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Speech to the French Senate Standing Committee on Sustainable Development by Inger Andersen

Photo by senat/Lionel Queennec

Monsieur le Président,

Mesdames et Messieurs les Sénateurs,

En premier lieu, permettez-moi de vous remercier, Monsieur le Président, pour l'invitation de m'exprimer sur un sujet d'actualité, d'envergure et d'urgence, le changement climatique. Un sujet qui, vous l'avez souligné dans vos propos liminaires, est au cœur des préoccupations de la commission de l'aménagement du territoire et du développement durable.

C'est également un axe majeur du Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement (PNUE). Nous le faisons de plusieurs manières et, notamment, en synthé-ti-sant et présentant l'état de la science pour encourager la transition vers un avenir durable à faible émission de carbone.

Un exemple est notre « Rapport sur l'écart entre les besoins et les perspectives en matière de réduction des émissions 2019 » publié à l'occasion de la Conférence des Nations Unies sur les changements climatiques 2019 (COP25).

Permettez-moi de poursuivre en anglais.

The 2019 UNEP Emissions Gap report put the scale of the challenge we face in stark and immediate terms. To get on track for limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C, greenhouse gas emissions should fall 7.6 per cent every year between 2020 and 2030.

Faced with this big number, hitting 1.5°C may seem impossible. After all, no nation has ever come close to achieving the level of cuts we need. Let me say this loud and clear: it isn't impossible. But we have to pull out all of the stops.

We all know that climate change is already upon us. President Macron just a few weeks ago, called for the "fight of the century" to combat climate change and preserve the environment.

And we all know that it has been an extraordinary and catastrophic start to 2020 with devastating bushfires in Australia, the warmest January on record since we

began keeping records 141 years ago, and floods in the Horn of Africa.

The IPCC tells us that going beyond 1.5°C would mean increased frequency and intensity of such climate events. Higher sea levels. The death of almost all coral reefs. Rapid species decline. And so much more.

As we struggle to respond to the relentless pace of these extreme events, it is clear that now, at this moment in time, we simply have no choice but to take action and pull back from planetary instability and reverse the loss of nature.

We did not start when we should have

We brought ourselves to this point. In 2010, UNEP's first Emissions Gap report called on us to begin the complex task of reducing emissions. If we had heeded the science then, we would now be looking at cuts of just over three per cent per year, a more manageable task. Perhaps we may even have avoided, or minimized, some of the recent climate change-linked events.

We did not start when we should have. We can't change that fact. But we can learn from this mistake. We know that further delay brings the need for larger, more expensive cuts and more climate havoc. We need to act now.

We know how to deliver emissions reductions

The good news is we know HOW to deliver the cuts. We need to step up national action. Dramatically stronger nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) are needed in 2020. This must represent a collective five-fold increase in ambition. This ambition must be immediately followed up with policies, strategies and action to kickstart the major transformations in economies and societies we need. We cannot wait until the end of 2020. This would mean another year lost, when we have so few remaining.

We know the solutions. We need to decarbonize by switching to renewable energy and boosting energy efficiency. We need to transition to circular economies. We need to build cities where net-zero energy buildings and houses are the norm, not the exception. We need to back nature to heal our climate. We need every government, city, region, business, banker and individual fully engaged in climate action.

And we need to help the most vulnerable countries and regions adapt to climate-related stresses. In the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Middle East, climate change is intensifying pressures on land, water and other resources. One of the clearest examples is perhaps provided by the Sahel where temperatures may,

according to climate projections (based on the CMIP-RCP8.5 model), rise between 1.4 degrees Celsius to 4.2 degrees by the end of the century.

In a region where close to 80 percent of people rely on natural resources for livelihoods there has been a recent escalation of violence, particularly, herder-farmer conflicts which are linked to climate change. We cannot ignore these impacts, and addressing them is at the heart of our efforts to protect people, planet, prosperity and peace around the world.

Many in this room I know and around the world were disappointed by the outcomes of the UN Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP) – 25 in Madrid. We needed a massive step up in ambition on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This did not happen. Nor did the COP deliver on finalizing the Paris Rule Book pertaining to Article 6, which means we have not deployed market forces to address climate change. No doubt this is a complex terrain with many divergent views, but the reality is that we simply cannot afford to lose more time. Without transparent, credible and well-designed carbon markets, we CANNOT stabilize global temperature rise and address climate change. This is the key ask for the Glasgow COP-26, and one we can no longer run from.

So far, over 70 countries have indicated that they will come stronger and harder at the climate challenge. This is welcome, and I hope that these pledges go some to cutting the shortfall, although we need bigger emitters to also come forward with faster and deeper cuts. The Emissions Gap Report tells us that G20 nations are responsible for 78 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, it is these nations that can have the biggest impact.

Nature is the foundation of economy, prosperity and planet

When we think of impact, we need to think of nature. For far too long we have treated nature as a limitless pool from which we draw just about everything that makes life on this planet possible, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the mechanisms that regulate temperature, the food that we eat, and the clothes we wear. Nature underpins 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and more than half of the world's GDP depends on it. Nature is indeed the foundation of our economy, our prosperity and the planet.

It is a foundation we have chipped away at relentlessly, altering virtually every part of our land and oceans. Nearly one million species face the threat of extinction. And scientists tell us that ocean temperatures are now

rising at the equivalent of five Hiroshima bombs a second.

In 2020, for the first time, the top five risks in the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report were environmental, with climate change and nature loss right up there as issues that keep CEOs awake at night and they are absolutely right to be worried.

So in the Super Year 2020 – we have a real opportunity to generate a groundswell of action on nature and seize a sustainable future for all. This year matters greatly because we have a number of processes and moments that will allow us to design a blueprint for economies and societies that factor nature into everything we plan and build, from homes, to cities, to food systems.

If we take full advantage of them, we can unlock nature's potential to create an equitable and sustainable future for humanity. One such "moment" will be convened by France which will host the International Union for Conservation of Nature's World Conservation Congress in Marseille. The Oceans conference in June will be an opportunity to push for ocean action and at the UN Nature Summit later this year will aim to build the wind in our sails, as we move closer to Kunming in China, where the world will agree on an ambitious, inclusive and meaningful post-2020 global biodiversity framework. And

at Glasgow COP-26, countries have a superb opportunity to integrate nature-based solutions in their strengthened NDCs.

France can help accelerate climate action

So far, we have spoken about the global level. I would now like to turn briefly to what France can do to help accelerate climate action.

Your nation has been at the forefront of environmental action in many ways. You were the driving force behind the Paris Agreement, which bears the name of your capital. You have also made many concrete pledges:

- You adopted legislation on net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, i.e. to ensure emissions resulting from human activity are balanced out by removing emissions from the atmosphere.
- You have committed to phasing out coal by 2022, part of which will include the closing of the Havre coal plant in April next year.
- You have committed to stopping new fossil fuel exploration and production.
- During your presidency of the G7 last year, you pushed for the Biarritz Pledge for Fast Action on Efficient Cooling, which will improve the energy efficiency of the cooling industry in parallel with the phase-down of HFCs under the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol.
- And you are to be lauded for the leadership of the Agence Française de Développement which has dedicated 30 per cent of climate finance by 2025 to nature-based solutions for climate action

But we ask more of you, as we must ask more of every nation. In particular, as one of the powerhouses of the European Union, France should take the lead in delivering on the transformative agenda of the European Green Deal, both at home and abroad. The Green Deal

has real potential to find solutions to address the climate crisis from many angles. This includes reform of agriculture, trade policies to support ecological transition, reform of financial systems to invest in sustainable growth globally, investments in nature, forests, biodiversity, and a blue economy. All of these will lead to positive transformation at home and abroad.

There are many specific steps you can take to accelerate this transformation:

- You can translate net-zero commitments at a sectoral level into real progress. You can do this through concrete action plans on issues such as accelerating the promised end of fossil fuel production, reducing the climate impact of buildings, and avoiding exporting carbon emissions to developing countries.
- You can bring in economic incentives for low-carbon transport, a sector the Haut Conseil pour le Climat pinpointed last year as holding major room for improvement.
- You have passed a bill on waste and the circular economy, but you can push the Green Deal's Farm to Fork strategy to further contribute to achieving a circular economy and stimulating sustainable food consumption.
- As a leader in European agriculture, you can embrace the transformative agricultural agenda in line with the Green Deal's focus on boosting the role of ecosystems and biodiversity in regulating the climate and cushioning communities against natural disasters. I urge you to use your next discussions on the Common Agricultural Policy as an opportunity to drive the end of "brown" subsidies and move resources towards nature-positive agriculture that

ensures incomes for farmers and contributes healthy food and ecosystems.

- You can use green spaces in your cities and buildings to keep them cool naturally, avoiding the need for power-hungry space cooling while helping to bring back nature.
- You can ensure political mobilization of French sustainable finance and investment, for example through the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures, the One Planet Network and the UNEP Finance Initiative.

All of these things, and more, can and should be done.

In closing, let me simply say that I am confident that the world, with France among the frontrunners, is ready to solve the climate crisis.

And why do I think so?

Because almost every day we hear of ambitious new efforts from national governments, cities, businesses and investors.

Because climate change is becoming a bigger issue at the ballot box.

Because our children are out on the street demanding we do better.

And because never before has there been so much scrutiny on what we, as an international community, are doing on climate.

Yes, we are under pressure. But it is when people are under pressure that they are often at their best and most creative.

When we have to act, we do. This is one of those moments. Let us show the best of ourselves, and get the job done.

Thank you.

Inger Andersen (<https://www.unenvironment.org/people/inger-andersen>)

Executive Director, UN Environment Programme

TOPICS

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Further Resources

2019 Emissions Gap Report (</resources/emissions-gap-report-2019>)

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Key Documents

- Annual Report 2018
- Emissions Gap Report
- Frontiers
- Global Environment Outlook (GEO) 6
- Invest in a Healthy Planet
- Mid-term Strategy
- Programme of Work

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