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MAN ON A MISSION

A MESSENGER ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Ban Ki-moon, the former head of the UN, reaffirmed the stand that tackling climate change requires cooperation of all countries



ZAKRI ABDUL HAMID

ENDURING legacies of former secretary-general Ban Ki-moon were two agreements reached in 2015 by the 193-member countries of the United Nations: Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Paris Climate Accord.

A former foreign minister of South Korea, Ban held the top post in the UN from 2007 to 2016. Ranked among the 35 most powerful people on Earth by *Forbes Magazine* in 2013, and among the Top 100 Global Thinkers in 2016, Ban received numerous accolades during his service with the UN, especially for his climate-related efforts.

Ban also instituted the UN Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) in 2013.

During the handover of the SAB Summary Report in September 2016, he called our moment on the planet "a critical time in human history. We face challenges and opportunities never seen before. We are the first generation that can end extreme poverty, and the last that can avert the threat of runaway climate change".

"Science is essential in making this vision a reality. But not just any science.

"We need stronger science, more connected science.

"We need science that is more deeply integrated with policy-making.

"The SAB has played an important role in helping shape our new global agenda."

As an alumnus of both the SAB and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), it was with great pride, therefore, to see Ban conferred with an honorary doctorate in Global Peace and Sustainable Development at a special ceremony graced by the chancellor, Yang di-Pertuan Besar of Negri Sembilan, Tuanku Muhriz Tuanku Munawir, at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in Bangi on Nov 27. FILE PIC.

The Paris accord, he said, offered a clear game plan to confront the serious threats to the planet and set viable targets to impede rising temperatures, constrict greenhouse gas emissions, and spur climate-resilient development and green growth.

"Climate change doesn't respect any border; our action must transcend all frontiers. I strongly and sincerely hope that the US will come back and return to our joint efforts to address this climate change."

From record-breaking heatwaves and wildfires to typhoons and floods of historic intensity, Ban said climate change was no longer a debate and was clearly here right now.

"With this reality in mind, we must urgently step up our collective efforts to implement the Paris Climate Accord. The bottom line is that we don't have a Plan B, simply because we don't have a Planet B either."

"The only way is to foster cooperation based on multilateralism and coexist with nature."

He called for an "all hands-on deck" approach where everyone joined hands in partnership to harness the ownership, participation and active involvement from all sectors of society.

And it was encouraging this week to see former US presidential candidate John Kerry announce a coalition of prominent leaders who would actively speak up throughout that nation on the imperative to drastically reduce carbon emissions — a movement called "World War Zero".

Likewise, here in Malaysia, the pursuit of targets outlined in SDG 4 — quality education — is essential in combating climate change. It is also a cross-cutting enabler of each of the other 16 SDGs: ending poverty, reducing inequality, achieving gender equality and scaling up public health.

In his acceptance speech at UKM, Ban eloquently emphasised that "proud universities such as this serve as living foundations of both knowledge and memory".

"Now more than ever before, the world needs a new generation of thinkers and doers."

"We need thinkers who can appreciate the scale of the challenges before us."

"And we need doers who will step forward to take action."

"This is particularly true in regard to achieving the UN's sustainable development and climate goals."

We congratulate vice-chancellor Professor Hamdi Shukor for opening the Global Peace and Sustainable Development as a new vista of academic pursuit.

And we are reminded of the university's rich history in the area of sustainable development and climate change.

For example, six of its academic staff were recipients of the prestigious Langkawi Award, and two were winners of the Merdeka Award (Environment), the latter dubbed by some as the Malaysian version of the Noble Peace Prize.

UKM's honorary doctorate to Ban will enhance the university's global reputation.

As the saying goes, "Respect is earned, not demanded".

The writer was a member of the UN Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board and an emeritus professor at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

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