

COP26 Climate and Development Ministerial 2020: Foreign Secretary's opening remarks

Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, can I just offer a very warm welcome, particularly to those that weren't at the group earlier today, to the Climate and Development Ministerial. I'm pleased to have you with us today and that we could get together

I think this meeting is an important milestone on the road to COP26 in November.

We're running out of time to keep the 1.5 degree target within our grasp and the need to adapt is becoming, I think, more and more urgent.

On top of this, we've got the challenge of recovering from Covid, a public health but also an economic challenge.

We know budgets are severely drained. The debt burden, particularly in the developing world is growing.

So we need to take action.

We all know about the nature and the scale of the challenges that climate change poses. And today, instead of just talking about the problems, we want to focus on the action we are going to take to solve them. We want to focus on what we need to do to enable ambitious climate change action.

So today is about hearing from those countries that are most vulnerable to climate change – those on the front line, if you like, of this struggle.

We need to identify the support that you need. We need to consider where international systems can do more to deliver urgent climate action.

So those here today – Foreign, Development, Planning, Finance Ministers from around the world – you've been invited to help identify the practical next steps and set the agenda for making progress in the lead up to COP26 in November.

As well as some of the most vulnerable countries, whose voice we need to hear, we've also got donor countries and international organisations here today, so I'm really looking forward to the discussion.

Now clearly there is a huge amount of excellent work already underway, particularly on adaption and resilience.

In the UK we are committed to doing all that we can to support that important work.

The Global Commission on Adaptation has found that 24 hours of warning of a coming storm or heatwave can cut the damage by 30%, which is massive if you think about what that means for those who would otherwise be affected.

So the UK is supporting programmes to provide better weather forecasting and climate modelling to support vulnerable countries to take the early action that can save those lives.

We also working to support smallholder farmers, who are on the frontline of climate change. They farm some of the most vulnerable landscapes, like hillsides, river deltas and flood plains. The very resources that they rely on to grow their crops and tend their animals are under threat from climate change.

Through our contribution to the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme, we are helping 6 million smallholder farmers in over 40 countries to increase their yields, to access commercial supply chains, and to ultimately increase their incomes and better their livelihoods. All this while, we're also helping them to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Those are just a couple of examples of the practical work that is being done, the practical work that we want to support.

And I think there is an urgent need to accelerate those efforts, and build on the 2019 Call for Action on Adaptation and Resilience, converting political promises into tangible delivery on the ground.

That's why my [Prime Minister Boris Johnson launched the Adaptation Action Coalition](#) back in January, together with our friends in Egypt, Bangladesh, Malawi, the Netherlands and St Lucia.

I hope we will be discussing many more practical, real world projects and initiatives today, like that – and asking where you think more needs to be done.

Let me just turn now to climate finance – which is another key part of our agenda today.

We know that the lack of finance creates barriers to countries implementing the Paris Agreement. Combined with the challenge of recovering from the pandemic, this obviously risks setting back progress. And I think these issues are very clearly intertwined – so we need to tackle them together.

And I think the way forward must be to engineer a green recovery that delivers both for people of this planet but also for the ecosystems.

And the good news is that the economics of the transition to net zero emissions have transformed since the Paris Agreement was struck back in 2015.

For example, for most of the world, renewables, like solar and wind power, already undercut fossil fuels as the cheapest and most secure form of energy. And the energy sector is a good example of where there's a real opportunity here.

By boosting investment in renewable energy, we could see the number of jobs in the sector quadruple, to reach 42 million globally by 2050. Off-grid solar power alone supports over 350,000 jobs across the East, West and Central parts of Africa, and South Asia, with the potential to increase to 1.3 million in the next two years.

So there's an opportunity to make the green recovery about job creation, not an economic drain or burden.

Seizing such opportunities and getting the recovery right for the long term, will depend on improving access to climate finance – and the quality, as well as the quantity, of that finance that's made available.

Again, here in the UK we're doing our bit, we're responding.

We have committed £11.6 billion over the next five years in climate finance.

And, through our Presidencies of COP26 but also the G7, we are urging others to try and follow the example we set and galvanise that international action that's so necessary to tackle this challenge.

We're working closely with our G7 partners, with the G20 and with the Paris Club partners to agree an unprecedented response to alleviate the debt burden that has grown because of the pandemic.

The G20 scheme which we helped launch last year has suspended repayments from the most vulnerable countries worth \$5.7 billion.

I know that many of the other countries joining us today are making tremendous contributions to tackling these issues. So I hope we will also hear more about that today – and about a whole range of other ambitious actions in the months ahead. Again, we want to hear from those who need access to finance – what are your priorities in these different areas?

So this meeting is an opportunity to highlight the areas where more action is needed and how we drive that forward. I think it's also a chance to point the way to the outcomes that we want at the end of COP26. And it's a moment to focus on the practical solutions that we all want to see.

So let's get on with it. Thank you.