

UNU-ONY SIDE EVENT, 11 MAY, 2009

**REMARKS BY PROF. U. JOY OGWU, AMBASSADOR AND
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NIGERIA TO THE
UNITED NATIONS**

I greatly appreciate the invitation extended to me to take part in this book lunch. In particular, I thank Prof. Hans Guenter Brauch, and the hosts and Co-sponsors of this event for their untiring efforts and commitments towards the success of this event.

2. The book that we are launching today - ***Facing Global Environmental Change. Environmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts*** – is a volume of immense value to major institutions and governments. It is as significant to the United Nations, as it is valid to academic, Governmental and Non-Governmental institutions and to individual countries. It deals profoundly with the issues that engender global climate change, and takes an depth look into its daring consequences in an attempt to proffer solutions to this major challenge.

3. For us in Africa, the book is exceedingly relevant. As several studies have confirmed, the impacts of the global environmental challenges have been severe the continent, with immeasurable implications for the livelihood of its people and its development. It is an irony that a continent, which contributes the least to global warming is, today, bearing the most burden of its devastating effects. Various studies have indicated that the continent is at the verge of ‘dangerous extremes’ as the arid or semi-arid areas in northern, western, eastern and parts of southern Africa are becoming drier, while its equatorial region and other parts of southern Africa are getting wetter.

4. Many coastal low-line cities across the continent have experienced frequent mud slides and ocean surges, signaling serious danger to livelihood as the possibility of submergence of shelters looms.

5. The rapidity in the expansion of desert frontiers, with accompanying degradation of arable lands has severely challenged the countries located within and around the vicinities of the Sahara and Kalahari deserts. Combined with the frequent incidences of prolonged drought periods across the continent, there have

been resultant shortages of freshwater and accentuated large-scale perishing of livestock and loss of bio-diversity. In fact, it is estimated that about 250 million people in Africa would be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change by 2020 and yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 59 per cent in some African countries by same year.

6. These mutually reinforcing challenges constitute a major impediment to efforts at development and provide a motif force behind the migration of displaced vulnerable populations in search of sanctuary in other less affected locations. This has generated frictions and conflicts over territory.

7. With economies largely dependent on agriculture for employment, household incomes and food, the longer these challenges endure, the more potent they become in draining the capacity of Africans to meet the basic benchmark for socio-economic development as encapsulated in the MDGs. Experts assert that “poverty cannot be eliminated while environmental degradation exacerbates malnutrition, disease, and injury.

Chair,

8. The severity of the impact of the global environmental change and climate change is no less on Nigeria. The sheer size and population of the country, among others reasons, exposes her to greater vulnerability.

The country is already experiencing erratic weather conditions: unprecedented rainfall in the southern parts with its attendant flooding and soil erosion in parts of the country while lakes are drying rivers declining drastically in volume in other parts of the country. The advancement of the desertification in the northern parts of the country has been accelerated by high temperatures leading to declining land productivity for agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing human conditions and shift in the ecological boundaries.

9. Nigeria is also projected to face shortage of potable water supply. Insufficient rainfall harvest, low ground water recharge rate and low volume of water in the rivers may even impair hydroelectricity generation. Similarly, the rise in fresh water and marine temperature will affect fishery in estuaries and lagoons, which support artesian and industrial fisheries that account for over 75 percent of

fishery landing in the country. Salt water intrusion will also cause much damage to inland fisheries in lakes and aqua-cultural installations.

10. In response to these challenges, Nigeria has taken a number of measures. These derive from national initiatives that mainstream environmental issues into development policy formulation and implementation, as well as the implementation of regional and global environment frameworks. Realizing the nexus between sound environmental policy and practices, national security, good governance, health and sustainable development, the present government has accordingly embarked on an intensive exercise to preserve Nigeria's natural resources: improving soil quality checking excessive flooding and erosion, promoting and implementing sustainable water and energy management and reversing desertification.

11. Nigeria is actively participating in the discussions and implementation United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNCCD) and Convention on Bio-diversity (CBD) that constitute the three Rio Conventions, which provide the global platforms for concerted actions in stemming the adverse impacts of the accelerated changes in environment and climate. She continues to urge:

12. I wish to underscore that the increasing impacts of global environmental change and climate change remain the greatest threat to humanity in the present world. These threats are overwhelming the already dire situations in most developing countries, particularly in African. Unless concrete genuine steps are taken to reduce emissions and implement clean environment standards, we stand the risk of will be condemning millions to perpetual hunger, starvation and death.

13. As we proceed towards Copenhagen at the end of the year, it is hoped that the entire world will be guided by the urgency of the situation and muster the necessary political will and determination to ensure a better world for posterity. Leadership and commitment are needed for a successful outcome in Copenhagen. I applaud the unequivocal embracement of international efforts to find sustainable solution to the challenges of climate change by the new administration in Washington and hope that this will add impetus to the search for more alternatives.

14. I thank you.