

'We Need To Elevate the Environment in Everything We Do'

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An Iceberg Breaks Off the Knox Coast in the Australian Antarctic Territory

On March 7, 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry issued instructions to all diplomats around the world on combating climate change. He stressed that success in this effort will require active leadership and participation from everyone in the State Department and at posts around the world.

Personal Message From Secretary Kerry:

The environment has been one of the central causes of my life. I was just 26 when I participated in the very first Earth Day at home in Massachusetts. It was an eye-opening immersion into the power of grassroots action to force an issue onto the national radar screen and demand change. More than 20 million Americans -- fully one-tenth of our country's population at the time -- came together to express a wake-up call. And they didn't stop there. They elected a Congress that passed the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act and the first wave of legislation that set us on a path to change the face of the planet we share with the rest of humanity.

We can transform challenges into opportunities. I've seen it happen long before I had a vote in the Senate or an office in Foggy Bottom, and it's what I still believe. But I'm not just waxing nostalgic. Protecting our environment and meeting the challenge of global climate change is a critical mission for me as our country's top diplomat. It's also a critical mission for all of you: our brave men and women on the frontlines of direct diplomacy.

Leading the way toward progress on this issue is the right role for the United States, and it's the right role for the Department of State. That's why I've decided to make climate change the subject of my first Policy Guidance as Secretary of State. I have been deeply impressed by the way Secretary Clinton elevated global women's issues as a top-tier diplomatic priority, and believe me, we're committed to keeping them there. When the opportunities for women grow, the possibilities for peace, prosperity, and security grow even more. President Obama and I believe the same thing about climate change. This isn't just a challenge, it's also an incredible opportunity. And the Policy Guidance I'm issuing today is an important step in the right direction.

One thing's for sure: there's no time to lose. The scientific facts are coming back to us in a stronger fashion and with greater urgency than ever before. That's why I spoke in Jakarta about the threat of climate change and what we, as citizens of the world, can do to address it. That's why I raised this issue at our senior management retreat here in Washington, and why I'll be raising it again at our Chiefs of Mission Conference next week. This challenge demands elevated urgency and attention from all of us.

I'm counting on Chiefs of Mission to make climate change a priority for all relevant personnel and to promote concerted action at posts and in host countries to address this problem. I've also directed all bureaus of the Department to focus on climate change in their day-to-day work. Here's what this guidance means in practice:

I. Lead by example through strong action at home and abroad: Making significant progress in combating climate change through domestic actions within the Department and at the federal, regional, and local level.

II. Conclude a new international climate change agreement: Working through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to negotiate a new, ambitious international climate agreement applicable to all countries by 2015 to take effect in 2020.

III. Implement the Global Climate Change Initiative: Undertaking a pragmatic, whole-of-government approach to speed the transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient future, including (1) promoting clean energy solutions; (2) slowing, halting, and reversing emissions from land use; and (3) helping the most vulnerable countries strengthen climate resilience.

IV. Enhance multilateral engagement: Helping lead efforts including the Major Economies Forum, Clean Energy Ministerial, Montreal Protocol, and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutants.

V. Expand bilateral engagement: Engaging more than 50 partner countries on clean energy, sustainable landscapes, and adaptation, including the largest greenhouse gas emitters in the developing world.

VI. Mobilize financial resources: Working to mobilize and leverage billions of dollars of funding to transform our energy economies and promote sustainable land use, as well as working to limit public incentives for high-carbon energy production and fossil fuels.

VII. Integrate climate change with other priorities: *Better integrating climate solutions into cross-cutting challenges, including women's empowerment, urbanization, conflict and national security, and our own management and operations.*

Climate change has special significance for the work we do here at State, and so do clean water, clean air, sustainability, and energy. We're talking about the future of our earth and of humanity. We need to elevate the environment in everything we do. There's nothing I'm more proud of than when we send one of our diplomats somewhere to really get out in the field and engage, to solve a problem, and to make something happen. I want all of you to feel empowered to think and operate that way on climate change. That's our mission as diplomats and that's our call to conscience as citizens of this fragile planet we inhabit. So let's get to work.

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