

Alok Sharma speech to mark six months since COP26

“If you could stop climate tragedy unfolding further you would, wouldn’t you?”

That question, which we have just heard Emi Mahmoud ask so articulately, hung over COP26.

It was the question world leaders faced as they entered the plenary rooms.

It was the question negotiators grappled with through the nights.

The question to which the world was waiting for an answer.

And on the final day countries gave their response.

Here, at the SEC, they agreed the historic Glasgow Climate Pact.

This forges a path to a clean global future, it keeps alive the possibility of limiting the rise in global temperature to 1.5 degrees celsius, and it told a watching world that leaders could and would stop tragedy unfolding before their eyes.

As I said at the time, in doing so, countries demonstrated what the world had come to doubt, that nations can rise above their differences to unite against a common challenge; And that the international system can deliver.

That is why, as Peter has just said, although those two weeks in November were intense, and they were difficult, it was an extraordinary privilege to play my part at COP26, in the role of Shepherd-in-Chief.

And I in turn want to thank Glasgow Council, the Scottish Government, and Peter and his team for all their efforts in hosting the event, and of course our principal partners for their support.

And I will always be grateful to the people of Glasgow for the warmth of their welcome; which was commented on by so many ministers and negotiators from across the globe.

This great City has earned its name as the “Dear Green Place” in the hearts of delegates from around the world.

And so it is right that we are donating items from COP26 to support the local community.

6000 items of furniture have been given to charities and community groups.

Miles of carpet have been divided up between 1800 families.

And over 600 laptops will support local people who need them, including

Ukrainian refugees.

This is a fitting final act for a summit that met the highest standards of sustainability, as our Sustainability Report, published today, demonstrates.

Six months have now passed since Presidents and Prime Ministers came to Glasgow,

since the SEC held the biggest international summit the United Kingdom has ever hosted.

And in that time, the world has changed.

The clouds have darkened over the international landscape.

War, has returned to Europe.

The tectonic plates within our geopolitics have shifted.

Inflation is spiking around the world.

Debt is mounting.

Energy prices are rising.

And globally, people are struggling to feed their families, all as we continue to deal with the effects of the pandemic.

Now as a result, climate is understandably no longer on the front pages as it was in the lead up to, and at, COP26.

Yet the current crises should increase, not diminish, our determination to deliver on what the world agreed here in Glasgow.

Because they show with devastating clarity, why it is imperative to do so. And to do so now.

In January, at Chatham House in London, I spoke about the fact that economic opportunity is now driving climate action.

Wind and solar are now cheaper than coal and gas in the majority of the world.

Investing in fossil fuels will only risk stranded assets.

And the potential of renewables is extraordinary.

On a recent visit to Brazil I was told that the country could, with investment, generate up to 700 gigawatts of power from offshore wind every year.

And in Mexico, I heard that the state of Oaxaca has more offshore wind potential than the entire North Sea.

Increasingly, unleashing such potential is a matter of security, as well as economics.

Putin's illegal and brutal invasion will define this year, and indeed many years to come.

The brave people of Ukraine, who continue to suffer at his hands, remain in all our thoughts.

And, of course, the actions of the Putin regime have pushed-up fossil fuel prices globally.

That has thrown our situation into stark relief.

We see clearly the dangers of energy systems powered by foreign fossil fuels.

We see the benefits of low cost, homegrown renewables, the price of which cannot be manipulated from afar.

In short, we see that climate security is energy security, that we must break our dependency on fossil fuels.

And governments are responding.

Yes, they are taking action to deal with immediate supply issues.

Yet they are also accelerating the move to clean power.

The European Commission has announced that the European Union will increase renewables deployment to help reduce dependency on Russian hydrocarbons.

And here in the United Kingdom, we have recently published our Energy Security Strategy, to accelerate our deployment of wind, of solar, of nuclear, and of hydrogen.

This could see 95 percent of our electricity come from low carbon sources by 2030.

And we aim to fully decarbonise our power system by 2035.

The forces driving us towards a clean future are building.

Increasingly, it is clear that net zero means security.

Net zero means prosperity.

And net zero means preventing the problems of the present growing inexorably.

Because many of the challenges we face today would intensify as global temperatures rise.

Look at food security.

One of the most moving conversations that I have had as COP President was

with women in Madagascar on the brink of famine, women who were enduring the unimaginable.

And it is a terrible truth that their experience is shared by many millions around the world.

Acute hunger is at unprecedented levels.

A recent report by the "Global Network Against Food Crises" found that hundreds of millions of people experienced food insecurity last year, with acute food insecurity rising almost 25 percent since 2020, which was already a record year.

That is many millions of people whose lives, or livelihoods, are in peril because they cannot eat.

Millions of individual tragedies.

And of course, those figures predate the Ukraine crisis, which has rocked global supply chains and driven-up prices.

Now, the World Food Programme expects acute hunger to rise further, by tens of millions of people if the conflict in Ukraine continues unabated.

We know that climate change inflames food insecurity.

It is inflaming food insecurity right now.

And every fraction of a degree makes a difference.

A rise in average global temperature to 2 degrees, compared to 1.5, would mean a doubling of the reduction in yields of maize, a staple crop, in the tropics, and fisheries losing twice as much of their catch.

And whilst the UN projects the world's population will increase by around 20 percent by 2050 from current levels,

Chatham House estimates that crop yields could decline by 30 percent by then unless we drastically reduce emissions,

including from agriculture.

So we must accelerate the transition to fairer, more sustainable, more resilient food systems and supply chains.

The problems we face today underscore why it is vital that we do so, and why we must honour the commitments made at COP26.

Failure to do so would be an act of monstrous self-harm.

And over the past six months, we have had grim reminders of the urgency of our task.

The United Nations body on climate science, the IPCC, has released two major

reports, each agreed by almost 200 countries and synthesising thousands of research papers.

These reports conclude unequivocally that the window of time we have left to act is closing fast, and that we must urgently adapt and reduce emissions, and that climate change is already, wreaking havoc: ecosystems are being irreversibly destroyed, people are being forced from their homes, and water insecurity has increased.

But it is not only the science that tells us our situation is critical.

We see the evidence all around us.

In the short film we watched just before I spoke, we saw the effects of Hurricane Irma that I witnessed on the island of Barbuda.

We saw the visit I made to the sea wall in Jakarta, which is literally being added to every few years to keep protecting the City.

On that same visit to Indonesia, I saw homes being relocated to save people from those same rising seas.

In Bolivia, Indigenous leaders told me how, longer and harder rains are causing flooding in their lands.

And this year, India and Pakistan have already experienced unbearable temperatures: a billion people exposed to extreme heat in some of the hottest months since records began.

And hundreds are reported dead in South Africa, where floods have swept the province of KwaZulu-Natal, destroying buildings and claiming lives.

This is the reality of climate change.

And it is a reality that will get far worse as temperatures rise.

Climate change is a chronic danger.

A danger that will be with us for generations to come.

And so we must continue to confront it, as we also deal with the pressures of the present.

That is why it is imperative we deliver the Glasgow Climate Pact.

As I say, this is a historic agreement.

It calls on countries to phase-down unabated coal power and phase-out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.

It requests countries to revisit and strengthen their 2030 emissions reduction targets, as necessary, to align with the Paris temperature goal by the end of this year.

It urges developed countries to scale-up climate finance, and specifically to double finance for adaptation by 2025.

It underlines the central importance of adaptation, the dangers of loss and damage, and the need to scale-up action and support for both, and the Pact charts a way forward to do so.

Outside the COP26 negotiating rooms we heard significant commitments from countries, companies and financial institutions too.

They pledged to clean-up vital sectors like power and transport, to end deforestation, and to work together to accelerate the clean transition.

Altogether, if the commitments made around COP26 are honoured on time, we can limit the rise in global temperature to below two degrees.

That was the conclusion of the International Energy Agency at the time.

And this analysis has been backed-up by a recent study in the respected scientific journal, Nature.

Since delegates left the SEC for a final time last November, work to deliver on the commitments made here in Glasgow has purposefully continued.

We have had some countries submit new emissions reduction targets, or NDCs.

And of course the UK is considering its own response to the Glasgow Pact.

That includes reviewing the evidence to ensure our NDC remains aligned with the Paris Agreement, and looking at ways to strengthen it, all as we focus on delivering and building on our Net Zero Strategy.

We have had new adaptation communications, work has kicked-off to get the Santiago Network up and running, to provide technical assistance on loss and damage.

And the Glasgow Dialogue and the Glasgow to Sharm el Sheikh Work Programme will get going in June.

On finance, the Taskforce on Access to Climate Finance has launched five trial projects in Bangladesh and Fiji, Jamaica, Rwanda, and Uganda.

And the IMF has launched the Resilience and Sustainability Trust, to support developed countries to channel their Special Drawing Rights to climate action in developing nations.

I have supported and championed this initiative, and I want to thank Kristalina Georgieva, for all her, and her team's dedication, in delivering the RST, and for responding to the calls in the Glasgow Climate Pact, championed by Small Island Developing Countries, to do so.

We have made some progress on critical sectors.

And action from business continues.

Around 2,000 international firms have joined the United Nations Race to Zero campaign since COP26, which commits them to reach net zero by 2050 at the latest.

That takes the total to over 7,000.

And civil society has kept-up the pressure on business and governments to deliver.

Last week the COP27 President Designate, Egypt's Foreign Minister Shoukry and I, co-chaired a meeting of ministers and representatives from over 40 governments around the world.

This May Ministerial was hosted in Copenhagen by Minister Jørgensen and the Danish Government.

This focussed not on what countries need to do, but how they will do it.

How individually and collectively they will honour the commitments made here in Glasgow on emissions reductions, on adaptation, on loss and damage, and on climate finance.

And what we heard was encouraging.

We did make progress in these key areas.

There was a high degree of consensus on what we must do to deliver in each of these areas.

We heard positive signals about countries looking again at their 2030 NDCs, including considering how they can strengthen their sectoral targets.

The German and Canadian governments have agreed to coordinate a Progress Update on the \$100billion Delivery Plan, which was published last year.

This Update will be based on the ten collective actions agreed last year, and it will cover the commitment to double adaptation finance, as well as access to finance.

We also announced a new, Independent High-Level Expert Group on investment in climate action, to be co-chaired by Lord Nick Stern and Vera Songwe.

The Group will develop policy options to encourage and enable the investment and finance necessary for delivery of the Paris Agreement and the Glasgow Climate Pact.

The May Ministerial was productive in helping to build momentum towards delivering the Glasgow Pact.

Now this progress is of course welcome.

But frankly we need to up the pace.

Leaders have not done enough to deliver on their Glasgow commitments.

And that must change.

This November, when countries meet in Sharm-el-Sheikh for COP27, the spotlight will be back on climate.

And the world will look to see whether they were right to put their doubts aside, and to cautiously place their confidence in the multilateral system.

Whether they were right to take leaders at their word.

We must show them that they were.

And that means moving much faster over the next six months than we have over the last six.

And setting ourselves up to deliver, over this vital decade.

In the final moments of COP, I described the Glasgow Climate Pact as a fragile win.

And unless we accelerate delivery, citizens will look-on at Sharm-el-Sheikh and see that cracks have emerged.

That leaders have allowed that historic and hard won agreement to fracture.

We cannot allow that to happen.

So the UK COP26 Presidency is working hard, with our Egyptian partners, to drive delivery.

Every country must respond to the call to revisit and strengthen their NDC.

And they must do so in 2022.

The Glasgow Pact calls on countries to look again at their NDCs, not at some vague point in the future, but this year, in 2022.

And the major emitters must lead from the front, particularly those G20 countries with little or no increase in ambition since Paris.

We need them to submit more ambitious NDCs, where they are not currently aligned with the Paris Agreement.

We need all countries to submit long-term strategies aligned with net zero.

And this needs to be done before the UNFCCC's Synthesis Report deadline of 23rd September.

We also need plans to turn these targets into action.

And we need developed countries to be delivering on finance to support developing nations' ambition, and to help them access the benefits of climate-resilient investments: from growth, to jobs, to clean air and competitive advantage.

The agreed \$100billion Delivery Plan update needs to show progress on delivery, particularly the goal to double adaptation finance by 2025.

Thus far, too little has been achieved on doubling adaptation finance, and that must change.

So we need countries to clearly set out their plans.

We also need more progress from countries and financial institutions in aligning with the Taskforce on Access to Climate Finance principles.

And we need to drive Just Energy Transition Partnerships forward.

In technical terms these are financial mechanisms that tailor support to individual countries' energy transitions, in alignment with national plans.

In human terms, they are about the many thousands of people who still rely on fossil fuels for their livelihoods,

about supporting them to retrain and reskill, and about helping countries transition away from fossil fuels, whilst keeping the lights on and cleaning-up the air by moving to green technologies.

We announced the South African Just Energy Transition Partnership at COP26.

And now, we are working towards others, and I am hopeful we will be able to announce them by COP27.

On adaptation and loss and damage, we need to have made practical progress on the Global Goal on Adaptation by COP27, as well as having operationalised the Santiago Network.

And we also must also make further progress in critical sectors.

We need more commitments to end coal power, to put a stop to international fossil fuel finance, and to accelerate the shift to renewables.

We need a greater share of the global market covered by commitments to end the sale of polluting vehicles.

We need countries to agree on the steps that they will take to accelerate clean technologies, including in sectors like steel and hydrogen, through the Breakthrough Agenda.

And we need leaders to show they are delivering on their commitments to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030.

On every one of these issues we will use the G7, the G20, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the United Nations General Assembly to urge action.

And we will host a second climate and development Ministerial in September to drive progress on the issues that matter most to climate vulnerable countries, because championing their needs remains critical for me.

If you think this sounds like a hefty programme of work, you are right.

But it is vital to achieving the change we have agreed is necessary.

The United Kingdom remains an unapologetically high-ambition COP presidency.

But ultimately, it is up to all world leaders to step up and deliver.

Just as they promised here in Glasgow six months ago.

I learnt a lot in those two weeks here at the SEC.

I learnt I could survive on three hours sleep,

I learnt to love Tunnocks teacakes.

But principally I learnt that though this international system, the COP process, is imperfect and it is unwieldy, it can work, it can deliver, and it is the best chance we have of tackling climate change.

But it is only as strong as the sum of its parts.

So we need every nation to pick up the pace.

We need every leader to show that their words were not hollow, that their commitments were made with integrity, and that they recognise, though the immediate challenges we face are grave, we will only inflame them if we falter.

Because it is leaders who made promises, and it is leaders who must honour them.

So when countries meet in Egypt in six months time, they must show a global audience that the confidence we inspired in the international system was not misplaced, that though the world has changed, our resolve has not, and that the historic agreement forged in this "Dear Green Place" is taking the world towards a cleaner, safer, and more prosperous future.

Ladies and gentlemen, earlier this morning we heard Emi Mahmoud ask whether:

"If you could stop the next tornado from hitting your home, the next hurricane from wiping out your city, the next drought from starving your people, wouldn't you?"

Here in the SEC last November, the world said it would.

Now, leaders must show that they will.

Thank you.