



**Interfaith Summit on Climate Change  
New York, 21 September 2014**

**Statement by  
Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon and thank you for this wonderful invitation. I'm delighted to be here. I would first like to thank Geronimo and the World Council of Churches.

I was in Samoa a couple of weeks ago. I was sad because it was a fantastic meeting of many of the most vulnerable populations of the world, and I thought the spiritual element was missing.

Yes we're talking about technological solutions. Yes we're talking about the economic solutions. Yes we're talking about the political solutions, but this has got to be put in the context of spirituality. I was sad that it wasn't and then one morning I wake up and I find Geronimo staying in the same hotel. So I asked Geronimo, "Can you make this happen? Can we have a sea prayer where we stand in the ocean and pray together?"

And he said we can do this! In a couple of hours it was done and I want to thank the World Council of Churches for a fantastic ceremony that was incredibly moving for me and everyone else who was there. Thank you very much for making small miracles happen all the time.

Now my friends, I want you to know that this is truly a momentous day, truly a momentous day. In fact it is a momentous week. We are making history, and we are making history together.

Over these three days, today and then tomorrow and Tuesday, everything that is occurring here in New York is dramatically shifting the ground on what is possible on climate change, what is possible in terms of addressing and facing the climate change challenge.

Over the next three days, if I were to extract one message from each day, I would say that today is a very powerful message that we must address climate change. Tomorrow we're going to get a very powerful message that we can address climate change then Tuesday, we must get a very powerful message that we will address climate change.

By the end of Tuesday we have to have a sense among all of us that a shift to a low-carbon society and low-carbon economy is fundamentally irreversible. And that three truths—that we must, that we can and that we will address climate change—have been unmistakably and firmly rooted into our decision making processes.

What do I mean by that? Let me take it day by day. Today is a very special day. My colleagues and I from the secretariat just came from the People's March, and this is one of those moments where I know you, like us, would like to be in two places at the same time.

We would all like to be at the march and we all want to be here at the same time. We took a few minutes to go to the People's Climate March this morning and I tell you it is fantastic. It is fantastic.

There are thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of people out on the street. We don't know how many thousands of people yet until counting is complete. It is unmistakably the largest climate march in history, and it's not just in New York City. There are climate marches and events going on in many cities around

the world. The organizers say on their website that they have been able to identify 166 countries in which there is a march or some event today.

Demonstrating popular, deep and broad support for addressing climate change, today we saw grandparents, we saw children, we saw scientists, we saw farmers, we saw health sector workers and doctors, we saw mayors and we saw citizens of many different cities.

It is a coming together of mankind to truly send out the message that we must address climate change, and tonight you will crown that message with your interfaith celebration at St. John's the Divine. A beautiful message sent loud and clear that we must address climate change because we have a moral imperative to do so.

Then tomorrow, we will have jaw dropping announcements from the private sector. I say jaw dropping because we're not used to the private sector, the finance sector, the insurance sector coming forward and saying my corporation is going to go 100% renewable energy by 2017-2020, my corporation is going to only be putting forward low-carbon products, my insurance company is going to be putting our assets into low-carbon and renewable energy.

We've been hearing some of this good news, trickled out over 12 to 18 months, but tomorrow it will be taken to a new level and it will be the tone of the day. The message of tomorrow is that we can address climate change because we have the capital, and we have the technology.

The private sector, the finance sector, the insurance sector, they are all realizing that this is indeed the greatest challenge that we have ever faced, but it is at the same time the greatest opportunity that humankind has ever had.

And if we focus on this opportunity, if we have clarity on what our destination is—the fact that we must be climate neutral, the fact that we must be at zero net emissions over the next fifty years—it will unleash human ingenuity that will not only solve an existential problem, but create a new developmental paradigm that we must urgently adopt.

So tomorrow, we will hear from many different voices and many different sectors that we can address climate change. Then we go to Tuesday and we will hear a vast array of announcements from all different sectors, individual companies or public and private partnerships, saying "this is what we are going to do."

We will hear across all the sectors, across energy, transportation, buildings, the health sector, agriculture and farming. We will hear interesting announcements.

We will be getting minute after minute after minute a vast array of announcements that not only must we address climate change, not only can we address climate change, but we will address climate change.

The corporate sector is going to be joined by governments on Tuesday upon the invitation of the Secretary-General and we have an unprecedented political mobilization, the likes of which we have never seen around climate.

We will have more than 120 heads of state plus 40 other countries represented at ministerial level, so we will have more than 160 countries standing up in the United Nations and publicly stating what they are going to do to address climate change.

They will be stating what they can do on a domestic level and they will then have to take that political statement into a legal environment, which is the formal negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Over the next six months, they will begin to populate the map of possibility, of solutions and of commitments. And they will in the end be able to join together and say, "Yes, we will address climate change".

Is that going to be enough? Despite my enthusiasm, my inspiration and the encouragement I take from these three days, what everyone is bringing to the table today, tomorrow and Tuesday, the sum total of those three days, is encouraging but it is still not enough.

Yes, everyone is doing their part, but from a global perspective we are not being globally responsible.

Yes, we are doing much on a domestic level in individual countries. Yes, companies are doing what they can at the corporate level. But we are here on this planet not only to look at our front and back yards and draw the boundary there.

We must look at the full planet and ensure that all life on the planet is protected. This is our challenge.

We can be encouraged by these three days and take heart that we are moving in the right direction. But, my dear friends, it is not going to be enough. So today I stand here before you with two requests.

How we are addressing climate change is going to get a huge push over the next three days. But Tuesday does not solve climate change. Tuesday night is a milestone in the process, but it is not the destination.

So my first request to you is to remember that this is a process that is going to take us over the next 15 months. Paris 2015 is when we need to have a legally binding agreement that is going to give certainty that the wellbeing of those most vulnerable around the world is no longer endangered.

I ask you to help me to maintain the arc of faith for that entire process. What does that mean? We are going to have many ups and downs. The next three days will see many ups, but that is not the full story. We will have many ups and downs in this process and we cannot afford to let the downs bring us down.

We collectively have the responsibility to inject confidence into this process. We have the responsibility to remind ourselves and everyone else around us that ultimately, we human beings know what is right, ultimately we will act on what is right and we will have the courage to act.

So over the next 15 months, my first request is to help me maintain the arc of faith and build confidence that we have everything that it takes. It's not just the funding, it's not just the technology, it's not just the political will; it is the courage to actually stand up and make history the way that we are called upon.

My second request to you is to help me maintain the arc of love. This means, to maintain in our consciousness, in our thinking, the solidarity with every human being. You know, it is easy to do that with those who are the most vulnerable, with those who are going to be the most impacted if we don't do our job right.

As human beings we tend to have greatness in our spirit and in our heart, to have that solidarity with those that are impacted. And we must. I have often said the measure of success of an agreement is whether we can ensure the wellbeing of those who are most impacted and most vulnerable.

That is not the end of the arc of love. Here is the most difficult part: The most difficult part is to embrace everyone, embrace every country, every sector and every industry because we cannot afford to demonize anyone.

We cannot afford to point a blaming finger. That would bring us down, take away and diminish the power that we have to move forward. Either we will have an answer to climate change for everyone, or we will have an answer to climate change for no one.

And so, my second request to you is this. Help me expand the arc of love that you put into this process, and include in that arc of love those that find it the hardest to get on board. Neither those countries, nor those industries nor those sectors knew when they started emitting carbon that they were creating such a mess.

They did not know then, but now they are called to action. We must open the spirit for them to come forward with contributions. If those countries, if those sectors and industries act as a handbrake to the process, we will not reach a solution in time. We have to bring them along with us.

That is a tall order because that is not what comes naturally to us. So help me maintain the arc of faith, help me maintain the arc of love that extends over all of us.

Do this over 15 months and beyond so we ensure that no child, no community, no sector, no industry, no country is left behind. We must ensure the move forward to a new economy that is exciting, safer for all, more equitable, more healthy, and that will be able to feed and clothe everyone joining us on this planet over the next 20 to 30 years.

Finally, my friends, my good friend Theresa Tenant is sitting here. Theresa has championed a fantastic interfaith initiative at a website called [ourvoices.net](http://ourvoices.net). We have been able to mobilize people to come out today around the world. We cannot do that every day, but we can start by signing up to [ourvoices.net](http://ourvoices.net).

We can maintain the arc of faith, the arc of love and ensure that that is going to be with us throughout this process, and then beyond. There is one arc to Paris, but there is an arc after that.

It is through faith and love that we will arrive first at a success in Paris and then beyond that, until we can stand up as responsible human beings and say: “Yes, we are the generation, the first generation, that truly knows what we are doing and we therefore stand up to our responsibility to solve that problem and not to turn it over to our children, for they are not responsible.”

Thank you.

-----