

Remarks by

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Chairperson of the Executive Board

Glacial shift: Unveiling Pakistan's Unique Climate Challenge

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His Excellency Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Pakistan to UNESCO,
Dear Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Our planet is under a dramatic environmental pressure: temperatures are rising, ice caps are melting, glaciers are receding, coral is dying, soils are eroding, water tables are falling, fisheries are being depleted, remaining rainforests are shrinking.

Something is very, very wrong with our eco-system. And yet, today, we are wasting our energy and resources on conflicts and wars.

UNESCO's programmes are also directly impacted as about 10% of the world's glaciers are located in World Heritage sites. In all, some 18 600 glaciers have been inventoried in 50 World Heritage sites.

In this rather dark overall picture, the glaciers of the Karakoram, the most glaciated place on Earth outside the Polar regions, are a glowing exception defying the trend of glaciers losing mass across the globe. On the contrary, in the Karakoram, not only are the glaciers resisting glacial melt due to global warming, but modest gains in their size have been noticed. While scientists try to solve this curious case, we cherish the anomaly, hoping that it will continue and wish that this anomaly would spread to all glaciers.

However, we know that no miracle can be expected. The most effective protective measure to counteract substantial glacier retreat worldwide is to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If emissions are drastically cut to limit global warming to 1.5°C relative to pre-industrial levels, glaciers in two-thirds of World Heritage sites could be saved.

In this sense, we welcome Pakistan's proactive approach and its National Environment Policy which aims to protect, conserve and restore the country's environment in order to improve the quality of life of the citizens through sustainable development.

Future generations, starting with our own children and grandchildren, are not going to ask us what our stand on climate change was. They are going to ask what we did about it, in order to preserve this planet. If we don't make radical changes, it is not guaranteed that future generations will have a sustainable planet to live on. Frankly, if the future of our own kids does not make us take action, nothing will.

So, let us not allow our hopes of offering future generations a world that is, at the very least, in the same condition as we inherited it from our ancestors melt away with the melting of the glaciers.

Thank you.