

Youth

(speaker name will change depending on time of statement but the rest is the same)

Thank you to the chair, my name is Vera Sitali from Zambia. This year I turned 23, which means you have been negotiating all my life. In this time, I have seen the Kyoto Protocol ratified by 192 countries, I have seen UNFCCC talks attended by hundreds of thousands of people and I have seen the livelihood of at least 10 countries come closer to destruction. I am young and I am aware of these issues.

To be young and aware today is to see your elders - from doctors and scientists to lawyers and bankers - telling us that we're in the final countdown, with the risk of runaway climate change mounting with every day we run business as usual. To hear a chorus of credible voices warning us that we could lose everything that sustains us and gives the future hope.

To be young and aware today is to see your elders— from newspaper editorial desks to corporate boardrooms—stalling progress on every front, nattering around actions to be undertaken long after they've retired and died. To be chided for not understanding how the real world works; to be warned that doing the right thing will bankrupt us; to be told that not wanting to melt the ice caps makes you too radical to be taken seriously.

To be young and aware today is to be confused. To wonder why you can stand in front of us and both call for change, and refuse to change.

Let's be honest, ditching the Kyoto Protocol will not save us from the catastrophe that awaits, and will not protect your two year old from a world with war, poverty, and civil strife. Let's be honest. You're afraid to share. Why are we who have everything still so greedy? You've bracketed your way through COP16. You've locked yourself in hotels and isolated yourselves from the communities who you are affecting. Is it because you're scared to face the reality? You can't look into our eyes and tell us that you're doing the best you can. Let's be honest, you've heard these words before. In 1992 at the Earth Summit. Why is it that 18 years later these questions still apply? Let's be honest, while you're nail-biting over the next elections, we're fighting for survival.

To be young and aware today is to know that a bright green future is possible; to know that we can regenerate the world, rebuild our cities, redesign our lives, retool our factories, distribute innovation and creativity and all live in a world that is not only better than the alternative, but much better than the world we have now.

To be young and to be aware today is to feel the urgency, see the potential, and create the vision. Let's be honest, we're all in this together, and you want this future too. You have been negotiating all my life. You cannot tell me you need more time.