

Mr/s. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let there be no doubt: the fight against climate change is a fight for survival.

Our physical survival.

But also a fight to keep the social cohesion.

Some people feel the consequences of climate change much harder than others.

And some people will feel the consequences of climate policy much harder than others.

I am thinking of our farmers, of people who rent old apartments, but also about small family businesses.

So it is more important than ever, to get our fight --- right.

The last thing we need in the fight against climate change is more polarization.

On one extreme, we see the complete denial of man-made global warming.

These people are sticking their heads in the sand.

While on the other extreme, we see movements that are trashing buildings and works of art.

Don't get me wrong. I hear and understand the anxiety of people who are afraid we do not do enough. I can reassure them: we will do more. More climate investments, meaning more international financing.

But I also hear the ones who are at their wits end; the ones who fear the personal burden of climate policy.

What we need today are solutions that work for everyone.

Yes, we need to be more ambitious but we also need to take care of people. Leaving no one behind.

And just like we don't need more polarization, we also should avoid resignation.

Because people should know that today's climate technologies are more promising than ever.

Belgium comes to this COP with a sizeable private sector delegation, because they bring big solutions to the table.

From off-shore wind technology, to green hydrogen, to projects that will not only protect us from rising sea levels but can even turn the driest desert into an oasis again.

And the really great news is: so is every other country doing:

Bringing their own solutions, their own strengths to the table. That is how we reinforce each other; That is how we will stop climate change. Together, North and South. This is what this summit should be about. About connecting expertise; with financing and ambition.

And we are making quantum leaps in our climate policies as well.

Look at last year alone. From RepowerEU in Europe to the Inflation Reduction Act in America: policy is catching up, policy is speeding up.

So my message here today is, especially to young people: be part of the solution with us.

Go study science and above all: build coalitions, build partnerships. Reach out to people with different ideas, because that is where the real change happens.

And young people know this. The media loves to shine a light on those who destroy art or shout slogans like “stop oil”. But yesterday, I met a large delegation of young Belgian activists who know they have to look beyond the slogans.

Young people who understand that only meaningful action can replace that oil.

Young people who know that government cannot do this on its own. That progress is not imposed top down, but co-created between partners. Between governments and the private sector. Between companies and civil society.

That is the only way forward: not by throwing paint at each other, but by reaching out to each other.

This must be our lesson in the fight against climate change: we need to keep everyone on board. We need to be ambitious and at the same time caring.

The solutions are out there, but that does not mean these solutions are simple.

In the words of the late Queen Elizabeth: *“it has always been easy to destroy. To build and to cherish is much more difficult.”*

The task ahead is not an easy one, but I am convinced that humanity can succeed once more.

I thank you.