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## UN SPECIAL ENVOY: EL NIÑO AND CLIMATE-LINKED EMERGENCIES THREATEN ACHIEVEMENT OF SDGS

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*Rome:* The newly-appointed United Nations Special Envoy on El Niño & Climate Ambassador Macharia Kamau issued a stark warning and challenge to the global community today in Rome, saying that a failure to adapt to the 'new normal' of increasing climate-linked emergencies such as El Niño would put global development targets at risk.

Ambassador Kamau, one of the architects of the Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs (the new global development agenda with a 2030 deadline), said in his remarks at the UN meeting on the impact of El Niño on food security and agriculture in Asia and Africa that climactic events were placing the SDGs, adopted by all countries in the world in September 2015, under threat.

"The new pattern of climate events is exposing weaknesses in our preparedness, in international and government systems and in community infrastructure. Both rapid and slow-onset climactic events are exposing years of poor investment and preparedness, demanding a much better financed and integrated response. These climactic events are also exposing the vulnerability of our grand plans for fighting poverty and sustaining our infrastructure. The SDGs are under threat and we should recognise this moving forward," Ambassador Kamau said at the event jointly organised by the World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization and International Fund for Agricultural Development.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon appointed Ambassador Kamau (Kenya's Permanent Representative to the UN in New York) and Mary Robinson (former President of Ireland, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and founder of the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice) as his Special Envoys on El Niño and Climate in late May, tasking them with calling attention to the more than 60 million people around the world affected by severe El Niño-linked drought and climate impacts, and mobilising an integrated response that takes preparedness for future climactic events into account.

As part of their new roles, the Special Envoys are travelling to meet with El Niño-affected communities around the world to understand their challenges and priorities. In July Ambassador Kamau travelled to Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste in the Asia-Pacific region, and Mary Robinson travelled to Ethiopia.

"Affected communities are under extreme strain, any reserves have been eroded and the drought is forcing them to rely on humanitarian assistance, which is often coming too late and in small amounts. They are frustrated and anxious to become independent and self-sufficient, so that they can break free from this cycle of extreme poverty and vulnerability to shocks and their attendant risks" said Ambassador Kamau.

As part of these trips both Special Envoys have also spent time meeting with governments, UN agencies and development and humanitarian partners, working to assess the situation and identify immediate and long-term steps that can be taken to alleviate suffering and improve the resilience and human security of affected communities. El Niño has affected communities already under immense pressure from climate change. More extreme weather events are expected in the future due to a changing climate, and these hit the poorest communities - those least responsible for climate change - first and hardest.

"The biggest takeaway from my visit to the drought-stricken areas of the Pacific is a rather self-evident one," said Ambassador Kamau. "Water is the biggest and most desperate challenge for communities. This represents a direct threat to life, not just to people but also to livestock and other critical community assets. As these slow-onset emergencies unfold, communities sell their assets, lose their livestock and crops, the health of their people and children deteriorates, children drop out of school, women and girls become more vulnerable and desperation sets in. This is very much unlike the drama that comes with an earthquake, tsunami or typhoon but it is just as debilitating and destructive."

The UN Special Envoy also called for a greater focus on both immediate response and preparedness for future climate shocks, especially in light of the latest forecasts which suggest a greater than 60-75% likelihood of a La Niña event beginning in the latter half of 2016. La Niña events generally have the opposite weather effects to El Niño – areas that experienced drought are at risk of greater rainfall, and vice versa. A La Niña event can have a compounding effect on communities already made vulnerable by El Niño.

In closing his remarks Ambassador Kamau concluded by calling on governments, development partners, UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams to closely assess the situation in their countries – employing a holistic human security approach to look at what plans can be adjusted or adapted to attend to both urgent needs and future threats.

“This is not a matter to put to one side for another day, we do not have the luxury of time. Our development and humanitarian systems need to be deeply integrated, climate-proofed and fit for purpose. A failure to deliver on this mission will have ripples felt for generations. If we do not succeed we will be letting down the people that need us most.”

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