

COP president highlights urgency of climate action at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in Fiji

Friends, Bula and good morning.

Now some of you will know

that my team and I have tried on a number of occasions to come out to the Pacific during last year but unfortunately the pandemic made it impossible.

And I can therefore appreciate just how challenging it must have been for those of you who did actually come to Glasgow and make that arduous journey.

And by doing so what you did was to add to the voices at COP26 calling for ambitious climate action.

So I am delighted to finally be here.

To indeed meet you in person, face to face, to hear about your lived experiences, and to try and understand what it is like to inhabit an island like this.

Which is at the front line of climate change.

You are forced to deal with the consequences of greenhouse gas emissions generated largely by the biggest emitting countries, a long way from here.

And let's be frank, this is not a crisis of your making.

As your Prime Minister said ahead of COP23 when Fiji held the presidency, Frank said:

"We have not caused this crisis, your nations have.

"We have trodden lightly on the earth whereas you have trodden heavily."

And those comments friends should weigh very heavily on all world leaders, many as you know who came to COP26 in Glasgow and made impassioned statements about tackling climate change.

The leaders of many of the biggest emitting countries, of course they talk the right talk.

But you know this, they haven't yet walked the walk on the level of climate action required.

Frankly, you have spent years trying to educate the world on the dangerous predicament faced by the smallest, low-lying island states due to a changing climate.

You will have seen this yourselves on the television that in my country in the United Kingdom, some are only finally waking up to the long-term dangers of global warming.

As the mercury in the thermostats topped forty degrees centigrade last week, we were hit by wildfires,

Destroying property, torching grassland and damaging train tracks.

In fact, we are starting to experience, more acutely, the consequences of rising temperatures that you have here in Fiji, and indeed other Pacific Islands, were forced to start adapting to a long time ago.

At the recent Pacific Island Forum you reinforced this reality, declaring a Climate Emergency that reflects the threat that you face to your livelihoods, your security and indeed the overall wellbeing of Pacific Islanders and ecosystems.

You face this lived reality literally everyday.

That is why I have prioritised visiting and working closely with Small Island Developing States during the UK's COP26 Presidency.

And it has been humbling.

When I visited the island of Barbuda last year, I met communities who are experiencing first-hand the devastating consequences of extreme weather, as they still struggle to recover from Hurricane Irma five years on.

The communities I met in Jamaica and Antigua were grappling with the challenges of rising seas, and forced migration, both equally prevalent here in the Pacific.

And on the boardwalk in Barbados, I saw the urgent adaptation work being done on the frontline of the fight to hold back the ever encroaching seas.

And whilst the pandemic prevented me from visiting the Pacific before we met in Glasgow,

I was honoured to speak with Pacific leaders at the UK-Pacific High Level Dialogue in July last year, at the United Nations last September, and at the Foreign Ministers Meeting last month.

Now turning to COP26, the Glasgow Climate Pact, which was agreed by almost 200 countries, is a historic agreement.

But, you know this as well as I do that it involved making difficult and sometimes painful compromises.

But thanks in no small part to the tireless leadership of representatives from the Pacific,

the Pact was an agreement forged in the understanding that it is in our

collective self-interest to tackle climate change, and to do that urgently.

And whilst I am sure many of you will have heard me championing the Pact in the months since COP26,

I understand how difficult it was for your representatives to swallow some of the compromises we reached, including at the very end,

We know that in these multilateral discussions, the final result often involves no one getting everything they want.

And I know that in areas such as finance and loss and damage, we didn't go as far as you would have liked.

But I also think that it is worth reiterating some of the key commitments that we did garner from every nation.

We concluded the Paris Rulebook.

We bolstered the rules on mitigation, calling on countries to revisit and strengthen their emissions reductions targets, by the end of this year.

And we made progress on consigning coal power and fossil fuel finance to history.

But, crucially, the Pact also began to address many of the other important issues for negotiations.

The Glasgow Sharm-el Sheikh work programme, on the Global Goal on Adaptation, underlined the imperative of all countries to prepare and respond to climate risks.

For the first time ever, we secured significant language on loss and damage in the cover decisions.

We set up the Glasgow Dialogue to discuss how funding arrangements can be enhanced.

We agreed to operationalize the Santiago Network to deliver technical assistance.

Glasgow also endorsed the need for integrated action,

bringing together work on adaptation, disaster response and recovery.

And we affirmed that developed countries must double the finance for adaptation by 2025.

The Pact also directly addressed the participation of young people and women, and the vital role of Indigenous Peoples.

And it notes the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including the oceans, an issue that has been so effectively championed by the

Pacific Island Nations.

All of this meant that yes, we left Glasgow with a large programme of work, and with tough compromises to allow us to achieve that global agreement, but I believe we also left with a sense of genuine momentum.

We were able to say with credibility that we had kept 1.5 alive.

Now as you know, the “keeping 1.5 alive” mantra originated from the SIDs.

It was given resonance in the Paris Agreement.

And we the UK recognised its vital importance and that is why we took it on as a central objective for our COP presidency in Glasgow.

But, I also know that 1.5 is not some dream result for those of you living on the frontline of climate change,

We are already at 1.1 degrees warming above pre-industrial levels and we can see the enormous impacts it is having everywhere.

I know that for many people 1.5 degrees is not about thriving,

It is literally about surviving.

And therefore it makes it even tougher when the richest countries, the biggest economies, those belching out the bulk of the emissions are still not doing enough.

Yes, we have seen 16 new NDCs submitted since COP26.

Five new long-term strategies.

Nine new adaptation communications.

And work to scale up finance.

You know that we have a deadline of September for revised NDCs to be submitted and I know that other countries, because I have these conversations, including some of the biggest economies, have pledged to publish revised NDCs by the end of this year.

But friends, the world’s progress since Glasgow has been too limited, and too slow.

And the fragile trust that we all generated amongst nations, large and small alike, is beginning to fray.

Since COP26 I have continued to urge governments to deliver on their commitments. I have made 23 international visits bringing the total to 65 visits to 45 countries since I took on the COP role.

Over the past eight months I have held bilateral discussions with 48 governments to press the case.

Now of course, the world has changed in the eight months since COP26. The global geopolitical and economic situation is perilous.

The Putin regime's illegal and brutal invasion of Ukraine has unleashed and exacerbated a series of global challenges, rising inflation, an energy crisis, food insecurity and rising debt levels. People around the world are struggling to make ends meet.

But the chronic threat of climate change has not gone away, in fact it is getting worse.

And just as the Pacific declared climate change its primary collective security risk years ago,

many now recognise that climate and environmental security are completely inter-linked with energy and national security.

The rest of the world is now waking up to what the Pacific has been warning about for decades.

So, I am going to be frank with you.

We have seen some productive conversations as part of the Glasgow Dialogue, and the Santiago Network.

Workshops on the Global Goal on Adaptation.

And as a G7 nation, the UK recognises our responsibility to take the lead.

Our own NDC is ambitious, committing to reduce emissions by 68 percent compared to 1990 levels.

And we are revisiting that NDC, to ensure it remains aligned with the Paris temperature goal.

That is the sort of action we must see from all the major emitters, and particularly the G20 countries, which are responsible for 80 percent of total global emissions.

The bright lights of the COP26 stage in Glasgow have long faded, but we need all G20 countries to live up to their words and promises. We need the substance behind the soundbites.

Separately, I was very concerned to know that, when Parties met in Bonn last month and some of you were there, the spirit of compromise that we saw in Glasgow, which underpinned the joint commitments we made there, was very sadly starting to erode

I hope that spirit of compromise and mutual trust will be reignited again on the road to COP27.

And it must, because I am all too aware that we simply have to quicken the pace.

And whilst I assure you that I will use the remaining months of the UK's COP Presidency to continue to urge action,

I also know that such promises are not enough.

We must drive further action on adaptation, on finance, on mitigation and on loss and damage,

This includes making further progress on the Global Goal on Adaptation, and operationalising the Santiago Network

On finance, whilst we know that the \$100 billion will be met later than expected – in 2023, which is what we set out in the \$100 billion Delivery Plan Report last year- it is imperative that we deliver on this pledge.

And on the commitment to double adaptation finance to \$40 billion by 2025.

Because we all know that we need a radical step-change in delivery.

That is why I continue to urge all climate finance providers, including the Multilateral Development Banks, who I will be convening next week, to set out clear and ambitious adaptation finance targets by COP27.

And all climate finance providers should align with the principles of the Taskforce on Access to Climate Finance, which Fiji and the UK jointly chair.

That Task Force's pioneer country trials, here in Fiji, as well as Bangladesh, Jamaica, Rwanda, and Uganda, are underway and they are there to prove that money can be made accessible and that it can support national priorities, not just those decided from afar.

And of course for the SIDS, we have to ensure vulnerability is guiding finance allocations, including ODA eligibility, whilst improving the quality of aid as well.

Alongside all this work we know that those already living with historic forms of inequality are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

That is why my team and I continue to engage with a diverse network of youth and civil society organisations, such as those with us here today, as well as Indigenous Peoples.

And that of course that includes those in Buretu village, who I am very much looking forward to meeting this afternoon.

These groups are an example to all of us, and they are vital agents of change.

So many young people, including my own daughters, are relentless in reminding all of us of what is at stake.

And Indigenous People, as stewards of 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity, are indeed powerful leaders in our work to develop nature-based

and resilient climate solutions.

Finally, I know that ocean protection is of critical importance to Fiji, who were of course pioneers of the "Blue COP" at COP23, and I know this matters of course to all the SIDS and Pacific Island nations.

That is why I continue to champion the Global Ocean Alliance when I meet governments around the world, to mobilise the international community to protect 30 percent of oceans by 2030.

And I am pleased that the UK is working internationally to scale up science-based and innovative ocean action, to maintain momentum in this "super year" of ocean summits.

Again, I know that this is a large programme of work.

But I remain positive that we can make significant progress in the months ahead.

We have ample opportunity to do so.

I am going to be convening the Climate and Development Ministerial in New York in September in the margins of the UN General Assembly.

Pre-COP, hosted by the DRC, will of course be an important milestone.

And we will be pushing for progress on finance, and particularly finance for adaptation, at the Annual Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank in October.

Now COP27 friends, where we hand the baton over to Egypt, will be a critical moment to judge who is living up to their promises and who is not.

As I have said, I believe we set a high bar at COP26, and we made progress.

I hope that the issues such as loss and damage, and adaptation will feature as a key part of the discussion in Sharm el-Sheikh.

But of course what we need to make sure is that we move from negotiation to implementation.

The UK I can promise you will be there, working alongside the Pacific and other climate vulnerable countries, to ensure that is the case.

But you also know that no one country, and no one Presidency, can do this alone.

So, whilst I am clear that the major emitters must take a significant amount of the responsibility for the climate action we need to see in the months and years ahead,

I would request humbly that the Pacific, and indeed all the climate vulnerable countries, continue to work with us to encourage them all to go further.

We are going to need once again your uniquely powerful voice and moral authority, which was deployed so well in the lead up to, and at, COP26, to challenge countries around the world to honour the promises they have made.

Now not every world leader, and indeed not every COP President in the future, will have the honour to visit Fiji and restate the case for climate action in one of the most vulnerable places on earth.

But with just over 100 days to go to COP27

We know what needs to be done.

The world should be in no doubt. We are facing a global climate emergency.

We are almost at the end of the line.

Some nations are already looking over the precipice. I have to ask you, how many more warnings from the science and from severe climate events do the world leaders actually need to wake up from their steeper and hear the piercing siren of the emergency.

I arrived here yesterday from Australia, where they have a new Government with a fresh mandate from their voters to tackle climate change.

As we left to travel here yesterday, I saw some protestors along the roadside holding up placards and colourful banners,

Two of these caught my eye: The first stated CLIMATE CODE RED

The second: THIS IS THE DECADE – 2050 IS TOO LATE

My friends, our populations know that the world is running out of time.

We also know that if we act now we will reap an economic as well as environmental dividend.

Jobs, growth and a boost for all of our economies.

But it is a climate code red right now and unless we act, we are in danger of allowing 1.5 to slip irreversibly out of reach, and frankly of moving beyond the limits of our ability to adapt.

For those leaders, and those countries, who do not yet appreciate this reality, my message is a simple one:

Climate change does not recognise borders.

It is no longer something that happens to other countries] .

Tackling climate change, and protecting the most vulnerable, is absolutely the single most important challenge of our time, whether and how we rise to

the challenge will define all of our futures.

So, whilst I am acutely aware that the issues that we are collectively facing will not be solved by the end of the UK's Presidency,

I want you to know that I, and my country, will not stop championing climate action.

But for now, as COP27 looms ever larger, let's continue to work together to cajole countries around the world, and particularly the major emitters, to honour the promises they made in Glasgow, and to turn commitments into action.

Once again, it is time for leaders to lead.

Our shared futures depend on it.

Thank you.