



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Global Media Forum  
Bonn, 15 May 2016**

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

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much and good afternoon. Quick question: how many of you actually knew that we were neighbors, that the UN was just right next to you? Oh good! Excellent! Quite wonderful for the Climate Convention, and we're not the only ones here. There are 18 UN organizations here in Bonn, and it is quite an honor to be here. Not just because it is Bonn, but because we are occupying historical buildings in Germany, and it's an honor to live and work here.

So thank you very much, Deutsche Welle. *Wo sind Sie? Deutsche Welle? Hallo. Wunderbar. Vielen Dank für die nette Einladung heute.* Thank you very much for the invitation to join you here at the end of your session.

I looked quickly through your agenda and I was quite impressed because I thought on the one hand there could have been the expectation, just today, that you are meant to solve the tension between privacy and security, the violence against women and children, the US presidential election, migration, and the many other topics you've been treated to today. You know there always is, from those of us who use your very valuable services, the thought that if the journalists could just get it right, then we would solve X, Y and Z, right?

Let me be the first one to say: I always want journalists to get things right, but it is clear that you do not have the power – and nobody does – to form magical solutions to these problems.

I would also argue that while you cannot solve these problems, you also cannot just inform the public about events that occur. If that is what you are doing, we are not using your

brain, we're not using your heart and we're not using your soul. So, from my perspective what I want to see in journalists is that you approach events, not just to inform but to interpret.

From my perspective, I think you have an incredible privilege, and you stand in a very, very important nexus, where you're able to use news events that occur, but you use them to connect dots, you use them to point out to the general public what are the ramifications of that news event. What does it mean? How did we get to that? And what are the implications for the future? So that connecting the dots and seeing the ramifications of news events is where you have extraordinary value added, and a very unique position in society.

So how does that apply to climate change? Because as Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, climate change is what I have for breakfast, lunch and dinner. So please forgive me if I use climate change to exemplify your enormous opportunity and responsibility to connect dots for people and to see ramifications.

So, question number two of the day: How many of you were at COP 21 in Paris? OK, so about six of you. Paris was a news event, and it was carried – certainly at the end – on the front pages of every newspaper and on every news show.

It was definitely a major event. We had – in addition to the six people here – 3,700 journalists there. This was actually almost two-thirds of the 6,000 who wanted to come. We had to say no to more than 2,000 journalists who wanted to come in. And remember that COP 21 occurred in Paris just two weeks after the attacks in Paris. So the fact that so many people wanted to come is news in itself.

We had 28,000 participants, coming from every single country in the world. We opened the conference with 155 heads of state and government. Never before in the history of woman and mankind have 155 heads of state and government gathered under one roof, on one day, for one topic. The United Nations brings them together for the General Assembly, but they always come over two to three to four days.

So 155 heads of state all in one day, under one roof, for one topic, and with one message, “We want an ambitious universal climate change agreement.” That was quite an opening. Not only that, but we opened with national climate change plans from almost 190 countries, which means all of those countries had already done their homework to figure out how they can, from their national perspective, contribute to the global effort.

So my point number one is, yes, Paris was a news event, and it was reported probably more than any other United Nations event. It was reported in every media, and was characterized as a huge surprise – unprecedented, historic, never before seen – all the superlatives that we Latin Americans love.

My point number two is that not only was it a news event, it was a historic news event. Why did it make history? Well, I would argue for at least four reasons.

First, how many of you in your family have had a unanimous decision about anything? You know how difficult it is – one person raised his hand! Congratulations! A very unique family!

I don't think that is the experience of most people, but in Paris we had 195 countries come together to take a unanimous decision. That is a historic event. Not only was it a unanimous decision, it was a unanimous decision to intentionally change the course of the global economy toward low-carbon and higher resilience—an amazing, historical event.

The second reason is that it was a global agreement that included everyone. The previous agreement that we had was only for some, industrialized countries. This is a legally binding framework that brings all countries together under the same rules and onto the same pathway.

The third reason we made history is because we started with these almost 190 national climate change plans and recognize them as the first step, but certainly not the last. In the Paris Agreement, this unanimous decision that all governments of the world have taken sets out the path forward. We know what the path is going to look like, not over two or three years, probably over two or three decades, because that is the lifespan of the Paris Agreement.

The final reason why this event is historic is because not only does it mark the starting point and delineate the path forward for all economies of the world, it is very clear about what the destination is going to be.

The Paris Agreement says “in the second half of the century” – although I like to change that to “by the second half of the century” – we have to be at a remarkable point in which we will only be emitting as many greenhouse gas emissions as the planet is capable of naturally absorbing. That balance, that ecological balance, is called climate neutrality, or net-zero emissions. And that is the destination we are all going to. It's not exactly where we are right now, because we are still increasing our greenhouse gas emissions. But to stay on the path determined in Paris, we will have to peak very soon and decrease our emissions rapidly.

The Paris Agreement, although it was a news event and although it was a historic event, cannot be only an event that marks a moment in history. It has to be an event that charts a different path for the future.

We have to immediately get on a path that is dramatically different than it would have been without the Paris Agreement. This, my friends, is where you come in. Now, you are probably wondering, “What do I have to do with that?” This is where you come in because over the next five, ten, fifteen years, we have to communicate in a compelling, coherent fashion, that we actually are on that path.

So are we? I don’t know how many of you speak German, but German has a fantastic word that I wish existed in many other languages, the word “Jein”. It means both yes and no.

But are we on the path? Jein is the answer!

On the yes side, we are definitely moving forward. Yes we do have 195 countries who have adopted the Agreement, 77 have signed it and 17 of them have already made it legally binding in their countries through ratification.

Yes we are on the path because that quick signing and ratification potentially means that the Paris Agreement will be legally binding in international law much quicker than previously thought. We thought it would come into force in 2020, but given the speed this is being internalized by all countries, it’s possible that it will come into force next year, 2017, or 2018 – two or three years before it was intended.

Are we on the path? Yes, the United States has already said they are going to make this legally binding in the United States. India and China will be making it legally binding. The European Union may ratify early next year, etc. So yes, we are on a path towards making this legally binding.

And in the real world – because you could argue this is just the world of the United Nations and what does that legal text have to do with reality? – in the real world we are also moving forward.

The latest fantastic news of Solar Impulse – the airplane making its way around the world without a single drop of fossil fuel, only with solar energy – just landed in New York. And Solar Impulse will soon complete its trip around the world when it lands in Dubai in a couple of weeks.

Morocco currently boasts the largest concentrated solar power plant in the world. Morocco. Not Germany but Morocco, a developing country now boasts the largest concentrated solar power plant in the world with 500 megawatts. And Dubai is currently preparing to build an even larger solar power plant.

We have more investment going into renewable energy year by year, for the third year running, than into fossil fuels. And we have 65 corporations and counting that have already committed to being powered 100 per cent by renewable energy, so 100 percent clean. These are not small corporations, they are corporations the likes of BMW, Ikea, Coca-Cola, Google, Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, Nike, Philips, Starbucks, Unilever, and on and on. So, a long list of multinational corporations fully apprised of the need for them to be a role model for what the rest of the economy needs to do.

So that's the yes part to my question are we moving forward? Now you remember the word Jein. It means both yes and no.

So are we moving forward at the pace that we should? Well, here comes the no. And the "no" is because we are still increasing greenhouse gas emissions globally. This spring, enjoy the weather but understand what is going on here. This is the warmest spring in the history of recorded temperatures, ever. The Great Barrier Reef is bleaching. We have already lost the first islands to sea level rise in the Solomon Islands. Thank heavens those islands were not inhabited! But that will not be the case soon. We will soon lose islands that are inhabited today and those people will have to migrate.

And let's talk about desertification, another Rio Convention with headquarters here in Bonn. Today we have 1.5 billion people around the world who are living on degraded land. Europe – just to outline the relationship here – last year had 1.4 million people come as migrants. I don't need to tell any of you who are in the news media, or those who live in Europe, how difficult that has been for Europe to deal with that influx of desperate people. That is 1.4 million: Compare that to the 75 million people who, last year, moved, got displaced, migrated internally in the Sahel because of water shortage, food insecurity, loss of livelihood.

My friends, by 2045, if we do not get our act together on the Sustainable Development Goals and on climate change—which are the only two tools that we have to prevent those major disasters – we are going to have 135 million people who will migrate because of desertification, because of loss of food security, because of loss of water, because of loss of arable land.

One half of those will be migrating out of Africa, out of southern and western Africa, on to North Africa and Europe.

And my final example: Please do not quote me saying that the situation that we have in Syria is caused by climate change. But I will say that the drought, the unusually deep drought that Syria had between 2006 and 2010, caused one million farmers in Syria to lose their arable land and move to cities. And then see what has happened since 2010. It is not a direct causality, but that very strong relationship is one that we are going to see over and over again, in particular, in the areas that are already vulnerable to degradation and very hot and dry weather.

So, my friends, what is my request to you? You know I'm famous for speaking in public and never letting you go out without asking you for something. My ask to you is that, as you move forward, you remember that your responsibility is not just to report on events that happen. For that we do not need your brains, for that we don't need your hearts and your souls. It's not just to report on news events, it's to connect the dots for the public. To look at a news event and say, "Hold on, how did we get to this? What is the chain?"

Go up the value chain and see how did we get to this point and what can we foresee is going to be the implication of this situation if we don't do something differently. What are the ramifications? And you will increasingly see that there is a very strong co-relationship between the lack of, or delay in, action on climate change. There is a very strong relationship between that and food insecurity, water insecurity, home insecurity. And then you move on to migration, conflict, wars – a very clear relationship.

So this is the opportunity we have as of this year, having adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in the United Nations last year, having adopted the Paris Agreement. We, the community of nations, we, the community of people around this world, have a huge opportunity to change that scenario around and say, "We are going to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We are going to achieve the targets in the Paris Agreement because what that means is we will be restoring lands. We will be increasing food security. We will be increasing water security. We will be increasing home security. We will be planting peace for tomorrow. And that is the scenario that all of us want."

Because, frankly, if there is one ultimate common interest that all humans share – no matter where you were born, no matter what your religion is, no matter what your gender, no matter what your age – we have one common ultimate interest and that is peace and stability.

There is no other more powerful common interest that we all share. And we have the amazing opportunity now to truly take these tools that have been approved, unanimously, by all the governments, with a lot of support from cities, from corporations, and actually make them happen, because it is the only way that we're going to be able to plant the ground of peace for tomorrow, rather than unintentionally walking into more conflict tomorrow.

From my perspective, because that's the world that I live in, I do think that conflict and the solutions to problems we have require a new form of collaborative diplomacy that was displayed in Paris.

That is the major miracle of Paris. And if we did it once, if we did it for one of the major challenges that the world has ever seen, climate change, then we can do it again. I count on you to help the world to get to that state.

Thank you.

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