



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Climate Leadership Conference
Chicago, 1 March 2017**

**Keynote speech by
Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, let me thank the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, the Climate Registry and all the event partners and sponsors for hosting this sixth annual conference and awards. For six years, this conference has been a platform to share information and experiences about climate action and recognize those who are leading the way.

The leadership on display has certainly contributed to the momentum that we have seen on climate change over the last six years. And it has contributed to success in the multilateral climate change process, so I must also thank you for that.

When we take a closer look at the relationship between private sector leadership and the international climate talks, the link is clear. Private sector action on climate change gives governments confidence to raise ambition and make bold commitments.

This is what we saw in the run up to the 2015 UN conference where the Paris Climate Change Agreement was adopted. Thousands of commitments by businesses and investors demonstrated to governments that sustainable, climate-safe social and economic growth has high levels of support from those driving the economy.

Now, as implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement gets underway – as we get on the post-Paris path – this group must turn climate commitments into concrete actions.

Coming out of the UN Climate Change Conference in Marrakech last November, I believe we are well positioned to do exactly that. Let me tell you why.

Marrakech showed that the momentum that carried us to Paris has not diminished.

Just before the COP 22 climate change conference opened, the Paris Agreement entered into force. We now have ratifications from 133 countries. This sends a strong signal that nations of the world remain united in their determination to fulfill the vision outlined in Paris.

And COP 22 also showcased bold announcements by the private sector and sub-national governments in support of the Paris Agreement continues to grow.

The number of companies making climate commitments through the We Mean Business coalition has more than doubled since Paris. And the companies taking action are now worth eight trillion US dollars in market capitalization.

The club of city and state-level governments committed to deep emission cuts has now grown to cover one in seven people on the planet, more than a billion people.

From science-based targets to renewable energy, from energy efficiency to sustainable water and food systems, the cities and companies that will spell success for the Paris Agreement are moving forward together.

And we are starting to see the results. Markets are hitting the tipping point where renewables win. Low-emission technologies like electric vehicles, power storage and aviation biofuels are growing in leaps and bounds. In Norway, one in every three new cars sold is electric. And last year there were more than 5,000 flights flown with biofuels. Places like China and California, with ambitious targets and carbon markets, have some of the strongest economies. This is all highly encouraging.

But friends, in recognizing how far we have come, we must also recognize how far we still need to go to truly transform the world to low-emission, sustainable development.

We know what successful transformation looks like. The long-term goal in the Paris Agreement seeks to achieve climate neutrality in the second half of the century. This is accomplished through actions that limit global average temperature rise to as close to 1.5 degrees Celsius as possible.

This complements the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, which are designed to ensure human needs are met, economic opportunity is open to all and the natural world we rely on is protected.

These are long-term goals, and achieving them will require leadership sustained over time – leadership by policymakers and leadership by the non-State actors whose actions define implementation.

This leadership comes from turning commitments into actions. And I see three ways the private sector can step into this leadership role.

First, look at the long-term. While acting urgently now, I also encourage you to build long-term policies and goals that encourage higher ambition over time. A diverse business plan that aligns with long-term global goals – the 2030 Agenda, climate neutrality mid-century – is in the private sector's best interest. It is also in your best interest to increase global stability, reduce extreme and unpredictable weather and grow wealth at all levels of society.

To accomplish these things, we need more and more businesses to move to clean energy, efficient operations and sustainable supply chains. Many times, these moves can cut costs, reduce risk and enhance your reputation.

Second, invest in clean and green innovation. In this new era of implementation, we must innovate the clean technologies that decouple emissions from growth at a rapid rate. For every industry, the path to innovation looks different, but getting on that path requires ideas and investment.

Development is moving towards cleaner, greener growth, and investment in innovation keeps you competitive in the transition to a new development model.

And third, share your action. When you have your long-term strategies in place and your roadmap for success outlined, when you are investing in an innovative, low-emission future, share what you are doing with the world.

Leaders must make their actions transparent and visible, so that others can be inspired by their actions and motivations and follow their lead.

The Climate Leadership Conference is a great place to start, but the message must also get out. People must hear that there is action happening and they must hear what they can do to be part of it. Policymakers must hear that action is happening.

For policymakers, it is especially important. Implementation of the Paris Agreement will feature policy that incentivizes success for the national climate action plan. Putting this policy in place is easier with confidence that the business community is ready for this transformation, that you welcome it. Your action gives them that confidence.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the first Climate Leadership Conference since the Paris Agreement entered into force. This is the crucial moment to turn bold climate change commitments into action.

In doing so, we put the world on a post-Paris path to a stable, secure future where peace and prosperity thrive. Together, we can realize the vision of sustainable development in which human needs are met, economic opportunity is open to all and the natural world we rely on is protected.

I look forward to discussing how we can accomplish that.

Thank you.
