



**St Paul's Cathedral Floor Debate  
Climate Change: Building the Will for Action  
London, 7 May 2014**

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

Your Excellency James Jones, former Bishop of Liverpool,  
Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti,  
Dr Tony Juniper,  
Peter Pereira Gray,  
Distinguished audience and dear friends,

Let me thank the St Paul's Institute, the CCLA, the Church Investors Group and Shrinking the Footprint, the Church of England's national environment campaign, for inviting me today.

I am honoured and humbled to join you in St Paul's Cathedral.

Over the past 300 years, millions of citizens from this great city and around the world have gathered under these three magnificent domes to pray for the moral courage to defeat some of the major injustices of our society: slavery, apartheid and equal rights for women, to name a few.

Today we gather here to raise our gaze above the horizon of daily debates on climate change to set our moral compass on this, the most daunting challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Over the past 300 years these spires have witnessed many changes in the global social and economic fabric. And today we live in an unprecedented time in the history of mankind: the Anthropocene era, when humans have the power – intentionally or not – to transform our planet Earth for good or for ill.

At this moment in history, we have catapulted ourselves to a crossroads of two possible paths for mankind. We have developed the technology and amassed the financial capability to go either way. The direction we take cannot result from inertia but rather intentional choice. The time for that decision is urgently upon us.

This choice will be informed by our technology, our financial systems and our policy, but it must also be indisputably steered by the overarching moral compass innate to all of us.

The crossroads is defined by science.

Since 1988, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change scientists have aggregated peer-reviewed evidence of climate change. The latest 5<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report leaves no room for

doubt. Due to human activity, you and I are today breathing air that contains 400 ppm of CO<sub>2</sub> for the first time in human history.

This concentration has already caused an average temperature rise of 0.8 degrees Celsius. The twelve hottest years on record are in this century, and we are only 14 years into this century! As a consequence, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters is increasing along with their economic costs.

You all remember the recent floods here in the UK that cost up to £14 billion in business losses, but you may not be aware that only a few weeks ago the UK supermarket chain ASDA reported that 95% of its fresh produce is at risk from climate change.

You all remember Hurricane Sandy in New York and drought in the US Midwest that collectively cost more than 100 billion dollars, but you may not be aware that just yesterday the US government released a report showing how all areas of the US are already affected. In Australia intense heat waves cost billions year after year.

A few examples of the current cost of climate change to industrialized countries, costs that can only escalate if action is delayed.

The cost to developing countries is much higher and more painful in human terms:

- Superstorm Haiyan in the Philippines cost 14 billion dollars in economic loss and 4 million people are still displaced.
- The 2010 floods in Pakistan displaced 20 million and cost 50 billion dollars.
- The recently released documentary Years of Living Dangerously shows the relationship between drought and the war in Syria.
- In Tonga I walked through villages swamped by salt water intrusion despite the fact that they are more than 900 feet away from the coast.
- I was in Nepal just last week when the tragic death of 13 sherpas reminded us the Himalayan glaciers are melting, weakening the snow and ice cover and ultimately threatening the water supply of 20% of the global population.

Unchecked, the rise in greenhouse gas emissions could increase global average temperatures by 3, 4 or even 6 degrees C, wiping out all social and economic advances over the past 25 years, and making it almost impossible for developing countries to adapt to new levels of disaster, destruction and despair.

But no country is immune. Retired Brigadier General Chris King of the US characterized extreme weather events and mass migration linked to climate change as equivalent to the risk of a global “Hundred Years’ War with no exit strategy”.

The scientific data on climate change is overwhelming, the experience of the affected overpowering. The few who still deny the science and argue for inaction of course have the right to hide their face in the sand, but the sand is warming rapidly, and they will soon have to face their children.

Fortunately, there are many, many more citizens from all walks of life who have realized that we are at the fork in the road. They are helping to avoid the path of high risk and steer us toward the path of stability and prosperity.

Collectively we are building an intricate web of finance, technology and policy solutions. Let’s take a look at each of these components.

The global financial system has understandably for many years facilitated the exploration and use of fossil fuels. However, this is now beginning to change. One trillion dollars have been cumulatively invested worldwide in renewable energy, a step toward the annual trillion needed.

More encouraging is the recent proliferation of actors in the finance space seeking better returns in a low-carbon future:

- Corporate disclosure of carbon risk exposure is increasingly required by investors.
- Institutional investors that serve pensioners and other beneficiaries are increasingly aware of the high risk of devalued assets and moving capital away from potentially stranded assets.
- Just last week the FTSE announced a 'fossil free' investment index, and tomorrow Carbon Tracker launches its report on the growing cost of oil investments.
- A growing number of financial institutions and corporations are issuing green bonds to promote investment in clean tech.
- Here in London, the finance hub of the world, the British government is organizing a Global Climate Finance Lab in early June followed by a summit for all economic sectors.
- And driven by students, universities in the US, UK and Australia are part of a growing movement to divest from fossil fuels.

At St Paul's, I would like to recognize that faith groups and churches around the world are joining this momentum:

- In the US, 12 religious institutions have divested from fossil fuel assets.
- The congregation of Trinity-St Paul's United in Toronto, Canada voted unanimously to divest from fossil fuel companies.
- Multi-faith groups in Australia and North America sent a letter to Pope Francis stating that it is "immoral" to profit from fossil fuels.
- Right here in Britain, the UK Quakers have decided to divest part of their fossil fuel assets on ethical grounds.
- And the Church of England's General Synod recently reaffirmed its commitment to address dangerous climate change and has launched a review of its fossil fuel investments.

Many concentric circles are working toward finance options that shift much needed capital toward clean tech, renewable energy and efficiency, thereby moving us toward the new low-carbon economy.

I think that progress in technology, the second solution space, is one of the most exciting. Technology transformed the world several times in the last 100 years and must do so again.

Today we stand on the verge of the most incredible energy transformation human society has ever seen, and it has already started:

- The cost of solar and wind has dropped dramatically making renewables competitive with fossil fuels in many countries around the world.
- Electric car sales are growing fast and news about charging infrastructure proliferating worldwide is great.
- Transit and transport are getting innovative from electric buses that charge from the roadway to bike share integrated with trains using smartphones.
- And green building technology is moving towards sustainably produced materials and smart thermostats that reduce costs through efficiency.

This technology is just the foundation. Larger opportunity comes from building on this foundation because a low-carbon life is a better life. For those of you who work in the developing world, imagine a future where:

- Every developing country has all the clean power it needs to grow its economy and urgently improve wellbeing for all, helping close the gap to industrialized countries.
- The 2 billion people who currently have no electricity can enjoy the comfort of light and power via a solar panel on their home.
- No woman has to cook on an open fire, but rather can eliminate smoke from her home and children's lungs by cooking with a closed, efficient stove.

Further imagine a future where:

- Energy can be stored personally instead of delivered to you, untethering you from power outlets, cables and adapters, increasing freedom and mobility.
- Electric cars charge through inductive power transfer from the roadway so you never have to stop to get fuel.
- Intelligent buildings are capable of producing all the energy they need, learning how to best use that energy to maximize your comfort and reduce your costs.

These technologies are not fairy tales. We will see them sooner than we think. This is not just my optimism, for which I admit to be renowned. We already have the technology we need to keep us under 2 degree temperature rise; we need policy and targeted finance to help deploy it.

Policy is the third solution space and it is fitting we meet in this magnificent church because right now we are on a policy pilgrimage.

This pilgrimage is taking us to Paris, France where in late 2015 governments have agreed to adopt a new, universal climate agreement.

Every government has reiterated they want this agreement. And every government is on board and actively analyzing their domestic contribution with a commitment to have a draft agreement ready by this December for review in Lima, Peru.

I believe this is possible because of the foundations emerging at the national level:

- We now have 500 climate change laws in 60 countries covering 80% of global emissions.
- New carbon pricing systems are opening in notable markets like China and California, and all markets are looking to increase effectiveness through linking and other means.
- The US Supreme Court ruled that the government can regulate emissions from coal-fired power stations, and the EPA is on track to do so.
- According to a recent report, the EU is on track to generate 20% of its energy from renewables by 2020.
- In the UK, 100,000 people are now employed in renewables energies and growing.

The growth in clean energy is not just happening in developed countries:

- China and India are emerging clean energy markets and small countries and island states are generating power from geothermal, wind and solar.
- Cities are moving too from megacities like New York investing in resilient infrastructure to Cape Town in South Africa which has just won the title of Global Earth Hour Capital 2014 for its climate change action.

- Local communities are moving: take the Hackney and Brixton Community Energy Co-ops, which aim to create renewable energy and low-carbon projects as shining examples.

Much action is underway to underpin the likelihood of the global agreement. The question, however, is whether this agreement will be strong enough to bend the currently rising curve of emissions.

If we are to stay under a 2 degree temperature rise we must peak global emissions in the next 6 to 10 years, and reach carbon-neutrality in the second half of the century, leaving most of the fossil fuel reserves in the ground. A tall order from where we stand today.

We already know that the sum total of what countries can currently do does not sum up to the necessary level of emission reductions. That is why the 2015 agreement must both effectively harvest all possible current efforts; and what's more strategically important, chart the long term course toward carbon neutrality.

Here my friends, is where we all play an important role. Yes, leadership of Presidents and Prime Ministers, of Mayors and of captains of technology and finance is crucial to transform our economies and protect the well-being of people everywhere.

But leadership is also required from individuals and from faith-based organizations, North and South, East and West in order to build the courage, the confidence, the political space and the urgency for accelerated action.

We have the funding, we have the technology and the policy to address climate change and give us a safer, more prosperous future. The progress toward low-carbon will prevail because of the many compelling benefits.

My concern is timing. If we do not have a strong draft this year, if we are not able to attain a strong agreement in 2015, if we do not bend the emissions curve this decade... we face unprecedented systemic risks to the global population and economy.

So why are we lagging behind in the timely response? Why are we not using every option to peak global emissions and descend to carbon-neutrality in the second half of the century?

I can, and often do, make a strong argument about the complexity of the transformation, the myriad components of change that must come together in order to accelerate us down the path toward low carbon.

But today, in these hallowed halls, I would like to evoke one element that is missing. That one element, dear friends, is one we all harbour, it is the one most dear to every human being no matter which culture we were born in or which faith we practice.

Quite simply it is LOVE. Love for ourselves, our children and their children, love for our neighbours across the globe, love for our common home the Earth.

I am not talking about feeble love. I am referring to tough love, the love that is strong enough to make tough decisions because we know it is the right thing to do. Because we understand that ultimately we are all inter-related, interwoven with one another and with this planet we cannot replace.

I am certain we all harbour more love than we are expressing toward the future of our children and our planet. My challenge to you is not to walk out of St Paul's today saying: "that was interesting" or even "that was inspiring".

I invite you to walk out resolved to add one concrete action you will undertake to further express your love as an individual, because we cannot ask others to do what we have not done ourselves.

Let me give you a little menu of choices:

- Eliminate food waste and eat less meat or go vegetarian.
- Walk, bike or use public transport.
- Replace inefficient lighting and/or install a solar panel.
- Request carbon neutral goods and ask for labeling.
- Support renewable energy projects in your community.
- Tell your MP or your local council leaders you want a strong international agreement in Paris and more action at home.
- Ask your pension fund managers how they are addressing stranded assets.
- Ask your churches and religious institutions to align their financial assets with their spiritual assets.
- And if prayer or meditation is your contribution, join a new movement called *Ourvoices.net*, which aims to trigger reflection across faiths everywhere.

These are some of the many actions each of us can do to set our own moral compass and open economic and political space for governments and corporations to do more.

Dear friends, for the first time in history we human beings now have the power to alter the physical foundations of life on this planet. But as ever throughout history we also have the responsibility to set the ethical foundation of our global society. We have done this with slavery and with apartheid. It is time to do it with climate change.

We are the first generation to understand the consequences of a high carbon economy on the planet, on future prosperity and in particular on the most vulnerable around the world. Let us be the generation that stands up and takes the responsibility conveyed by that knowledge. Mahatma Gandhi wisely warned us that "The future depends on what we do in the present".

St Paul's is a beloved and lasting symbol of the determination and strength of the city of London and the UK.

Gathered here today let us renew our determination to tackle the daunting but solvable challenge of climate change.

Gathered here today let us decide to marshal our individual and collective strength to show through our actions and decisions that we love ourselves, our children, our grandchildren and our neighbours across the globe.

Or as I would have said way back in my days at a British boarding school, "Let's just blooming well get on with it!"

Thank you.

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