

COP26 President remarks at first day of Petersberg Climate Dialogue

COP26 President Alok Sharma spoke at the High Level Stakeholder Session for the Petersberg Climate Dialogue on Monday 27 April 2020.

This was an online session involving international organisations, governments, business, and members of civil society.

Firstly, thank you everyone for joining us for this discussion, despite the very difficult circumstances facing so many people right now.

I am very honoured to be co-hosting the Petersberg Climate Dialogue with Minister Schulze; and it's great to be participating in this high-level stakeholder event ahead of the ministerial discussions that are going to take place tomorrow.

While we rightly focus on fighting the immediate crisis of the Coronavirus, we must not lose sight of the huge challenges of climate change. And Minister Ribera of course referred to that in some detail.

We all know that climate risks are growing year by year. And the steps we take now to rebuild our economies can have a profound impact on our societies' future sustainability, resilience and, ultimately, wellbeing of humans, but of course, nature as well.

And two of the areas that I think we particularly need to have our attention on are the power and transport sectors.

Energy transition and accelerating the move to zero-emission road transport are two of the five key campaigns that the UK is going to be focusing on in the lead up to COP 26.

And I believe that by actually uniting around specific issues, we hope to spur innovation, scale up solutions and bring down the costs in both of these areas. And I'll talk a little about what's been happening in costs in these areas

The challenge we face is how do we speed up progress towards a zero emission and climate-resilient global economy, whilst at the same time creating jobs and supporting communities through the transition? And, of course, that it is particularly important now as a result of where the global economy finds itself in the COVID-19 situation.

To meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, we need to decarbonise the global economy about three to five times faster over the next decade than we did over the last two decades.

And it is right that we should come together as we have done today –

international organisations, governments, business, civil society – to discuss how we meet that challenge together.

Now, our efforts can and they must of course support each other. And government policy can encourage business investment. And business innovation can create new options for consumers. And civil society advocacy can build on support for strong policy.

And we live in a globally connected economy, and the options available to each country depend greatly on the actions that we take together and the actions that are taken by others.

And I do think that if we work together on this we can progress a lot faster.

So, just to give you some statistics.

In the power sector, the pace of progress has actually been pretty impressive. Globally, the cost of solar power has fallen by 85%, and that of wind power by 49%, since 2010.

Renewables are already cheaper than new coal power in two thirds of all countries in the world. And before long, it will be cheaper to build new renewables than to continue to operate existing coal plants. And I do think actually this is a remarkable global achievement. All countries that have deployed these technologies have helped to increase economies of scale, to accelerate innovation, to shift investment, and ultimately to bring down costs.

Cheap and clean electricity is very much a reality. But the transition away from polluting coal power is not complete.

The goal of phasing out unabated coal from power generation is now supported by 97 members of the Powering Past Coal Alliance, so this is 33 countries, 27 sub-national governments, around 37 businesses and related organisations. And the Alliance now covers more than a third of the total coal power capacity of the OECD countries.

It's clear that developed countries should lead the way, and the UK is committed to achieving zero coal power by 2024.

Last year, if I can tell you, that only 2% of all our electricity generation in the UK came from coal, which is for us a record low. Just eight years ago, that level was around 40%. So, where we work effectively we can make a difference.

In parallel we also need to scale up technical assistance, investment, and indeed, policy support, so that clean power becomes the most attractive option for all countries, not just developed ones.

So that the global pipeline of planned new coal plants, which is already shrinking, we should aim to have that eliminated entirely.

We must support heavily coal-dependent countries in making a 'just

transition' – it's a phrase we use a lot, but I think we have to really give effect to that. We need to help them to move to clean energy in a way that creates jobs and supports the communities that are most affected.

And we absolutely have to work together to extend access to electricity to almost the almost billion people – around 840 million people – around the world who don't actually have access to it right now.

Turning to road transport, the promise of cheaper, cleaner technology is, again, equally real.

Electric vehicles are cheaper to run than fossil fuel cars and are expected to be cheaper to buy by the early 2020s.

The auto industry is being hit hard by the current crisis, we all know that for those of us who are dealing with this in our own governments. And of course our immediate concerns are the businesses and jobs that are affected.

But the long-term prosperity of the industry, and for wider society, the challenge of transition is just as important.

By the most optimistic estimates, over half of new car sales globally will be electric vehicles by 2040. To meet the Paris Agreement goals, we probably need all new vehicles to be zero emission by then. In other words, we're going to need to double the pace of the global transition.

I do believe that we can achieve this if we work together.

The UK itself has already set the goal of ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040. And in February, thanks to progress in the sector, our Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced we were bringing this target forward to 2035 or, indeed, earlier if we can give effect to that.

We have also invested in a UK Battery Industrialisation Centre, and that's a stepping stone to our larger commitment for a Gigafactory – a large-scale battery technology factory for electric vehicles.

Now, I do believe that actually the more countries that set clear targets and policies in line with this rapid transition that I've talked about, the faster investment will shift towards new technologies, and the faster their costs will come down. We've seen that in renewables and we want to see that when it comes to vehicles as well.

Faster transitions in power and transport will absolutely have far-reaching consequences and we all understand that.

Cheap and clean power, and the scaling up of batteries and fuel cells in road transport, will absolutely open new pathways to decarbonisation in industry, buildings, aviation and shipping.

And we are only just beginning to experience the benefits of a clean economy, and we need to move much more quickly towards it.

And I do believe that whether we live in the South, the North, the East or the West, we do share one life-giving but incredibly fragile planet. We share an interconnected global economy. That is absolutely clear and has been very clear as we've seen the consequences throughout COVID-19.

But we also share the hope of a prosperous future.

And I hope the discussion today can explore opportunities for stronger cooperation to meet this shared challenge, working together. Absolutely, we can certainly make faster progress.

Thank you.

The eleventh annual [Petersberg Climate Dialogue](#) is the first major climate ministerial meeting of the year, bringing together ministers from 35 countries within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Letter to the ACMD on advice on emergency legislation to enable supply of controlled drugs

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

Storage limit for frozen eggs, sperm and embryos extended during coronavirus outbreak

Anyone who has frozen their eggs, sperm and embryos will be able to extend their storage for an additional 2 years under new government plans to support

those going through fertility treatment during the global coronavirus pandemic.

To support wider changes to the health service in responding to the pandemic, fertility treatment in the UK across the NHS and private sector was temporarily paused earlier this month.

In recognition of the potential impact this may have on those wishing to start a family, the government has confirmed that the current 10-year storage limit for embryos and gametes will be extended by 2 years to enable sufficient time for fertility treatment to resume.

Currently the storage period for embryos and gametes is limited to a maximum of 10 years, after which people must choose whether to undergo fertility treatment or have their frozen eggs, sperm and embryos destroyed.

Health Minister, Lord Bethell, said:

Many people rely on fertility treatment as their only hope to start a family and the current pandemic means some will have to put their hopes on hold.

We are taking steps to ensure during these extraordinary times, those that have embryos, sperm or eggs stored as part of their treatment are not unfairly caught out by the existing storage limits and have the best possible opportunity to start their family in the future.

I know for some people the pausing of services will be extremely worrying and we are constantly assessing when it will be appropriate to commence fertility services again while balancing the pressures of the pandemic on our NHS and workforce.

Sally Cheshire, Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, said:

We welcome today's announcement from the DHSC. We have been working together to ensure those patients who have stored sperm, eggs or embryos that are reaching the 10-year storage limit are not penalised by the current suspension of fertility treatment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know this is a difficult and distressing time for all patients, so this decision brings good news for those who are reaching the 10-year storage limit. It provides them with some much-needed reassurance and most importantly gives more time to try for their much longed for family.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority will be issuing new guidance

to fertility clinics across the UK to support them in implementing the new storage limit extension.

Freezing and storing sperm, eggs and embryos are becoming more frequent with patients choosing to do so for various reasons. These may include that:

- they are not ready to have a family but want to preserve their fertility so that they can start a family later in life
- they are having cancer treatment that may affect their fertility and wish to protect and preserve their future fertility
- they may be planning on transitioning or having gender reassignment surgery but intend to start a family later
- they have several good embryos as part of their treatment cycle and store these for future treatment use
- Earlier in the year, the government launched a consultation for views on whether the current law to store their frozen eggs, sperm and embryos for 10 years should change.
- Currently the storage period is limited to a maximum of 10 years and only those stored for medical reasons, such as cancer treatment, and premature infertility can be preserved for longer – up to 55 years in total. The consultation will also consider arguments about whether women are disproportionately affected by the current time limit.
- The consultation continues until 5 May to consider [whether the limit should be extended in line with significant improvements in freezing technologies.](#)

[First 'Foodbank Thursday' success for new response team](#)

The 'Area 6 Covid Response Team' is providing vital help to boost support for vulnerable people living in isolated areas in and around Hillcrest and Hensingham in Whitehaven, which is some of the largest residential areas in the town.

Ryan Taylor, Senior Project Manager, is leading the response team.

He said:

I was approached to lead the team by John Murphy who is doing the same in Cleator Moor and I was keen to help. We have a lot of amazing volunteers offering their time, so the main priority is ensuring that we organise and coordinate them in the best way, to get the right support to the right people as quickly as we can.

A big thank you to the people helping us make this a more positive

situation for those living in our area. Those of us from Sellafield Ltd are also very lucky to have the support of our management, who are giving us time to support the community.

Area 6 covers Hillcrest, Hensingham, Richmond, Red Lonning, Inkerman and surrounding estates in the Whitehaven area.

The service offered includes food shopping and deliveries, pharmacy collections, a telephone befriending service, utilities support, dog walking and even gardening.

The team had an overwhelming response to their first 'Foodbank Thursday' event this week, which saw food parcels being collected from doorsteps and taken to a new collection hub in Rascals nursery at Red Lonning.

Foodbank Thursday

Jessica Ward, Programme Manager, has allocated teams to focus on specific 'zones', ensuring everyone has access to support if they need it.

She said:

The first thing we did was devise a strategy to set-up the group of volunteers as quickly as possible. Within 24 hours we had split the area into 6 zones, allocating a lead to each.

Each team now has their own Whatsapp groups and are providing a vital service to those who are in need of a helping hand. Its really motivational to see such a caring and proactive community of people working to turn a difficult situation into one that is more positive for local people.

Local Councillors Allan Forster, Mike Hawkins and Chris Hays are also backing the efforts.

Cllr Forster said:

This is a hugely populated area of Whitehaven and we're keen to do all we can to ensure vulnerable and isolated residents get the help they need.

We have been overwhelmed by offers of support and are very grateful to our volunteers offering time and skills to help their neighbours during this testing time.

CMA clears NHS hospital trusts merger

In 2013, the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) predecessor, the Competition Commission, prohibited a [previous merger proposal](#) between the hospital trusts. As a result, they were required to enter into a 10-year commitment not to merge without the CMA's permission.

When investigating an NHS hospital merger, the CMA considers the potential impact of that merger on competition between hospitals. Since the Competition Commission's decision, there have been significant changes to policy within the NHS that have affected the role that competition plays in the provision of public healthcare services.

The CMA's investigation in this case has confirmed that competition between NHS hospitals now plays little role in the provision of NHS services in the east Dorset area, with collaboration often viewed as a better way to meet increasing demands for care and deliver better value. In particular, the CMA found that the 2 hospital trusts have limited incentive to compete with each other, given the way that they are now funded, and so there would be no significant loss of competition in this area after the deal.

The CMA has therefore concluded that the merger does not give rise to competition concerns and should be cleared. The CMA has, in parallel, also released the hospitals from the commitment not to merge that they had given in 2013.

Throughout its investigation, the CMA worked closely with the sector regulator, NHS Improvement, and engaged with local commissioners, who are responsible for planning and commissioning healthcare services in their local area. These NHS bodies fully supported the merger. The CMA also carefully considered all views and evidence provided by patients and their representative groups, local authorities and other interested bodies.

The CMA started to discuss the merger with the two hospitals in 2019. Its information-gathering with the trusts and other NHS bodies was completed before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The CMA has been conscious of the exceptional pressures on the hospitals at this time when finalising its investigation.

Looking ahead to future hospital mergers, the CMA is aware of [longer-term plans to exempt mergers between NHS hospitals from CMA review](#), which it fully supports.

For more information, visit the CMA's dedicated webpage for the [Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals / Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trusts merger investigation](#).

For media enquiries, contact the CMA press team on 020 3738 6460 or

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