

COP26 will be a chance to restore our relationship with nature

On 5 June the world marked World Environment Day. This year the anniversary fell in unprecedented circumstances: the global COVID-19 crisis has of course brought with it immense challenges around the world, including in Egypt, Italy and the UK. But in the middle of so much pain and suffering, we have also had the opportunity to reflect on the effects of the crisis on our climate. Falling global emissions had an impact on all walks of life: wildlife not seen in decades have appeared in parts of the UK, fish have returned to the canals of Venice, and air pollution is at a record low in many of our cities.

The Coronavirus provides a stark reminder of what happens when humanity's relationship with nature breaks down. As we recover, we have an opportunity to protect and to restore that relationship, by reducing our exposure to deadly viruses and climate impacts alike.

That is why next year's climate summit, COP26 – which will be held in Glasgow from 1 to 12 November 2021 – will be a critical moment for us all. Hosted by the UK in partnership with Italy, it will be the biggest summit ever to take place in the UK: over 30,000 delegates are expected to gather for the event in Glasgow. Postponing the summit until 2021 has given us another year to get ready: Italy and the UK will be working tirelessly over this period to raise global ambition, and to ensure that COP26 is a resounding success. The twin Presidencies of the G7 (UK) and the G20 (Italy) in 2021 will be putting the climate change agenda front and centre.

We are delighted that Egypt will be our partner in this vital endeavour.

At the last summit – COP 25, in Madrid – the UK and Egypt jointly launched an ambitious action plan aimed at mitigating the most severe impacts of climate change, and adapting to those impacts where they cannot be avoided. This was an important contribution to the global effort to complete and implement the Paris Agreement of 2015. Only by delivering on that Agreement can we demonstrate that the world is able to work together to solve this pressing challenge.

As the Egyptian Minister of Environment, Her Excellency Dr Yasmin Fouad, said at the recent Petersberg Climate Dialogue, the whole world has come together to face the Coronavirus. The solidarity we have achieved in that context provides an excellent platform on which to build united and coordinated international action to tackle the climate crisis as well.

To achieve that, we need countries, cities, states and businesses to come together now to take ambitious action towards achieving net zero global emissions. As incoming Presidents of COP26, the UK and Italy are committed to bringing all our partners together to deliver on the spirit and the letter of the Paris Agreement. A special effort will be dedicated to the impact of

climate change on Africa: Italy will host an event on this theme in 2021, in preparation for the COP26 summit in Glasgow. Italy will also organize the first edition of the event “Youth4Climate: driving ambition” to highlight the fundamental role that young generations play in tackling issues related to climate change.

As we recover from COVID-19, we have a rare opportunity to rebuild in a way that lays the foundation for sustainable, resilient and inclusive growth. And just as we have come together to face COVID-19, the international community can and must unite to tackle the climate crisis. Our people, and our planet, deserve no less.