

COP26 – Prime Minister's address to World Leaders Summit Opening Ceremony

The UN conference on climate change welcomed many world leaders to the first sessions on Monday.

This is what the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson said to them on Monday 1 November 2021 in Glasgow:

Good afternoon everybody,

welcome to COP, welcome to Glasgow and to Scotland whose most globally famous fictional son is almost certainly a man called James Bond

who generally comes to the climax of his highly lucrative films strapped to a doomsday device

desperately trying to work out which coloured wire to pull to turn it off

while a red digital clock ticks down remorselessly to a detonation that will end human life as we know it

and we are in roughly the same position, my fellow global leaders, as James Bond today

except that the tragedy is that this is not a movie, and the doomsday device is real

and the clock is ticking to the furious rhythm of hundreds of billions of pistons and turbines and furnaces and engines

with which we are pumping carbon into the air faster and faster- record outputs

and quilting the earth in an invisible and suffocating blanket of CO₂

raising the temperature of the planet with a speed and an abruptness that is entirely manmade

and we know what the scientists tell us and we have learned not to ignore them

2 degrees more and we jeopardise the food supply for hundreds of millions of people

as crops wither, locusts swarm

3 degrees and you can add more wildfires and cyclones – twice as many of them, five times as many droughts and 36 times as many heatwaves

4 degrees and we say goodbye to whole cities – Miami, Alexandria, Shanghai – all lost beneath the waves

and the longer we fail to act

the worse it gets and the higher the price when we are eventually forced by catastrophe to act

because humanity has long since run down the clock on climate change.

It's one minute to midnight on that doomsday clock and we need to act now.

If we don't get serious about climate change today, it will be too late for our children to do so tomorrow.

I was there with many of you in Copenhagen 11 years ago when we acknowledged we had a problem

I was there in Paris six years ago when we agreed to net zero and to try to restrain the rise in the temperature of the planet to 1.5c

and all those promises will be nothing but blah blah blah – to coin a phrase

and the anger and impatience of the world will be uncontrollable

unless we make this COP 26 in Glasgow the moment when we get real about climate change

and we can

we can get real on coal, cars, cash and trees

We have the technology to deactivate that ticking doomsday device

not all at once

I am afraid it is too late for that

But one by one and with ever greater speed and efficiency we can begin to close down those billions of hydrocarbon combustion chambers that you find currently in every corner of the planet

we can phase out the use of cars with hydrocarbon internal combustion engines – by 2035 – we can do that and we in the UK are ending new sales by 2030

We can end the use of coal fired power stations – we can do it by 2040 in the developing world and 2030 in the richer nations

we can plant hundreds of millions of trees – a trillion –it's not technologically difficult

and halt and reverse deforestation by 2030

not just because it is a spiritually uplifting and beautiful thing to do

but because that is the way to restore the balance of nature and to fix carbon in the air

and as we look at the green industrial revolution that is now needed – around the world

we in the developed world must recognise the special responsibility to help everybody else to do it

because it was here in Glasgow 250 years ago that James Watt came up with a machine that was powered by steam that was produced by burning coal

and yes my friends – we have brought you to the very place where the doomsday device began to tick

and even though for 200 years the industrialised countries were in complete ignorance of the problem that they were creating

we now have a duty now to find those funds –

\$100bn a year that was promised in Paris by 2020 but which we won't deliver until 2023 –

to help the rest of the world to move to green technology.

But we cannot and will not succeed by government spending alone

We in this room could deploy hundreds of billions, no question

But the market has hundreds of trillions and the task now is to work together to help our friends to decarbonise

using our funds – the funds we have in development assistance

and working with the multilateral development banks so that in

the key countries that need to make progress

we can jointly identify the projects that we can help to de-risk so that the private sector can come in

in just the same way that it was the private sector that enabled the UK to end our dependence on coal

become the Saudi Arabia of wind

we have the technology

we can find the finance and we must

and the question for all of us today is whether we have the will

My fellow leaders – I do not wish to put too fine a point on it

but when we all talk about what we are going to do in 2050 or 2060

I don't think it will escape the notice of the crowds of young people outside

and the billions who are watching around the world

half of the population of the world under 30

that the average age of this conclave of cardinals is 60

and I fully intend to be alive in 2060

I will be a mere 94 years old

even if I'm not still in Downing Street – you never know

but the people who will judge us are children not yet born

and their children

and we are now coming centre stage before a vast and

uncountable audience of posterity

and we must not fluff our lines or miss our cue

because if we fail they will not forgive us

They will know that Glasgow was the historic turning point when history failed to turn

They will judge us with bitterness and with a resentment that eclipses any of the climate activists of today, and they will be right.

COP26 will not, cannot, be the end of the story on climate change.

Even if this conference ends with binding global commitments for game-changing real world action, two weeks from now smokestacks will still belch in industrial heartlands,

cows will still belch in their pastures –

even if some brilliant Kiwi scientists are teaching them to be more polite –

cars powered by petrol and diesel will still choke congested roads in the world's great cities

and no one conference could ever change that.

If summits alone solved climate change then we would not have needed 25 previous COP summits to get to where we are today.

But while COP26 will not be the end of climate change it can and it must mark the beginning of the end.

In the years since Paris the world has slowly and with great effort and pain, built a lifeboat for humanity.

Now is the time to give it a mighty shove into the water, like some great liner rolling down the slipways of the Clyde,

take a sextant sighting on 1.5c, and set off on a journey to a cleaner, greener future.

So let us therefore in the next days devote ourselves to this extraordinary task

so that we not only continue with a programme, a green industrial revolution, that is already

creating millions of high wage high skill jobs in power and technology

taking our economies forward

let us do enough to save our planet and our way of life

and as we work let us think about those billions of beady eyes that are watching us around the world

increasingly edgy and disenchanted

and let us think of the billions more of the unborn whose anger will be all the greater if we fail

We cannot let them down

We have the ideas

we have the technology

we have the bankers, we have the corporations and the NGOs

we have the interpreters and the meeting rooms and if all else fails we have the unbeatable hospitality and refreshment of Glasgow

we may not feel much like James Bond

not all of us necessarily look like James Bond

but we have the opportunity

the duty

to make this summit the moment when humanity finally began –
and I stress began – to defuse that bomb

and make this the moment when we began irrefutably to turn the
tide and to begin the fightback against climate change

yes it's going to be hard

but yes we can do it

and so let's get to work with all the creativity and
imagination and goodwill that we possess

Thank you very much and good luck to all of us. Thank you.

