

**Acceptance speech by
Dr. Balgis Osman-Elasha
Recipient of “The Champion of the Earth Award 2008” – Africa**

Let me first start by praising the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) for its steadfast efforts over the years to preserve this precious planet we all share and for its leadership in promoting principles of sustainable development among nations and cultures. I am deeply touched by UNEP's recognition and appreciation of my humble efforts in addressing environmental issues of global concern. It is a real pleasure to be here among all those honourable guests and distinguished awardees. Being one of them fills me with a real sense of pride and gratitude.

I would like to share this prestigious award with a large number of dedicated scientists, whose commitment to the cause of climate change motivates them to spare no time or effort to finding lasting solutions and save our mother earth. I would also like to share it with my family members at home and the Sudanese people at large.

As you know, humanity is currently facing enormous environmental challenges; the threat of global warming reminds us that we all live in a one big global village in which one's actions can profoundly affect the expectations of others. While the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the IPCC and Al Gore is a welcome development highlighting this truth, tackling global warming remains a long-term battle requiring a sustained and genuine commitment from all governments and all people.

I come from Africa, a continent already facing many difficult challenges. Land degradation; unrelenting poverty, disease outbreaks, and tragic resource-based conflicts, are but a few. Adding a changed climate to this cauldron of trouble will make Africa's suffering even worse, much worse. And while we Africans have already begun to set our sights on adapting as best we can, the compelling truth remains that the international community must unite in purpose, and strategy, to achieve deep cuts in GHGs emissions in order to slow down an otherwise certain future devastation in Africa.

In the heart of Africa lies my beloved home -Sudan, which like many sub-Saharan countries, is characterized by inherently fragile ecosystems, high climatic variability and ongoing desertification. With climate change, we expect more frequent droughts and sharp reductions in the agricultural productivity particularly impacting small scale farming. With so many vulnerable people already struggling to secure their livelihoods against a backdrop of environmental, economic, and resource pressures, the motivation for action becomes high and urgent.

I would like to conclude these brief remarks by suggesting that Africa's future need not be entrenched in vulnerability and hopelessness in the face of climate change. I believe Africa has extraordinary potential and opportunity to contribute to sustainable development and thereby set an example for the rest of the world. This, of course needs an additional financial and technological support which I strongly encourage developed countries to make available. Africa can increasingly supply the world with oxygen instead of CO₂ through conservation of its vast forests and afforestation programs. Africa has the resource potential that if we together succeed in tapping would definitely translate our dreams of a happy future into a colorful world of reality. Let us join efforts and work together to create this future for the coming generations.

I would like to end by quoting the words of Albert Einstein "The world we have created today as a result of our thinking thus far has created problems that cannot be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them."

Thank you