

**DISCUSSING CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION WITH AMBASSADOR
THERESE ADAM**
Interview conducted by Meagan Torello

Could you please discuss your background in the foreign service?

For 28 years I was in the Swiss foreign service serving in different functions. I started in the late 80s as a foreign service officer. First, I was an analyst for the Africa region and after this period I was sent abroad and was the Head of Mission in the Republic of Niger. As I have an environmental science background, I was asked to take the lead of the global environment division in the Ministry which was a new division created shortly after the Rio Convention. I was also in charge of representing the Swiss government for the UN Convention to Combat Desertification. For five years I did this among many other tasks, and it was a good initiation to multilateral negotiations. Then I was the Assistant Director-General of the Directorate of Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperation of the Ministry and was also the Director of Cooperation for Eastern European countries for 9 and a half years. When I left this position, [Kosovo] had gotten their independence, making it very rewarding to be part of the peacebuilding process. Later, as an Ambassador to Mozambique, I was very much involved in peacebuilding issues too. In a nutshell, these are some of the highlights.

From your experience as a diplomat, do you feel that states are adequately addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which concern the environment in their foreign services (mainly goals 6, 7, 11, and 12, which are clean water and sanitation, clean and affordable energy, sustainable cities and communities, and sustainable consumption respectively)?

This question is many-fold. Internally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a coordination with domestic affairs ministries for negotiations and also reports what has been implemented. I wouldn't say that this is the same for every country, but a lot of European countries, namely Nordic countries, follow a similar framework. In this respect, I can say yes, countries are addressing the SDGs, because we have to represent the whole agenda through negotiations. In Switzerland, specifically in relation to the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does the reporting and coordination to implement the SDGs.

To address the specific targets, I would add goal 13 because we must take urgent action to combat climate change. I think they are all well

considered except for goal 11 about city planning because it is considered to be a sub-national agenda item. Another important factor regarding the SDGs in many countries, cooperation or support of least-developed countries is integrated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It's not a separate agency, and in this respect, there is even a stronger link to implementation of support and partnerships to pursue goals like drinking water, sanitation, or access to affordable and green energy which cannot be supported by LDCs alone.

The Paris Climate Agreement has been hailed as a monumental diplomatic success. Drawing from your experience as an Ambassador, what is your opinion on the achievements of the Paris Climate Agreement?

I absolutely think that the Paris Agreement was a landmark in climate change management. I was involved with the Rio Convention in the 1990s and the Kyoto Protocols which were designed solely for industrial countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Up until the Paris Agreement, I think there was a top-down approach to setting targets. They negotiated for four years or so to get these targets fixed because the UN framework to combat climate change established norms where every party to the convention must agree on the method of reducing certain targets.

In the negotiation of the Paris Agreement there was a shift. It took about three years to get out of the top-down framework. The Paris Agreement took a completely different approach with the same norms, but all the countries are contributing through self-designed targets to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and to undertake adaptation measures to protect against environmental hazards. This mechanism is called the “state-determined contributions” method, where each country sets their own country-specific targets. For this reason, I say it is bottom-up since there is no set negotiated target for all countries, as seen with the Kyoto Protocols.

However, there should still be a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions so that the global average temperature does not surpass 2 degrees Celsius and every effort should be made to go below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Of course, it is the aim not to exceed 2 degrees Celsius, with the reference being the pre-industrial temperature average. We are already 1 degree above pre-industrial levels, and now there is a big fear that by 2030 the 1.5-degree mark will be surpassed anyway. We are already seeing the huge environmental impact under the 1.5-degree average with draughts, storms, and floods. There is evidence that the number of environmental hazards are increasing along with their intensity and frequency. So now there is a big fear, that the efforts countries have made to reduce their

greenhouse gas emissions are not enough and that sum of all the efforts will not be enough to reduce emissions to what is needed. But in any case, the Paris Agreement is a great success because at least now there is a base to go forward. In 2020 there is a conference where all countries who agreed on the Paris Agreement will announce their commitments and plans for emissions reduction and adaptation. There will also be a debate for what additional efforts are needed. To me, this was a great achievement.

In your opinion, has President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement poked a significant hole in the framework and overall success of the Agreement?

There are different considerations to that. The UN scientific panel's report (IPCC) which stated that even if temperatures go up to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the environmental consequences will still be disastrous. There will be a lot of negative effects on the environment, the economy, and it will have social implications as well. It's been known for quite a long time that climate change is the biggest threat of the century and it's very pressing to act. So, to have one country not involved in this common action is a big loss.

On the other hand, the Paris Agreement is up to the fight because the other countries didn't follow the U.S.'s exit. I think that's already a very good sign that all the countries and political leaders – the European Union, China, or India – have remained. The European Union also just indicated they would make greater efforts after the release of this report. I think it's really a move in the right direction, but the question is whether it will be enough. In the U.S. there are also a lot of private and sub-national efforts to reduce emissions but, of course, this does not compare to the efforts an entire nation can commit to. However, ultimately this is a big loss.

Economic stability and security are major precursors to sustainable development. How can wealthy states better invest in developing states to ensure environmentally sound practices are implemented?

There are a lot of possibilities, particularly in the energy production and consumption fields. Since the existence of the Rio Conventions, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has been established to focus on energy efficiency, biodiversity, and deforestation in less wealthy countries. A lot of programs have already been financed by this multilateral fund along with others. Of course, the Paris Agreement also has established the Green Fund which is a commitment of about \$100 billion per year from

wealthy countries specifically for energy and adaptation measures and programs in LDCs. For instance, in many countries there are a lot of losses in the production of food after harvest in storage. There are conservation technologies to save these products which wealthier countries can invest in. This type of investment could only be positive for the economy since there is no loss of food which ultimately creates more economic security.

Women and girls face more challenges than men when it comes to climate change since they are statistically more likely to be impoverished, live in environmentally insecure areas (i.e. living close to or in flood plains). They also often bear the sole burden of childcare, thus making relocation and the ability to easily source drinking water and food more difficult. Where can international institutions and governments begin to help remedy and alleviate some of these climate burdens/pressures?

It's a well-established fact that the negative impacts of climate change affect women and girls more as the victims of such hazards. Floods and draughts impact access to drinking water when there may already be little access. This is not only isolated to rural areas where the problem is more extensive, but also in urban areas also face similar issues. There's not always running water in houses, requiring women to get drinking water, which is a very hard and time-consuming task even in normal climate conditions. Investing in drinking water facilities is a very important project which can greatly help women and make it safer for them since they won't have to travel for hours every day just to get drinking water. It's also about sanitation. It's important to see that sanitation problems are tackled to combat disease. For example, investing in toilets, or public toilets if it's not possible in every house, will provide for safer management of sanitation for healthier environmental conditions.

The government can also invest in amendments or new laws which grant women access to land and have their own property titles. Often, women cultivate land but do not have the right to own it. This can be changed. Women must also have access to finance mechanisms so that they can get credit to start a business if they have lost their land due to climate change impacts or they cannot cultivate anymore, thus demanding a new means to sustain their families. If women don't have access to credit, they will continue to get more and more impoverished. Access to finance is a very important tool to raise the status of women and to involve them in public life. Women's financial advancement is a good way to ensure a better outlook for a country in regard to climate change. They must also have access to education for themselves or their children

since they are more sensitive to the fact that all their children will succeed.

How can organizations like the UN help states and local governments to ensure women's and girls' security in environmental terms?

It's through the kinds of support systems I have described. In addition, it is important to support adaptation measures to prevent climate change's environmental hazards since it's more economically sound to have prevention measures than to constantly repair damaged infrastructure. If there is some external support from the UN or other organizations, they should never assume that women have the same access to whatever they implement. Often, a gender lens is not applied enough or at all, but there is a possibility for outside organizations to support women through their programs. Again, there must also be policy dialogues to get women and girls better access to education. This a long-term project but it's happening and it's an important way to counter environmental damages as well.

Do you believe that the security costs and risks of climate change are often overlooked?

Oh, yes. You cannot look to only one hazard and ask, "Is it due to climate change or not?" In the last 10 years there have been so many more hazards – flood, draughts, and so on. It's destroying human lives physically, emotionally, and infrastructurally. Climate change has broken bridges, roads, harbors, and social facilities like schools and houses which are big emotional and infrastructural losses. If a city is damaged, their population must reconstruct on their own since the city cannot finance everyone's housing and they have work for years to rebuild what they once had. It's a huge loss in this sense.

In the transition period until nations get into a better situation to manage global warming, there will be many more hazards ahead. Financing protection and adaptation measures are very important when possible. It's an investment, yes, but it's less costly to protect a coastal zone with a wall than to rebuild the harbor, houses, the streets, and ships each year. We must also consider that rising sea levels has a huge impact in certain regions – like on islands and lowland nations like Bangladesh. For these countries, every second year the land is inundated by salt water and the it becomes unusable for agriculture use. Then people are driven to leave since they can no longer sustain themselves there. Frequent draughts in some regions also prevents cultivation and drives people to leave. Now there is forced migration induced by climate change which has sparked a lot of debate. In some regions, if the land

gets poorer and poorer [in quality], the possibility for conflict rises politically and socially. Environmental degradation is a driving factor of conflict – this is for sure. You can now say that there is forced migration because of violence, the environment, or political and social changes, but there is evidence that in some areas it's [only] global warming, droughts, and coastal erosion which are clearly driving people out. The issue of forced climate migration will become more important these coming years and the international community must consider its impact on legal agreements on migration and the internationally recognized definition of refugees along with security costs.

Arguably, all the SDGs concern environmental change. Reduced inequalities, infrastructure development, education, and gender equality can all be tied to means of avoiding the 2 degrees Celsius temperature cut-off. Are diplomats, governments, and international organizations considering this fact enough?

We are at the beginning of considering these policies in a different way. In the last century it was a much more sectorial, specialized approach in addressing climate change. It was looked at much more technically and policymakers did not look at the linkages between economic and social aspects. You mention inequalities such as gender, as a socially important issue, which wasn't considered as a means to mitigate the effects of climate change. It's now recognized that these critical dimensions are interlinked. Policies must be integrated, transformative approaches which rely on sustainable development based on the SDGs as a systemic understanding which links the economy, the environment, social, and political processes. Policies may be planned so differently by considering all social inequalities such as ensuring affordable public transport for all to reduce pollution and energy consumption.

There are also efforts by private firms, NGOs, and international organizations which are thinking and acting in this capacity. I would say we are in the beginning of a shift in implementing socially-aware policies; there are examples, but we are still not fully there yet. Governments must adapt comprehensive changes in policy not only geared towards reducing greenhouse gases, but also considering the social implications which continue to drive climate change. If we abolish subsidies for fossil fuels (for countries who are producing and consuming) this will of course have a positive environmental and social impact. If a country decides to facilitate installation of solar energy it does not need extra money, it just needs to invest what it has differently – this is part of reorienting governments' thinking. It's challenging, but governments can really do a lot without spending a cent more.

Can civilians play a larger role in encouraging their governments and international organizations to better address their environmental concerns?

Yes, of course. For example, there are a lot of small-initiatives by civil society organizations and NGOs which address energy consumption and production methods or aim to reduce waste. They are encouraging their governments to reduce CO2 emissions and advocating for new laws and incentives to change [energy] production methods. Subnational efforts have a very important role to play because they have a much closer relationship to civil society. Local governments can take common initiatives with their inhabitants, as seen in the communities which are adopting zero-waste policies. This type of shift must engage civil society from the beginning, and it needs the commitment of the local government or municipality. For instance, communal lands (in smaller cities and counties) can be given for use for urban gardening. There are a lot of local initiatives and the civil society and NGO advocacy role is very important in relation to the SDGs since the UN Agenda 2030 is having states submit voluntary reports on implementation and debates with civil society. This is not to say every country is doing this, but it's an incentive imbedded in the SDGs which civil society organizations can rely on. Both civilians and private sector organizations can call up their government and say they want to implement and be associated with the SDGs based on this report. They have an anchor: the SDGs.