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Statement

by

H.E. Dr. Heinz Fischer

Federal President of the Republic of Austria

at the

Climate Summit

New York, 23 September 2014

Check against delivery!

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Your Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time, and we need to meet this challenge together!

This is the central message of this summit.

Climate change is a fact. Its consequences, damages and costs are already being felt around the globe. Only two weeks ago the World Meteorological Organization published data according to which the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere reached a new record high in 2013, and that due to human behaviour weather conditions will become even more extreme in the future.

The findings of the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) – that climate change is unequivocal – are well-known in this room. I would therefore like to highlight just a few points from the First Assessment Report of the APCC/The Austrian Panel on Climate Change, published last week, on the current state of the climate in my own country, Austria: It shows that in Austria, a land-locked country with fragile Alpine eco-systems, warming since 1880 has been more than twice the global average. Glaciers are melting at an increasing rate, and extreme weather events have become more common and much more severe in recent years.

Austria has already taken significant steps towards addressing this challenge. Currently, over 30% of our total domestic final energy demand is met by renewables, and we are confident to be able to achieve 34% by 2020.

Around 70% of domestic electricity production comes from renewables, nuclear power being excluded by law for health and safety reasons.

Greenhouse gas emissions have taken a downward trend in Austria for the past nine years. We plan to reduce them by 16% by the year 2020, compared to 1990.

But this is not enough.

We recognise that much more needs to be done – in Austria, in Europe and around the globe. We need a common response, and a decisive response. We need to redouble our efforts at all levels – at the regional, national and international levels.

As a world community, we should strive collectively to halve global emissions by the mid of this century.

That is why we need a new, legally binding climate agreement that is fit for the climate challenges of the twenty-first century. We need the broadest possible participation, with common but differentiated commitments from all countries, which reflect individual capabilities as they evolve over time. Developed countries need to take the lead in this common effort and support developing countries so that the global response to climate change is ambitious and equitable at the same time.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The universal fight against climate change is a major challenge, but may also be an opportunity – for development and for the eradication of poverty. I therefore think that climate change should be integrated into the Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 Agenda.

I said that we need a collective effort, that this is a challenge for the world community. But this is not only about states and intergovernmental agreements. This is about society as a whole. I would therefore like to thank all Civil Society Organisations and Environmental NGOs engaged in trying to bring about change. Their ambitious goals have my full understanding.

It is to the great credit of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to have organised today's Climate Summit, and to have brought together a broad range of actors, to highlight and publicise the necessity of rapid action.

Thank you for your continued efforts and this important initiative, Mr. Secretary-General!

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let us take up the spirit of this Climate Summit, let us take the next steps at the Conference of Parties in Lima later this year, and let us agree on an ambitious, universal, legally binding climate agreement in Paris next year.

Let us act together!

Thank you.