



# BUNDESPRÄSIDENTIALAMT

The speech online:  
[www.bundespraesident.de](http://www.bundespraesident.de)

page 1 to 4

**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP23)  
in Bonn  
on 15 November 2017**

It is just a week since I came back from a trip to the South Pacific. One image is firmly lodged in my memory: during the flight home, I took a long look out of the aircraft window, gazing down on the turquoise archipelago, on hundreds of little islands. That picture left more of an impression than any sober statistics. It was a picture of beauty, home to countless families and the heart of millennia-old traditions and cultures. But it was also a picture of vulnerability, of filigree isles surrounded by the expanse of Oceania.

Sitting there in the plane high above the Pacific, I found myself thinking back to my years as Foreign Minister, to the many talks I had on the fringes of the UN General Assembly with representatives of the Small Island Developing States, talks which, I admit, really opened my eyes to those regions most endangered by climate change. And so I am especially delighted to see many familiar faces from the Small Island Developing States here today. As President of the Federal Republic of Germany, I am very pleased to extend to them and to each and every one of you a very warm welcome to the United Nations Climate Change Conference here in Bonn. Welcome!

During the trip I mentioned just a moment ago, in New Zealand, I was shown what I regarded as a quite extraordinary newspaper article. It came from the Rodney & Otamatea Times and was dated 14 August. Very concisely, it said that burning billions of tons of coal added billions of tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere every year. This tended to make the air a more effective blanket for the earth and to raise its temperature. The effect, the article said, would be considerable in a few centuries. You have probably already guessed that this report was not dated 14 August 2017, and not even 2007. No, this warning appeared in the paper on 14 August 1912.

ADDRESS	Bundespräsidialamt 11010 Berlin
TEL	+49 30 2000-2021
FAX	+49 30 1810200-2870
E-MAIL	presse@bpra.bund.de
WEBSITE	www.bundespraesident.de

I am sure you will agree with me that back then, 105 years ago, that was a remarkably shrewd prognosis. And at a time, indeed, when mankind's terrible contribution to climate change had not really got underway. The report only got one thing wrong: the effects of climate change are not going to be felt first "in a few centuries".

On the contrary: we can already see how dramatic the situation is and we are already feeling the effects.

We can feel the effects here in Europe when we drive in winter through empty Alpine valleys – valleys which just fifty years ago were packed full of glacial ice.

We feel them in other parts of the world, where the sea floods the land more and more often, while elsewhere, far away, whole towns are disappearing in the desert sand.

And we feel them when the Gulf Stream slows in the Atlantic and at the same time ever larger icebergs calve off from the shelf of the polar ice caps.

But we are most immediately moved by the effects of climate change when, every year, environmental changes and extreme weather events destroy the homes of thousands of people; when terrible droughts and famines force the population of whole swathes of land to leave their homes; and when this all causes crises and bloody conflicts, as is happening ever more frequently.

I certainly am in no doubt that the dramatic nature of these developments, this urgency, means it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to act quickly and resolutely.

I am therefore all the more pleased that there are so many people here who wish to play a constructive part in the negotiations. They include many well-known pioneers, but also some who until recently were rather reticent with regard to climate protection. The rapidly growing economies – including, for example, the Republic of China – are particularly important in this context, as they are now among the bigger emitters. Yes, the starting positions may be very different, and in many areas China does indeed have a long way to go. However, the most recent messages from Beijing regarding decoupling economic growth from environmental impact have been clear and unambiguous, and that is a good sign. My hope is that precisely this energy, this impetus, flow into the international negotiations now too.

And when, on the other hand, we experience individual setbacks, then what I would say is this: who knows? International politics – like the climate – is a cumbersome tanker, particularly when it has really got going. And perhaps some who are leaving the command bridge for the dinghy today might decide in a few years to dock on to our common ship again. Perhaps those in positions of responsibility in state capitols and in the municipalities, in companies and in civil society,

might even succeed in doing something amazing: sticking, despite opposition from their own capital and thanks merely to their own strong commitment, to the course embarked upon in Paris.

For it is clear that the historic climate accord of 2015 must remain irreversible, and we are all jointly called upon to take concrete action now. Paris will only truly have been a breakthrough if we follow the agreement with action.

I firmly believe that we have already developed a difficult but functioning model for our joint action – constructive, multilateral cooperation within the United Nations. Yes, there are repeated setbacks and disappointments. If we think back to the negotiations in Copenhagen, then many of us will also remember bitter moments of doubt. But now, when individual voices are very deliberately badmouthing multilateral cooperation, this is exactly the time for the rest of us to speak out clearly – for our rules-based international order, for its institutions and thus above all for the United Nations.

The major milestones of the past few years confirm us in this. Look at the Paris accord. Look at the Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda. And look at the many thousands of little successes, all the measures and projects in towns and cities which really got underway in the wake of the trailblazing decisions – from the photovoltaic system replacing a village's diesel generators and kerosene stoves to all-electric public transport in a smog-ridden city.

My feeling is that we must not ignore or dismiss such successes, despite the odd disappointment along the way. After all, far beyond the bounds of individual agreements and treaties, this multilateral order is indispensable for a peaceful and prosperous future. International cooperation is a bulwark against all visions of the world in which nothing but the law of the strong or arbitrary political action or unregulated global markets determine the fate of humanity.

This is particularly important for economically weaker countries and for the world's small island states because they have contributed least to climate change and yet even now are fearing for the very existence of their country.

They are the ones who are not yet sharing in the prosperity of the industrialised countries and so suffer particularly hard in the event of natural disasters, droughts and failed harvests.

And they are the ones whose voice is often ignored in the global concert, even though they are the ones in most urgent need of our solidarity.

We owe it to the smaller and weaker states above all to make this conference a success. Climate protection is also a question of global fairness. And for some people here today, the question is not one that will arise at some point in the future, but is pressing right

now. We can see this from the fate of Barbuda and Dominica, two island states which were rendered uninhabitable by this year's hurricanes. Island states like them have no time to lose. It is not enough to be talking about their situation; we must do something practical, we must help them to protect themselves. We need to take action.

It is good that the interests of these states are being clearly represented with the Republic of Fiji in the chair at this conference. Fiji itself is threatened by the effect of climate change in a very direct way. I would therefore like to express my particular gratitude and my respect to the Government of Fiji and also to thank you, Prime Minister Bainimarama, for your engagement. Thank you very much!

Allow me to conclude with a few remarks from the German viewpoint. With the negotiations here in Bonn, you are preparing what experts call a "transformative shift" in the global economy. Here in Germany we have been tackling this transformative shift for some years now. We call it the "Energiewende", the shift to green energy.

I am telling you this for two reasons.

On the one hand, we are seeing more and more instances in Germany where entrepreneurship and smart technology are helping us to combine economy and ecology in a positive way, rather than to see them as irreconcilables.

On the other, I get the impression that despite much controversy in our social debate there is increasingly a broad consensus in favour of sustainable business, the preservation of creation and effective environment and climate policy.

Happily, we are not alone in this. No, many other states are already taking the same approach and others are coming on board.

I hope that by mentioning this example from the German and European context I have at least been able to give you a bit of courage, both for the negotiations here in Bonn and for the challenges facing you at home.

We all bear responsibility for the future of our planet, especially you during the final round of negotiations. In our common interest I wish you and the conference every possible success.

Thank you.