

Working together to put us on course for a clean resilient age

Thank you Shaun very much for that introduction.

Good afternoon everyone on this meeting.

Firstly, a huge thank you to Green Alliance for inviting me to speak today.

And thank you also for everything that you have done and that you continue to do, to advance climate policy and climate action.

And frankly, for the moment, we have moved into this virtual world where we are doing everything virtually.

Some of us remember a time when we actually did physical meetings and physical events.

And I am really looking forward to that time again and coming in and speaking with you live so to speak, in front of you.

So, I just wanted to talk a little bit about one of the physical visits I did manage to get in, and this was within days of being appointed to the COP26 role,

I went to New York to visit the United Nations.

I had an opportunity, alongside the Secretary General, to speak with the UN Permanent Representatives.

During that trip I also had a whole range of meetings. And there was one particular meeting that struck a real chord with me.

And it was one of these informal gatherings and we had the permanent representatives from the developing countries around the table.

And we went round the table and I asked each of them what did climate change mean for them and their country.

And then we got to the representative of one of the small island developing states.

And she said this: "Unless we tackle climate change urgently, I won't have a place to call home".

And actually, what made this really stark message so poignant, was also the manner of the delivery.

She was calm, she was collected, it was matter of fact.

And that was the point at which I resolved, that whatever else we may achieve

on the road to COP, at COP26 itself, we must make this the most inclusive COP ever.

And I want to ensure that the voices of the vulnerable countries, of indigenous peoples, civil society and of course, young people, are heard.

Heard loud and clear.

And on an equal footing with larger, richer nations.

I am going to return to some of the practical things we are doing to make sure that happens. But I just want to go back to your launch, the Green Alliance's launch in 1979.

And your founding Chairman, Maurice Ash, said at the time and I quote: "We're a bunch of optimists. We are not doomsters. We believe in the possibilities of the future."

Well on the basis of that description, I very much consider myself part of the Green Alliance gang.

And there are reasons to be optimistic when it comes to climate action.

Because I do believe we are at a vital inflection point.

Where the views of governments, businesses and civil society are coalescing in a determination to tackle climate change.

Quite rightly, we have all been focused this year on the Covid emergency and that's right and proper.

But all of us recognise that the climate emergency hasn't gone away.

The clock is still ticking and those two hands are still moving inexorably closer midnight.

But we can, and are, taking action.

As we look to emerge from the dark shadow of Covid, I want 2021 to mark the beginning of the future we all want.

I want 2021 to be the year the world unites behind the Paris Agreement.

Putting it on course for a clean, resilient age.

Governments around the world are looking to build back greener.

And you've seen in China, Japan and South Korea they have committed recently to going net zero like other countries.

And crucially, what governments are doing is putting policy heft and finance behind their intentions.

Businesses are also committing to science-based net zero targets.

If you take into account all the companies, cities, regions, and other non-state actors, which have signed-up to the UN's 'Race to Zero' Campaign launched in June, they collectively already represent 50% of the global economy and 25% of global emissions.

All these organisations remember have committed, on science-based targets, to reach net zero emissions by 2050 or, indeed, earlier.

And actually, business realises that going green is not just the right thing to do, but it is also what their customers want.

And, increasingly, is what drives shareholder value.

The UK as a country has demonstrated that green growth is possible.

Over the last 30 years we have managed to grow our economy and yet at the same time cut emissions by 43%.

Last week the Prime Minister launched the UK's blueprint for a green industrial revolution.

This is a plan to consign to history, industrial chimneys and processes, vehicle tail pipes and home heating which spew out harmful emissions.

What we want is a clean future powered by hydrogen, wind turbines and electric vehicle batteries.

Revitalising our industrial heartlands and economy and creating high-value added green jobs.

Of course, all the while civil society is rightly holding a mirror up to the actions of governments and businesses.

And you're spurring us on to change.

And each of us as individuals can play our part.

Over 100,000 people have joined the Count Us In project since it was launched in October.

Committing to reduce their carbon footprints.

You'll know that 350 young people, from over 150 countries are, right now, holding their own virtual, mock COP26.

And I was very honoured to take part in the opening ceremony last week.

All around the world, youth, indigenous peoples, and communities are taking action on the ground to adapt, and to reduce their climate impact.

Such work is absolutely critical.

The crisis we face requires us to work together across society.

Business and investors.

Cities and regions.

Universities, schools, individuals, and civil society, all of us play our part.

Of course, it has to happen alongside the work of national governments.

To adapt, to reduce emissions, and to finance the change.

Our efforts support one another.

And at the end of the day, Government policy should be there to encourage business investment.

And business innovation can provide new options for consumers.

While civil society can create the conditions leaders need to act, and represent community interests in policy-making.

When we all turn our attention to the same problems, we know that we can make progress much faster.

And that is why, as well urging countries to come forward with ambitious emissions reduction targets, and adaptation plans,

And alongside calling on donor countries to live up to their obligations on international climate finance.

Our COP26 Presidency is focussing efforts on five critical issues which need an all-of-society response:

Restoring nature, adaptation and resilience, clean energy, clean transport and finance.

And I want to give you an example of the cooperation across all parts of society, and this is through the work that we are doing with the Energy Transition Council, a group of political, financial and technical leaders who are focussed in the global power sector.

And the aim of this grouping is to speed up the global transition to clean power.

And we have representatives of business and civil society also involved in its country and regional meetings.

And when it comes to nature, we have established the Sustainable Land Use Dialogues.

And we're bringing together producer and consumer countries for discussions to tackle deforestation.

And these discussions have been informed by consultations with business and

civil society, which have been held in Africa, Asia and Latin America by the Tropical Forest Alliance.

We are committed to driving this work forward over the next twelve months.

I spoke earlier about listening to diverse voices on the road to, and at, COP26.

And we want the interests of groups across society, from both the global North and South, to be heard loud and clear in the COP negotiations.

To achieve this, I have been clear that they will be at the heart of both our preparations for COP, but of course the summit itself.

It's why I was so keen to set up the COP26 international Civil Society and Youth advisory council. This is up and running.

And it's co-chaired by two young climate activists.

One from the global south, the other the global north.

As I understand it, this is the first time any COP Presidency that such a grouping has been established.

We are also holding a series of events with our fellow UN climate leaders.

To maintain momentum around the COP26 political process.

And drive real world change.

Next week I am meeting the UN Observers, who represent civil society, at a virtual event to make progress on vital negotiating issues.

Now you'll all know of course that next year, the UK holds the presidency of the G7, our partners Italy hold the presidency of the G20 and together, we share the presidency of COP26.

On the road to COP, I want to see the golden thread of climate action as a key theme, flowing strongly, like a torrent, through the G7, the G20 and every major international leader-level gathering ahead of the two weeks of COP26 in November 2021.

And the first stopover on that road is the Climate Ambition Summit which is taking place on 12 December.

The UK is hosting with the UN and France, and in partnership with Italy and Chile. And this is the point that marks the five-year anniversary of the Paris Agreement.

We are calling on countries to use this summit to announce ambitious commitments on emissions, adaptation and climate finance.

And yes, the UK will be setting out its own Nationally Determined Contribution metric ahead of 12 December.

There will be room for non-state actors to make commitments too at the Ambition Summit.

And we will absolutely provide a platform for civil society, young people and indigenous peoples to make sure that their voices are heard.

That is something that I consider to be absolutely vital in this process.

In the run up to next November we will host more discussions, to make progress on the issues in the negotiations.

Because we all recognise that the next twelve months are critical.

We must put the world in the best possible position to unleash the full potential of the Paris Agreement.

As I have said, we all have a role to play.

So, firstly let me thank everyone who is on this call for everything that you have already done – your organisations and you individually.

Secondly, keep up the pressure and ambition level.

Please challenge leaders, wherever you find them – in schools, universities, businesses and every level of government, to do more.

Thirdly, if you have not already done so, Join the “Race to Zero” campaign.

And sign-up to “Count Us In”.

By working together, we can bring about the change we need.

At the end of COP26, I want to be able to look my friend from the small island developing state in the eye and I want to be able to say to her: all of us, working together, made a positive difference.

And we did it for today’s, and tomorrow’s, generations.

Thank you very much for having me speak and I’m very happy to answer some questions.