

Minister Heather Wheeler's address at the PIF Partners' Dialogue in Tuvalu

Mr Prime Minister, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to come to this beautiful part of the world for the first time, on my first overseas visit as the UK's Minister for Asia and the Pacific.

Global Britain Uplift

We may live on opposite sides of the globe, but I can assure you that the UK is more committed to this region and addressing climate change than ever. By the end of this year, we will have doubled our diplomatic presence in the Pacific to six missions, enabling us to work more closely with you on issues that matter to us all.

Challenge of Climate Change

Clearly, climate change is one of the most pressing of those issues. Visiting Fiji and Tuvalu I have seen for myself some of the challenges the region faces. I also witnessed the resilience, ingenuity and determination of its people in adapting to these challenges. I'm keen to see what more we can do to tackle climate change together.

UK Action

The UK is already taking a global lead on the issue – we were the first major economy to legislate for net-zero emissions by 2050, and we are sharing our expertise in clean growth with partners around the world.

We recognise our responsibility – as one of the world's major economies – not only to meet the commitments of and ensure continued momentum on the Paris Climate Agreement, but also to raise global ambition even further.

This is why we are bidding to host COP26, in partnership with Italy, next year, and co-leading the resilience strand of the UN Climate Action Summit next month. We will be reliant on High Ambition Coalition partners in the Pacific to add your voices to our own. I sincerely hope that we will have your continued moral and vocal support on an issue that affects us all.

Climate Finance

Resilience and adaptation are vital, to address the impacts of climate change that are already here to stay. The UK has listened to the concerns of countries in this region that more climate finance needs to be devoted to adaptation. That is why we are committing nearly £6 billion in international climate finance over five years to 2020, split evenly between adaptation and mitigation.

It is also why, as co-chair of the Green Climate Fund in 2019, we are pushing for funds to be disbursed more efficiently and projects to be started more quickly.

Oceans

As an island nation, like all of you, we are particularly aware of the importance of protecting our ocean. We joined the '30by30' pledge to protect 30% of the ocean by 2030 and I am pleased to say that we are doing our bit to honour that pledge, thanks to our Blue Belt Initiative, which is on track to designate 4 million square kilometres of ocean as Marine Protected Areas by 2020.

We are also working with Commonwealth partners on issues related to our oceans. Countries in the Pacific are benefiting from our £26.5 million Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme, and we are proud to co-lead, with Vanuatu, the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance, to tackle the scourge of plastic pollution. The commitment of Pacific countries to this issue is clear, and we want to work even more closely with you.

That is why I am delighted to announce our support for a scoping study, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the South Pacific Tourism Organisation, on how to reduce litter from cruise ships – which, as you will be well aware, is a key contributor to plastic pollution.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think we all recognise that limiting any further global warming will be challenging. However, the UK believes it is achievable if we all work together. With our enhanced diplomatic network here in the Pacific, that is what we are determined to do.

I look forward to working with island leaders to build resilience to climate change and to advocate relentlessly for a level of global ambition to match the scale of the climate crisis we face.