times. Japan is aiming to create 1.4 million new green jobs. And Brazil committed to reducing its deforestation rate by 80 per cent by the year 2020.

These actions are vital on their own – but they can also inspire other countries, creating a virtuous cycle. This is a global race to save the planet. And I hope Australia will lead the way – for your own good, as well as that of our planet.

Thank you.