

COP26 President Alok Sharma's opening speech at COP26

Friends, it is an honour to speak to you today for the first time as COP President.

And I want to thank my dear friend Carolina for her really strong leadership over the past two years.

Friends, I am very aware of the responsibility placed upon me in this role.

And I do not underestimate the challenge.

Let me start first by formally welcoming you to Glasgow.

And I want to thank you for all your efforts in getting to the United Kingdom, which I know for some has been arduous due to the impacts of the pandemic.

Indeed for almost two years now the pandemic has caused devastation and disruption, to lives and livelihoods across the world.

And I know this has particularly affected the least developed countries and the small island developing states.

And because of the pandemic, as you know, we postponed COP26 by a year. But during that year, climate change did not take time off.

And the IPCC report in August was a wake-up call for all of us.

It made clear that the lights are flashing red on the climate dashboard.

That report, agreed by 195 Governments, makes clear that human activity is unequivocally the cause of global warming.

And we know that the window to keep 1.5 degrees within reach is closing.

I have been humbled to speak over this year with communities devastated by climate change.

On a visit to Jomsom in Nepal, in the Hindu-Kush region I spoke to communities literally displaced from their homes from a combination of droughts and floods.

In Barbuda I met communities still suffering from the ravages of Hurricane Irma four years ago.

I have spoken with communities in East Africa fighting plagues of locusts spawned by climate change.

And earlier this month I spoke to a group of women in Madagascar,

Determinedly coping with what some describe, as the first climate induced famine in the world.

Friends, in each of our countries we are seeing the devastating impact of a changing climate.

Floods, cyclones, wildfires, record temperatures.

We know that our shared planet is changing for the worse.

And we can only address that together, through this international system.

And we know what we need to do.

Because six years ago, in Paris we agreed our shared goals.

We said we would protect people and nature from the effects of climate change.

We said we would get finance flowing to climate action.

And we said we would limit the rise in global temperature to well below two degrees pursuing efforts towards 1.5.

The rapidly changing climate is sounding an alarm to the world, to step up on adaptation, to address loss and damage, and to act now to keep 1.5 alive.

We know that this COP, COP26, is our last best hope to keep 1.5 in reach.

And I know that we have an unprecedented negotiations agenda ahead of us.

But I believe this international system can deliver.

It must deliver.

And as COP President I am committed to promoting transparency and inclusivity.

And I will lead this conference in accordance with the draft rules of procedure, and with the utmost respect for the party-driven nature of our process.

In that spirit I believe that we can resolve the outstanding issues. We can move the negotiations forward. And we can launch a decade of every increasing ambition and action.

And, together, we can seize the enormous opportunities for green growth, for good green jobs, for cheaper, cleaner power.

But we need to hit the ground running to develop the solutions that we need.

And that work, my friends, starts today.

And we will succeed.

Or fail.

As one.

Astronauts speak of the intense emotion they feel when looking back at Earth from space. Seeing it gleaming through the darkness of the cosmos.

Incredible, improbable and infinitely precious.

And if we act now, and we act together, we can protect our precious planet.

So let's come together over these two weeks.

And ensure that where Paris promised, Glasgow delivers.

Thank you.