

PM's remarks to UN climate roundtable: 20 September 2021

Over the past year we've come together many times to discuss climate change.

So you know by now how this conversation goes.

I talk about the need to rid the world of coal-fired power and internal combustion engines, the need to stop deforestation, and for developed nations to find that \$100 billion.

I'll stress that again – for this to be a success we need developed countries to find that \$100 billion.

And everyone nods and we all agree that Something Must Be Done.

Yet I confess I'm increasingly frustrated that the "something" to which many of you have committed is nowhere near enough.

It is the biggest economies in the world that are causing the problem, while the smallest suffer the worst consequences.

And while progress is being made all over the world, the gulf between what has been promised, what is actually being delivered, and what needs to happen... it remains vast.

Too many major economies – some represented here today, some absent – are lagging too far behind.

And tinkering around the edges, simply denuding the tree of its lowest fruit, simply won't achieve the change the planet needs.

I know it's not easy.

We are all answerable to our voters, to our people.

And the questions being asked are pretty tough.

In the UK we've already cut our carbon emissions in half and we have all but eliminated coal from our energy mix.

Going further than that requires a whole extra level of effort – right now we're grappling over how to get rid of gas-powered boilers, for example.

But remain committed to hitting net zero by 2050, with a huge chunk of the necessary cuts in emissions coming by 2030, by the end of the decade.

And as COP26 looms large I need to see, we all need to see, a similar level of ambition from the major economies represented here.

I'm not demanding that any nation forego the development achieved by the UK,

or condemn its people to some kind of agrarian, pasteurised existence. Quite the opposite.

I want to see you leapfrogging the outdated methods of yesteryear in favour of the cheaper, cleaner, cutting-edge technology that will power the 21st century.

Wind and solar are the cheapest form of electricity generation in two-thirds of the world.

By 2030 renewables will be undercutting coal and gas almost everywhere. So going green isn't just better for the planet. It means greater prosperity for your people.

It means more opportunities for your businesses.

And it puts you on the right side of public opinion both at home and on the international stage.

Because climate change is no longer an issue that solely concerns the unkempt fringes.

Climate change IS realpolitik.

It's a diplomacy issue, a security issue, a trade issue.

And in the years to come, the only great powers will be green powers.

We are joined today by leaders of countries already feeling the worst effects of climate change.

As the world continues to warm they will be joined in that unfortunate distinction by still more nations, home to billions of people, and an ever-growing slice of global GDP.

And if you abdicate responsibility today, do you think those who pay the price for that decision will rally to your side tomorrow?

If you say that the lives of their children are not worth the hassle of reducing domestic coal consumption, will they vote with you in fora such as this?

Will they work with you, borrow from you, stand with you if you tell the world that you don't care whether their land and their people slip below the waves?

These countries need allies.

They need help now, that's why I stress the \$100 billion so much.

To be merely a bystander is to be complicit in their fate – yet that is exactly what you will be if you fail to act this year.

I speak frankly – we are, after all, among friends.

But COP26 will be staged in the full glare of the global spotlight.

And when the summit ends, when most of the world has committed to decisive, game-changing action, it will be clear to all which of us has lacked the courage to step up.

The world will see, and your people will remember, and history will judge.

So you can look away, you can do the minimum, you can hope that if you feed the crocodile enough it will devour you last.

Or you can show leadership.

You can make the choices that will make your country stronger and your people richer.

You can make the promises we need and follow through with the action that will give them form.

And together we can make COP26 the success the world needs it to be.