



International Forum on Zero Carbon Cities

Opening remarks by Ms Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC

17 March 2021

It's a pleasure to be here and I thank Minister Koizumi for organizing this forum and bringing together this diverse group of State and non-State participants from around the world.

A few years ago, UN Climate Change developed a concept we call “inclusive multilateralism” — a recognition that governments alone cannot address climate change.

Success is only possible when State and non-State actors — including civil society and especially the most vulnerable amongst us — are an active part of finding solutions to climate change.

This meeting exemplifies the spirit of inclusive multilateralism.

I recognize the Government of Japan for its recent climate change progress, including Prime Minister Suga's announcement that Japan will work towards becoming a carbon-neutral society by 2050.

The public and private sectors are responding. More than 200 local and regional governments in Japan committing to net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050.

It shows how leadership and collaboration can accelerate measures to achieve decarbonisation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Reaching net-zero, especially in cities, is a vital part of achieving our long-term climate goals under the Paris Agreement.

Success in 2050, however, is impossible without first completing the work of today — of 2021.

That work includes finally moving the Paris Agreement from adoption to implementation. It has been on the table for five long years.

Yet we cannot get to *implementation* unless we achieve success at COP26 this coming November.

Right now, nations are woefully behind. To be clear, they were behind before the pandemic began.

While we've seen recent signs of momentum, nations simply haven't done enough complete work under the Paris Agreement. Nor have they sufficiently raised climate ambition under it.

An example is the recent NDC Synthesis Report, measuring the combined impact of national climate action plans under the Paris Agreement.

It shows that current levels of climate ambition are *very* far from putting nations on a pathway that will meet the goals of the Paris Agreement to limit global temperatures to 1.5C by the end of the century.

At the current rate, nations will achieve only less than a 1% reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to 2010 levels. The IPCC calls for that reduction to be 45% lower.

That must change in 2021 and major emitters must lead. Faced with a global pandemic and an existential climate change emergency, delay is inexcusable.

COP26, held only a few months from now, must be a success. It's a credibility test for our fight against the climate emergency.

In my view, there are four keys to success at COP26.

First, promises made must be promises kept.

That means pledges Parties made before 2020 must be honoured and completed. That means strong NDCs submitted this year and especially by major emitters.

It's also true of the pledge by developed nations to mobilize \$100 billion annually to developing nations by 2020.

Second, it's time to wrap up outstanding negotiations and implement the Paris Agreement.

The clock has run out. Implementation is needed at *all* levels, especially within cities.

More people are living in cities than at any point in history. They want, and deserve to live in areas that are clean, green and healthy.

The heavy lifting will be done by people such as urban planners, architects material suppliers and many others. But they must be supported by national and local policy and investment.

We need those policies now. If we want to reach net-zero emissions by mid-century, we're talking about a time period of about thirty years. That's the general life-span of buildings being constructed now.

Policies are needed for more than buildings. City infrastructure needs to actively encourage people to adopt sustainable habits such as walking to work, recycling household waste, adopting a more circular economy and more.

These are only a few quick examples of how implementing the Paris Agreement — and with clear plans spelled out in ambitious NDCs — can accelerate the transformations throughout society we urgently need, and especially in our cities.

The third key for success at COP26 is to raise ambition in mitigation, adaptation and finance.

The best time to raise climate ambition was yesterday. The next best time is today. Never has global expectation and political commitment been so far apart.

It's time to close that gap. And when we're talking about raising ambition, we're not just talking about mitigation, but also adaptation and resilience and finance.

Fourth, we must leave no voice or solution behind.

We must re-engage with observers and Non-Party Stakeholders in a *unity of purpose*. Our brand of inclusive multilateralism is the only way forward. *Everyone* has a role to play and everyone must be involved.

We see that today.

Dear Friends,

Let us seize this moment.

Let us reach not just across borders to do it, but across jurisdictions and generations, cultures and races.

Let us build strong, resilient and sustainable cities.

Let us achieve zero emissions in 2050 and make COP26 a success this November.

Let us work to complete outstanding negotiations under the Paris Agreement, move it from adoption to implementation, boost our climate ambition and ensure all voices are heard during this crucial year.

And let us build forward, build a better future, a green future, a clean future, and a future that is healthy, safe, resilient, sustainable and prosperous for *all* people.

Thank you.

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