THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS AT THE PLENARY MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE ADVISORY OPINION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE ON THE OBLIGATIONS OF STATES IN RESPECT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

New York, 29 March 2023

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Earlier this month, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – IPCC – confirmed that humans are responsible for virtually all global heating over the last 200 years.

The IPCC report shows that limiting temperature rise to 1.5-degree is achievable, but time is running out.

The window is rapidly closing to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

This is the critical decade for climate action. It must happen on our watch.

Those that contributed least to the climate crisis are already facing both climate hell and high-water.

For some countries, climate threats are a death sentence.

Indeed, it is the initiative of those countries, joined by so many others – along with the efforts of young people – that brings us together.

Together, you are making history.
The General Assembly meets today to consider a draft resolution requesting the International Court of Justice to render an advisory opinion on the obligations of States in respect of climate change.

Advisory opinions of the Court – the principal judicial organ of the United Nations – have tremendous importance and can have a long-standing impact on the international legal order.

Advisory opinions can provide much-needed clarification on existing international legal obligations.

If and when given, such an opinion would assist the General Assembly, the UN and Member States to take the bolder and stronger climate action that our world so desperately needs.

It could also guide the actions and conduct of States in their relations with each other, as well as towards their own citizens.

This is essential.

Climate justice is both a moral imperative and a prerequisite for effective global climate action.

The climate crisis can only be overcome through cooperation – between peoples, cultures, nations, generations.

But festering climate injustice feeds divisions and threatens to paralyze global climate action.

Excellencies,

For those on the frontlines already paying the price for global heating they did nothing to cause, climate justice is both a vital recognition and a tool.

Recognition that all people on our planet are of equal worth – and a tool to build resilience against spiraling climate impacts.

I have presented an Acceleration Agenda to close the emissions gap and massively fast-track climate action by every country and every sector and on every timeframe.
We have never been better equipped to solve the climate crisis.

Let us work together to get the job done.

It has been said that there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come.

Now is the time for climate action and climate justice.

Thank you.