

SPEECH BY HRH Charles, Prince of Wales

FOR COP. 21 OPENING SESSION  
MONDAY, 30TH NOVEMBER 2015

Minister Pulgar-Vidal, Minister Fabius, Madame Figueres, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am enormously touched to have been invited by President Hollande to say a very few words at the start of this crucially important Conference. May I just begin by expressing my profound horror at what happened in Paris two weeks ago, together with untold sympathy for the grieving families and loved ones of those whose lives were so brutally extinguished? My heart is with the courageous French people in their hour of anguish.

Ladies and Gentlemen, rarely in human history have so many people around the world placed their trust in so few. Your deliberations over the next two weeks will decide the fate not only of those alive today, but also of generations yet unborn.

So I can only urge you to think of your grandchildren, as I think of mine, and of those billions of people without a voice; those for whom hope is the rarest of sensations; those for whom a secure life is a distant prospect.

Most of all, I urge you to consider the needs of the youngest generation, because none of us has the right to assume that “for our today they should give up their tomorrow.”

On an increasingly crowded planet, humanity faces many threats – but none is greater than climate change. It magnifies every hazard and tension of our existence. It threatens our ability to feed ourselves; to remain healthy and safe from extreme weather; to manage the natural resources that support our economies, and to avert the humanitarian disaster of mass migration and increasing conflict.

In damaging our climate we become the architects of our own destruction. While the planet can survive the scorching of the earth and the rising of the waters, the human race cannot. The absurd thing is that we know exactly what needs to be done; we know we cannot adapt sufficiently to go on as we are, nor can we build ourselves a new atmosphere. To avoid catastrophe we must restrict climate change to less than two degrees, which requires a dramatic reduction in carbon emissions.

This can be done. We have the knowledge, the tools and the money – only 1.7% per cent of global annual consumption would be required to put us on the right low carbon path for 2030. We lack only the will and the framework to use them wisely, consistently and at the required global scale. Governments collectively spend more than a trillion dollars every year on subsidies to energy, agriculture and fisheries. Just imagine what could be done if those vast sums supported sustainable energy, farming and fishing, rather than fossil fuels, deforestation and over-exploitation of the seas. It is the premium we need to pay for our collective, long-term insurance policy. We are always hearing nowadays that all our actions must be based on “good science”. We have that science. Why, then, when it comes to climate change apparently is this no longer applicable?

We have also seen how fast innovation and investment can drive low carbon energy technologies and we are learning how to develop circular economies, in which everything we previously regarded as waste becomes the feedstock for future growth.

So I pray that in pursuing National interest you will not lose sight of the International necessity. Back in 2009, just before COP.15, in Copenhagen, I remember trying to point out that the best scientific projections gave us less than a hundred months to alter our behaviour before we risk the tipping point of catastrophic climate change, beyond which there is no recovery. Have we really reached such a collective inertia that ignores so clear a warning? Eighty of those hundred months have now passed, so we must act now. Already we are being overtaken by other events and crises that can be seen as greater and more immediate threats. But in reality many are already and will increasingly be related to the rapidly growing effects of climate change.

The whole of Nature cries out at our mistreatment of Her. If the planet were a patient, we would have treated her long ago. You, Ladies and Gentlemen, have the power to put her on life support, and you must surely start the emergency procedures now!

So, today, after far too long an interval, you are all here to set us on the road to a saner future. If, at last, the moment has arrived to take those long-awaited steps towards rescuing our planet and our fellow man from impending catastrophe, then let us pursue that vital goal in a spirit of enlightened and humane collaboration.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you well in your endeavours and I shall pray for your success.

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