

Albanian prime minister Edi Rama delivers speech at COP29.

I have decided to set aside my well-prepared speech, because, in the meantime since yesterday, I was watching the silent TV screens in the Leaders' Lounge, where the organizers have thoughtfully added the space with green plants above the comfortable couches. People there eat, drink, meet, and take photos together, while images of voiceless speeches from leaders play on and on and on in the background.

To me, this seems exactly like what happens in the real world every day: life goes on with its old habits and our speeches, full of good intentions about fighting climate change, change nothing. Worse, as the UN Secretary-General emphasized yesterday, carbon emissions actually increased, last year from the previous COP to this COP, instead of decreasing, and Ambitious goals are, once again, postponed in a world that grows increasingly confused and deeply divided.

I come here from a small country in the heart of Europe—Albania—where we are proud to have 100% renewable energy production, but what does this mean for the future of the planet if the biggest polluters continue business as usual? Far be it from me to lecture anyone. After all, we are more accustomed to being lectured than to lecturing others. But my point is this: what on Earth are we doing here in these gatherings over and over and over..., if there is no common political will on the horizon, to move beyond words and unite for meaningful action? And adding insult to injury, some major and minor players even boycotted this annual global event. What does this mean?

For a long time, we Albanians lived under the curse of a brutal history that left us in complete isolation—no individual rights, no freedom of movement, no hope for the future. Recently, we have been blessed by the companionship of the European Union, and for the first time in our history, freedom, individual rights, hopes, and dreams have become part of our lives. But what is happening in Europe and around the world today doesn't leave much room for optimism. Though optimism is the only way of survival, we Albanians know.

While my voiceless image plays on the silent TV screens in the beautiful lounge next to this room, I want to conclude by evoking here a story from Anas **ibn** Mālik—"May Allah be pleased with him"! (and I'm catholic by the way) —who narrated that Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him), said: -"If the Day of Judgment comes while one of you has a sapling in his hand, if he's able to plant it before it comes, Let him plant it".

Thank you very much.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch/XMQpwG1ecL8>