

PM Boris Johnson's address to the UN Security Council on Climate and Security: 23 February 2021

For more than 75 years, this Security Council has been tasked with maintaining peace and security and it's been difficult. We haven't always agreed about how to achieve that goal.

But one thing is absolutely clear to me: that we are committed to tackling threats to our security, and as you've heard from Antonio, and from Nisreen it is absolutely clear that climate change is a threat to our collective security and the security of our nations.

And I know there are people around the world who will say this is all kind of "green stuff" from a bunch of tree-hugging tofu munchers and not suited to international diplomacy and international politics.

I couldn't disagree more profoundly.

The causes of climate change we've got to address, but the effects as you've heard from Nisreen, and as you've heard from Antonio, in those speeches just now, are absolutely clear.

Think of the young man forced onto the road when his home becomes a desert, one of 16 million people displaced every year as a result of weather-related disasters – weather-related disasters that are associated with climate change.

He goes to some camp, he becomes prey for violent extremists, people who radicalise him and the effects of that radicalisation are felt around the world.

"Think of the girl who drops out of school because her daily search for water takes her further and further from her family – and into the clutches of human traffickers and the international criminal gangs who profit from them.

Or think of a farmer who has lost harvest after harvest to drought and then switches to poppies because poppies are a hardier crop, with the impacts that the opium crops have on the streets of all our cities, quite frankly.

Or think of the impoverished and fragile nation whose government collapses when critical infrastructure is overwhelmed by increasingly frequent extreme weather – of a kind that sends shockwaves of instability around the world.

Now if that kind of result, in terms of political, economic, humanitarian impact, if that was being triggered by some kind of despotic warlord or civil war, then nobody would question the right and the duty of this UN Security Council to act, and therefore this is not a subject we can shy away from.

This isn't by the way, like so many of the issues that I know you confront, Antonio, this isn't some bafflingly complex diplomatic minuet, this isn't some modern equivalent of the Schleswig-Holstein question – can you remember the answer to the Schleswig-Holstein question, Antonio? I bet you can.

People know the answer to climate change and they know how to tackle this crisis.

And as Bill Gates put it in his new book, what we've got to do is go from 51 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions each year to net zero, so the increase in global temperatures remains at manageable levels. And as we do so we must support the most vulnerable and fragile nations that are feeling the effects of climate change, help them to adapt and to build resilience.

And that's what we're doing. So last year [sic: 2019] we passed a law committing us, the UK, to achieving net zero carbon-emissions by 2050. And we've pledged to slash emissions by 68 per cent by 2030, that's the steepest reduction for any major economy.

Our climate finance commitments for the next five years, supporting the rest of the world to achieve this, stand at £11.6 billion. And, ahead of the COP26 summit we're going to be putting climate change firmly at the top of the agenda for our G7 presidency as well.

So my message to you all today is now the UN Security Council has got to act too.

Because climate change is a geopolitical issue every bit as much as it is an environmental one. And if this Council is going to succeed in maintaining peace and security worldwide then it's got to galvanise the whole range of UN agencies and organisations into a swift and effective response.

"If we don't act now, when will we act? That's my question. When are we going to do something if we don't act now?"

When changing sea levels are affecting our navigation around our coasts? Or when, as Nisreen said, when huddled masses fleeing drought or wildfire, or conflict over resources arrive at our borders?

Whether you like it or not, it is a matter of when, not if, your country and your people will have to deal with the security impacts of climate change.

So let's do what this Council was created to do and let's show the kind of global leadership that is needed to protect the peace, the security and the stability of our nations, of our regions and of our world.

Thank you all very much.

[Sir David Attenborough on Climate and Security – Security Council Open VTC](#)

Thank you Prime Minister and members of the Security Council. I am greatly honoured to have this opportunity to speak to you. I am not a politician, nor am I a diplomat. I speak as a member of the public who listens to your

deliberations and pronouncements with care and concern.

We know that the security of the entire world depends on your decisions. That you hold the key to preventing a repetition of that global catastrophe, the Great War, that took place during my youth and transformed a whole generation. And that awesome responsibility, I know well, still rests with you.

But may I plead that today there are threats to security of a new and unprecedented kind. These threats do not divide us. They are threats which should unite us, no matter from which part of the world we come, for they face us all.

They are: rising global temperatures; the despoiling of the ocean, that vast universal larder on which people everywhere depend for their food; changes in the pattern of weather worldwide that pay no regard to national boundaries, but that can turn forests into deserts, drown great cities and lead to the extermination of huge numbers of the other creatures with which we share this planet.

No matter what we do now, some of these threats will assuredly become reality within a few short years. Others could, in the lifetime of today's young people, destroy entire cities and societies, even altering the stability of the entire world. The heating of our planet has already reached the point that the impacts on the poorest and most vulnerable people are profound. But this is only the beginning of this crisis.

In the last 150 years, the world has warmed on average by just over 1 degree Celsius and our atmosphere now contains concentrations of carbon dioxide that have not been equalled for millions of years.

We are today perilously close to tipping points that, once passed, will send global temperatures spiralling catastrophically higher. If we continue on our current path, we will face the collapse of everything that gives us our security: food production, access to fresh water, habitable ambient temperature and ocean food chains. And if the natural world can no longer support the most basic of our needs, then much of the rest of civilisation will quickly break down.

Please, make no mistake, climate change is the biggest threat to security that modern humans have ever faced. I don't envy you the responsibility that this places on all of you and your governments. We have left the stable and secure climatic period that gave birth to our civilisation. There is no going back. No matter what we do now, it's too late to avoid climate change. And the poorest and most vulnerable – those with the least security – are now certain to suffer.

Our duty right now is surely to do all we can to help those in the most immediate danger. But of course we have a parallel duty, and it's here where I think there are grounds for hope. While it's true we can never go back to the stable benign climate that enabled us to flourish for the past 10,000 years, I do believe that if we act fast enough, we can reach a new stable

state.

In November this year, at COP26 in Glasgow, we have what may be our last opportunity to make this step change. If we recognise climate change and the loss of nature as worldwide security threats, as indeed they are, then we may yet act proportionately and in time.

The change needed in itself sounds immense, and of course it is, but we already have many of the technologies needed, at least for the initial changes. And perhaps crucially, we also have a level of public support and demand for action that I have myself never seen before.

People today all over the world now realise this is no longer an issue which will affect future generations. It is people alive today, and in particular young people, who will live with the consequences of our actions.

Politicians and business leaders know this too, having seen how quickly and radically their societies and global activities were affected by Covid, it is now sadly easier to imagine some of the consequences of climate change.

Perhaps the most significant lesson brought by these last 12 months has been that we are no longer separate nations, each best served by looking after its own needs and security. We are a single truly global species whose greatest threats are shared and whose security must ultimately come from acting together in the interests of us all.

Climate change is a threat to global security that can only be dealt with by unparalleled levels of global co-operation. It will compel us to: question our economic models and where we place value; invent entirely new industries; recognise the moral responsibility that wealthy nations have to the rest of the world; and put a value on nature that goes far beyond money.

And through global co-operation, we may achieve far more than tackling climate change. We may finally create a stable, healthy world where resources are equally shared and where we thrive in balance with the rest of the natural world. We may, for the first time in the entire history of humanity, come to know what it feels like to be secure.

PM statement at coronavirus press conference: 22 February 2021

Good evening,

Our extraordinary NHS has now succeeded in vaccinating more than 17.7 million people across the United Kingdom and nearly a year after the pandemic began

This unparalleled national effort has decisively shifted the odds in our favour so that we no longer have to rely simply on lockdowns and restricting our behaviour and putting our lives on hold

But with every day that goes by this programme of vaccination is creating a shield around the entire population which means that we are now travelling on a one way road to freedom.

And we can begin safely to restart our lives and do it with confidence.

But I want to be frank about exactly what that means and the trade-offs involved.

The vaccines reduce the danger of Covid: they save lives and they keep people out of hospital.

But no vaccine against any disease has ever been 100 per cent effective.

So whenever we ease the lockdown, whether it is today or in six or nine months,

We've got to be realistic and accept that there will be more infections, more hospitalisations and therefore – sadly – more deaths, just as there are every year with flu.

Even if we sustained the lockdown indefinitely, which would itself cost lives and do immeasurable harm to our children, we would not be able to eradicate this disease.

And that's why it's right gradually to replace the protection afforded by the lockdown with the protection of the vaccines, and our approach is to move with the utmost care, and advancing in four steps, each with a minimum of five weeks apart so we can fully judge the impact of each relaxation before we move on, and you can see the details of all of this on gov.uk.

And we will be led at every stage by data not dates, and we will apply four tests: the pace of the vaccination programme; the effectiveness of the vaccines; the pressure on the NHS; and the risks of any new variants of Covid.

And therefore as we look at the data today, I can confirm that two weeks from today – Monday 8th March – we will begin step one and schools and colleges across England will re-open and teaching in classrooms can start again. All the evidence shows that schools are safe and the risk posed to children by Covid is vanishingly small. But to offer even greater reassurance, we are introducing twice-weekly testing of secondary school and college pupils and asking them to wear face coverings for the rest of this term. Students on practical courses can return to university, but all others will need to continue learning online and we will review the situation before the end of the Easter holidays. We will allow breakfast and afterschool clubs to restart and among other changes on 8 March, you'll be able to have a coffee on a bench or a picnic in a park with one person outside your household.

And because we know how stressful this time has been and how people yearn to see friends and family if only fleetingly we will now go further and on 29 March, you can meet more of your friends and family outside, including in gardens – either as two households or subject to the Rule of Six.

And then we will go to step two – which is no earlier than 12 April – when shops will return and re-open, hairdressers, nail salons will reopen pubs and restaurants will all be able to serve customers outside – precisely because we know the risk of outside transmission is lower.

And then five weeks after that, no earlier than 17 May, we will go to step three and open all our hospitality sector to service indoors pubs, bars, restaurants, along with hotels and cinemas, and, subject to capacity limits, we will also open sports stadia, concert halls and theatres.

And finally – provided we continue to pass the four tests – then from 21 June we will go to step four and say goodbye to most remaining restrictions:

resuming large-scale events like business conferences and football matches, lifting the limits on weddings and reopening nightclubs.

All of these steps will apply in England, and the government will continue to do whatever it takes to protect jobs and livelihoods across our whole United Kingdom for the duration of the pandemic.

I know there are some who would like to accelerate this timetable and I know of course there are others who would like to be more cautious and stay in the slow lane.

I understand and sympathise with both of those points of view because levels of infection are still high and we must strike a very careful balance and always accept we must be humble in the face of nature.

But also, we must accept that we cannot persist indefinitely with restrictions that have separated families and loved ones for too long,

and threatened the livelihoods of millions,

and kept pupils out of school.

It is thanks to the roll-out of the vaccinations, some of them pioneered in this country that the balance of that judgement is now changing in our favour.

And it is thanks to the vaccinations that there is light ahead leading us to a spring and summer which I think will be seasons of hope, looking and feeling incomparably better for us all and from which we will not go back.

[Alister Jack responds to February Labour Market Statistics](#)

News story

Scottish Secretary responds to the latest ONS employment figures



Scottish Secretary, Alister Jack said:

Today's figures reflect the challenges we continue to face as a result of this global pandemic.

The UK Government has taken quick and decisive action to support jobs and businesses across all parts of the UK. Our £280 billion support package which includes furlough, business loans and self employed schemes have so far protected nearly one million jobs and 100,000 businesses in Scotland.

This direct support is on top of £9.7 billion additional funding provided to the Scottish Government.

We are also taking action to create new jobs and support economic recovery in Scotland. Investing billions as part of our Plan for Jobs, City and Region Deals, a new Shared Prosperity Fund and in the supply of vaccines which are important in lifting restrictions and reopening the economy.

At the budget next week, the Chancellor will set out the next stage of our plan to support and create jobs in all corners of the UK.

- The UK Government furlough scheme, paying 80 per cent of wages, will run until the end of April. The self-employed support scheme has also been extended to the end of March and will increase from 55% to 80% of average profits – up to £7,500. At their peak in the summer our furlough and self-employed support schemes were supporting more than 930,000 jobs in

Scotland.

- More than 90,000 businesses in Scotland have been supported from UK Government business loans worth £3.4 billion.
- The UK Government is investing billions to help people of all ages back into work, including our £2 billion Kickstart scheme for young people, expansion of sector work experience programmes and recruitment of thousands of Work Coaches in Jobcentres.
- The UK Government has provided billions in extra funding for the welfare system for those unable to access other forms of support.
- This support is on top of an additional £9.7 billion upfront funding given to the Scottish Government this financial year for their covid response.
- The UK Government continues to provide the bulk of covid testing in Scotland and has moved quickly to buy vaccines, securing more than 400 million doses from seven developers with Pfizer/BioNTech and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines currently being distributed across all parts of the UK.

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E3 foreign ministers' statement on the JCPoA: 23 February 2021

Press release

The governments of France, Germany and the United Kingdom respond to Iran's suspension of the Additional Protocol.



Statement from the governments of France, Germany and the UK:

We, the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany and the United Kingdom, deeply regret that Iran has started, as of today, to suspend the Additional Protocol and the transparency measures under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA). Iran's actions are a further violation of its commitments under the JCPoA and significantly reduces safeguards oversight by the IAEA.

The E3 are united in underlining the dangerous nature of this decision. It will significantly constrain the IAEA's access to sites and to safeguards-relevant information. It will also constrain the IAEA's ability to monitor and verify Iran's nuclear programme and nuclear-related activities, as per its reporting mandate under United Nations Security Council resolution 2231.

We commend and fully support the Director General and the Secretariat for their continued efforts to implement the necessary verification and monitoring of Iran's nuclear commitments under the JCPoA in the present context, as highlighted by the DG's visit to Tehran on the 20 and 21st of February. We take note of the conclusion of a temporary bilateral understanding between the IAEA and Iran which preserves for up to three months the possibility of access to certain information.

We urge Iran to stop and reverse all measures that reduce transparency and to ensure full and timely cooperation with the IAEA. Our objective remains to preserve the JCPoA and to support ongoing diplomatic efforts for a negotiated solution allowing for the return of Iran and the U.S. to full compliance with their JCPoA commitments.

Published 23 February 2021

Fewer than 1 in 5 university students had COVID-19 by end of autumn term

The COVID-19 [university seroprevalence study](#) was carried out among the student population in England. It was conducted between 2 to 11 December 2020 at 5 universities across the country, which had reported COVID-19 outbreaks during the autumn term. The study found that, overall, 17.8% of 17 to 25 year old students had antibodies from prior COVID-19 infection.

Despite a rise in laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases amongst university-aged groups in England between September to November – and a large number of reported COVID-19 outbreaks in university halls of residence – PHE's study suggests there was not widespread transmission of the virus across the wider student population. The study also shows that a substantial proportion of students were still susceptible to COVID-19 infection in December 2020.

The proportion of university students with antibodies to COVID-19 was highest amongst younger students, most likely to represent first-year undergraduates and particularly those living in university halls of residence.

Students aged 17 to 19 years had 4.1 times greater odds of being seropositive than 23 to 25 year olds. In halls of residence, which had reported high case rates of COVID-19 infection during the autumn term, an estimated 49% of students were found to have antibodies, highlighting the extent of spread within these specific settings when cases rates were high. Overall, those living in halls of residence had 2.9 times greater odds of testing seropositive than those living in other accommodation types.

Lead investigator Gayatri Amirthalingam, a Consultant Medical Epidemiologist at PHE, said:

This study gives the first evidence of the extent of spread of COVID-19 infection amongst university students in England during the autumn term. Fewer than 1 in 5 students had evidence of previous COVID-19 infection by December 2020, indicating that the majority of students were still susceptible by the end of the autumn term. However, almost half of students living in halls of residence with high numbers of reported cases were found to have COVID-19 antibodies.

The study shows that it remains as important as ever that students continue to follow the rules of hands, face, space and latest university guidance.

We are grateful to the universities and students that participated in this study and to the university staff who supported this important work.

The extent of COVID-19 antibody positivity in students living in university halls of residence that experienced high rates of COVID-19 highlights the need for early identification and isolation of suspected cases, and the rapid implementation of infection control measures to interrupt the spread of the virus.

Professor Viv Bennett, Chief Nurse and COVID-19 lead for Children and Young People at PHE, said:

This study shows most students are likely to still be susceptible to COVID-19 infection and even without developing symptoms could pass the virus on to others.

This highlights the importance of regular rapid testing so students can self-isolate quickly and prevent the spread of the virus. Students can help protect each other and their wider contacts by getting tested regularly.