

Slow down climate change: Obama urges developed world

Frederick Baffour Opoku
Accra, Ghana

United States President Hussein Barrack Obama has said the developed world has the responsibility to slow down climate change through mitigation (whereby active measures are taken to reduce or change the human activities that are driving climate change) and changing the way they use energy.

“Warming climate would spread disease, drink water resources and deplete crops, creating conditions that produce more famine, and conflict” he warned. (Global warming emphasizes the rise in average temperatures. It is often used to mean the same thing as climate change which is a more general term and reflects the fact that certain parts of the world may not simply get warmer but may suffer types of changes to the climate, reflected in extreme weather events.)

President Obama said these in a speech to the Parliament of Ghana in Accra on July 11, 2009 during his historic visit to Sub Saharan– Africa.

He regretted that even though Africa gave off less green house gases than any part of the world, but it was the most threatened by climate change adding, the developed world could also work with Africa to turn the crisis into an opportunity.

“Together we can partner on behalf of our climate and prosperity, and help countries increase access while skipping the dirtier phase of development”, President Obama said, observing that across Africa there is bountiful wind and solar power, geo – thermal energy and bio – fuels.

He observed that from the Rift Valley to the North African Desert, from the Western Coast to South Africa’s coast, Africa’s bountiful natural gifts can generate its own power, while exporting profitable clean energy abroad. (Clean or renewable energy, otherwise known as green or environmentally friendly energy, come from natural sources that won’t run out. These include the wind, the sand, the waves and biofuels such as wood, manure or flaxseed oil which are produced from plant biomass and can be combusted to generate heat and power so that they can substitute for fossil fuels such as oil, coal and natural gas. Burning them to produce energy is among the biggest contributors to increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere).

President Obama said these steps are about more than growth numbers on a balance sheet, pointing out “they’re about whether a young person with an education can get a job that supports a family, and a farmer can transfer their good to the market, or an entrepreneur with a good idea can start a business”. It is also about the opportunity that must exist for Africans in the 21st Century, he said.

New moment

In a speech dubbed “New moment of promise”, televised live in Ghana and abroad, President Obama indicated that he came to Ghana for the simple reason that “the 21st century will be shaped by what happens not just in Rome or Moscow or Washington, but by what happens in Accra as well and Africa”, pointing out, the century will not only be shaped by what happens in the advance economies but what takes place in Africa too.

President Obama commended the people of Ghana for working hard to put democracy on a firmer footing, with peaceful transfers of power even in the wake of closely contested elections.

President Obama stressed on good governance and structures as fundamental to the continent's development, which he observed has been missing for far too long.

Good governance was the change that could unlock Africa's potential and that it was a responsibility that could be met by Africans, he said, adding "we must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans".

President Obama urged Africa to move beyond apportioning its development retardation on colonial masters, explaining that the "West is not responsible for the destruction of the Zimbabwean economy over the last decade, or wars in which children are enlisted as combatants".

He said despite the progress that has been made in parts of Africa, there was the need to change Africa's relationship with America as patron to partner, explaining that this progress may lack the drama of the 20th century's liberation struggles.

He said the commitment of America and the West must be measured more than just the dollars they spent, and pledged substantial increases in America's foreign assistance to Africa.

Mutual responsibility must be the foundation of the partnership and focused the four areas that were critical to the future of Africa and the entire developing world as democracy, opportunity, health and the peaceful resolution of conflict, according to the United States President.

President Obama cautioned that it will be more challenging to emerge from the control of another man's nation, even more important to build one's own.

"I believe that this moment is just as promising for Ghana – and for Africa as the moment when my father came of age and knew that new nations were being born. This is a new moment of promise", he said.

With emphasis on strong and sustainable democratic governments, President Obama explained that governments that respected the will of the people were more prosperous, more stable and more successful than governments that did not.

"It is also about what happens between them. Repression takes many forms, and too many nations are plagued by problems that condemn their people to poverty. No country is going to create wealth if its leaders exploit the economy to enrich themselves, or if the people can be bought off by drug traffickers", he said.

President Obama said in the 21st century, capable, reliable and transparent institutions like strong parliament and honest police forces, independent judges and journalists, a vibrant private sector and civil society, were the things that gave life in democracy and what mattered in peoples' lives.

He said time and again, Ghanaians have chosen constitutional rule over autocracy, and shown a democratic spirit that allow the energy of Ghanaian people to break through, he told the members of parliament.

“We see that spirit in courageous leaders who accept defeat graciously, and victors who resist calls to wield power against the opposition” he said.

President Obama underscored the need for people to take control of their destiny and make changes from the bottom up, saying history was on the side of brave Africans and not with those who use coups or changed constitutions to stay in power.

“Africa doesn’t need strong men. It needs strong institutions, he said, explaining that America will not seek to impose any system of governance on any other nation – the essential truth of democracy is that each nation determines its own destiny”,

To this end what America will do is to increase assistance for responsible individuals and institutions with a focus on supporting good governance – parliaments which check abuses of power and ensure that opposition voices are heard; on the rule of law which ensures the equal administration of justice; on civic participation so that young people get involved; and on concrete solutions to corruption like forensic accounting, automating services, strengthening hotlines, and protecting whistle blowers to advance transparency and accountability.

President Obama said as the United States reached for this promise, it will be more responsible in extending its hands and cutting costs that go to western consultants and administration. “We will put more resources in the hands of those who need it, while training people to do more for themselves” he said.

It is for this reason why the United States’ \$3.5 billion food security initiative is focused on new methods and technologies for farmers – not simply sending American producers or goods to Africa, since aid is not an end in itself, President Obama said, pointing out that the purpose of foreign assistance must be creating the conditions where it is no longer needed.

President Obama who visited Russia for a summit between it and the United States and attended the G – 8 summit in Italy before arriving in Ghana, was accompanied by his wife Michelle, and children Masha and Malia.

He held bilateral talks with his Ghanaian counterpart, President John Evans Mill, and had a break fast session with leading Ghanaian politicians and statesmen including two former presidents, and a cross – section of Ghanaians.

He also visited a health facility in the capital supported by the United States Agency for International development (USAID) and the slave castle at Cape Coast in Ghana’s Central Region, from where Africa slaves were transported across the atlantics to America and else where.