

COP26 President closing remarks at Placencia Ambition Forum

COP26 President Alok Sharma gave closing remarks at the Placencia Ambition Forum by video on 22 April 2020.

The focus of the forum was to drive climate action and ambition in Nationally Determined Contributions in the lead up to COP26 and beyond in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

I want to, of course, thank the Government of Belize for bringing us together under, what we all recognise are challenging circumstances. Of course we are all engaged in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, in our countries to support our peoples.

At the same time, and I think many colleagues have remarked on this, we also need to keep a very clear focus on tackling climate change.

And of course, small island states are very much on the very front line of climate change as we all know.

When I was in New York recently a representative of one of the Small Island Developing States said to me that “tackling climate change is absolutely an existential issue, because if we don’t get it right, we will no longer have a place to call home.” Those are the words of a representative from the Small Island Developing States.

Now, whether we live in the South or the North, the East or the West, we share one life-giving but fragile planet. It is important, as we come together on the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, that we remember that all our futures are intrinsically linked.

As the Presidency of COP26, alongside our Italian partners, as you’ve heard from Minister Costa, the UK is committed to putting the voices of those most affected by climate change front and centre of the discussion.

That is why I met early on in the Presidency with the Permanent Representatives of the Small Island Developing States, the Least Developed Countries, and of course others who are on the front line of climate impacts, to hear from them how failure to act will cause irreversible consequences for the places they call home.

The UK and Italy will of course continue to champion their voices in the lead up to COP26.

As you will all know the Bureau took the difficult decision to postpone COP26. But of course we are busy consulting with all of you to identify a new date. In doing so our priorities are very much about the health of our participants, the representation of all parties who are engaged in this

dialogue, and of course very importantly allowing the work to be done to enable an ambitious outcome, which is what, I believe, we all want.

Some partners understandably fear that a postponement might impact momentum. Let me give you this very clear reassurance – we are determined to make sure that climate change remains a priority for all of us. That is why events like this forum are so important.

Undoubtably COVID presents many challenges, not least how we recover from the pandemic, and every country around the world will face a choice, between laying the foundations for sound, sustainable and inclusive growth or locking-in polluting emissions for decades.

As I think every speaker that we've had on this panel has remarked, we must collectively support a green and resilient recovery that helps us deliver our existing commitments.

As the incoming Presidency, we continue to press for much greater ambition around the world – more ambition to reduce emissions, more ambition to build resilience, and more ambition to cooperate and support each other.

Let me take each of those in turn. First, we do need more ambition to reduce emissions. The science on climate change is clear and we all are going to have to play our part. Every country must submit a credible and ambitious nationally determined contribution and long-term strategy to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.

All of us have a competing priority right now in tackling the global coronavirus pandemic. But 2020 remains a critical year for climate ambition. And I'm deeply encouraged that governments, the UN and other partners have been working together to support new climate plans.

The people of the world expect us to put forward our highest possible ambition as we committed to in Paris.

And those with the most capacity to develop NDCs and the most capacity to reduce emissions, must lead the way. Let me take this opportunity to thank the Marshall Islands, Suriname, Norway and the current COP Presidency Chile who have all set an example with their NDC.

The UK will submit its own ambitious NDC to complement our net zero commitment – and we will continue to support developing countries to develop their NDCs as we also respond to the urgent needs arising from COVID-19.

Second, we need more ambition on adaptation and resilience. Helping people, economies and the environment adapt and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

This was a personal priority for me when I was International Development Secretary in the UK Government, and working with friends from Egypt, Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Malawi, St Lucia and the UN we launched a call for action in this area, where 118 nations and over 80 organisations committed to raising their ambition.

On my most recent visit back to New York, I met the Permanent Representatives, the UN and NGO's to discuss how we can translate these political commitments into on the ground action.

In March, I had the opportunity to co-chair the first governing council of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure with Mr PK Mishra, Prime Minister Modi's Principal Secretary. And we reaffirmed the UK and India's deep commitment to improving global resilience. And we will continue to work with countries, financial institutions, and civil society so that adaptation and resilience receives greater political attention.

Third, we need more ambition to cooperate and support each other. Which I believe everyone this panel has outlined.

We must deliver and move beyond the \$100 billion per year climate finance goal and look to align finance flows with low carbon, resilient development. From solar panels to electric vehicles and tree planting, it is often finance that turns good intentions into action.

In February I joined the Governor of the Bank of England Mark Carney for the launch of the COP26 Finance Action Plan.

I can confirm that our Presidency will push for greater clarity on post-2020 climate finance, by working with major donor countries, multilateral development banks and other public and also private sources to step up ambition.

The UK itself has already committed to doubling our climate finance to £11.6 billion from next year to 2025.

In conclusion, from the latest cutting edge global technology and innovation to tried and tested indigenous knowledge, we all have much to learn from each other.

That is why I am very pleased that over the last two days you've got into the nuts and bolts of practical solutions.

I will take the messages from this conference and apply them to the work that I just outlined on finance, and on adaptation and resilience, but also to our other COP campaigns.

We will work with countries and communities to protect and restore the natural habitats and ecosystems, as we are reminded of on the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, are absolutely crucial to preserving both the planet's biodiversity and climate.

We will work with business, countries and international organisations to support the transition to renewable energy sources. And we will seize the economic and social benefits of innovations in clean energy and energy storage.

We will work to clean up the air we breathe by seeking to accelerate the global transition to zero emission vehicles and phasing out petrol and diesel

engines.

My duty is to spread your message around the world – starting with the Petersberg Dialogue next week. And to work tirelessly to help parties reach a constructive negotiated outcome that results in practical action on the ground.

We will work night and day to encourage everyone to raise their ambition on tackling this threat of climate change.

I look forward to welcoming you all at COP26 and working with you on the road to that summit.