

AS DELIVERED

Remarks of SPEC John Kerry  
“Winning the Decisive Decade”  
London School of Economics, London, UK  
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To **Director Minouche Shafik** – thank you so much for that generous introduction.

**Nick – Sir Nick** —it’s wonderful to be here. Thank you for your leadership of the Grantham Research Institute and on climate.

It is always special to come back to LSE. I’m proud to tell you my daughter **Vanessa**, now CEO of a global health initiative, earned her Master’s Degree here (which means it’s also the place she played hooky at The George.)

For 126 years, LSE students have lived up to your motto and more – you haven’t just looked into the causes of things, you’ve sought solutions.

And let’s be clear: the time for debating the causes of climate change is long over. The time for action is long overdue. And the stakes could not be higher.

Nick Stern knows this. He literally wrote the book on the real costs of climate change. And as he summed it up this week in an OpEd, on this challenge, “*economists have grossly undervalued the lives of young people.*” Your lives. Your livelihoods. Your ability to count on the barest of bare minimums, the right to live on a habitable planet.

Think about that.

That’s why I came here today, four days before COP 26 in Glasgow, to provide some context for our meeting, and for where we stand at this decisive moment in this decisive decade.

I had the privilege of being in Rio in 1992 for the first Earth Summit, which created the COP process itself. The journey from Rio to Kyoto to Paris and now Glasgow has taught me many things, but above all that success in the climate fight is defined not by words alone, but by actions they inspire.

Glasgow has already summoned more climate ambition than the world has ever seen. In that regard, Glasgow has already achieved success.

Is all the world fully aligned with what science says we must do to avoid the worst of the climate crisis?

In two words – not yet.

But more countries than ever before are stepping up.

In the course of public life you’re called on to make a lot of choices. Some are hard, where the costs and benefits are closely balanced. This, my friends, is not a hard choice. Addressing the climate crisis is the only choice. In every way, the cost of inaction is far greater than the cost of action.

A little history is important here.

Six years ago in Paris, we came together – 195 nations strong – to commit to hold the Earth’s temperature rise to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts to keep that limit at 1.5 degrees. At the time of Paris, the world was already on track for up to 4 degrees of warming.

Yes, the Paris Agreement pulled us back from the brink and gave the world a second chance to save ourselves. But Paris always contemplated reconvening in order to raise ambition as circumstances warranted.

Each nation wrote its contribution to emissions reductions. Those nationally determined contributions, or NDCs, were a huge improvement. They reflected initial commitments, and Paris set forth mechanisms to regularly review progress.

While they did not yet add up to the Paris temperature goal, they did send an important signal to the marketplace that 195 nations were going to move in the same direction, and for the first time in modern history, more investment went to renewable energy than fossil fuels. In 2016, we were off and running.

Then, a year later, the next President of the United States just plain pulled out of the agreement. The UK, the EU, and other countries filled the breach – as did Mayors and Governors in my country – and the world owes them a debt of gratitude. But now, we must significantly accelerate our efforts.

That is a judgment of the best science and mathematics. According to the most recent report from the scientists at the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, devastating consequences await us if global temperature rises above 1.5 degrees. And we are already at 1.2.

The United States is fully invested in accelerating our efforts while there is still time. President Biden has initiated an all-of-government effort to meet this challenge.

The President knows – and you know – we are no longer talking about impacts in the future. We no longer need scientists to tell us what will happen, because we see it happening – for ourselves, now.

Here in the UK, in July the Met Office issued its first ever “extreme heat warning” as a deadly heatwave took hold. In Germany, unprecedented floods killed almost 200 and swept away homes and bridges. In my country, a supercharged storm drowned people in their basements in New York City months after more than 150 froze to death in Texas. The rainforests of the Amazon are burning and being deforested at the rate of 10,000 acres a day. Ten million people a year already die from air pollution. Another five million die because of heat.

The planet is already at its hottest and least stable point in 125,000 years – and people are dying because of it. That's with just 1.2 degrees of warming.

Some of these impacts are already irreversible. Without dramatic action, they become unlivable.

Remember that Mother Nature only has one measure: how much emissions are in our atmosphere. Every ounce matters. Every tenth of a degree of temperature matters.

Half of our oxygen comes from our oceans. With a 1.5-degree temperature rise, we lose most of the world's coral reefs. With a 2-degree temperature rise, we lose all of them – as well as some of our best protection from storms. The basis of the marine food chain – crustaceans – will no longer be able to grow their shells in waters that are warmer and more acidic. We already see this.

At 1.5 degrees, crops from corn, to rice, and wheat are imperiled. At 2 degrees, many of those crops wither and die, especially in Africa and Southeast Asia – threatening starvation for tens of millions.

If you're like me, you stand in awe of the power the great mountains of the world. But even they are no match for this onslaught. Glaciers from the Alps to the Himalayas are melting – with devastating consequences for the billions of people that rely on the waters of great rivers they feed, from the Yangtze and the Yellow River to the Ganges.

Tens of millions of people migrating due to climate change could destabilize entire regions.

Markets and economies could collapse.

Let me be clear: no one is exaggerating when they call this an existential threat. Just ask the people of the Marshall Islands and Fiji.

That is what makes this the Decade of Decision – and now we must make it the Decade of Action. To prevent catastrophe, the scientists tell us we must cut global greenhouse gas emissions at least 45% by 2030 and get to net zero by 2050.

We head to Glasgow in that context.

And I head to Glasgow an optimist.

Where are we? How close are we to keeping 1.5 alive with a net zero, climate resilient 2050? How much of a gap remains? How quickly can we close it? And how can we adapt to the impacts of climate change that are already locked in place?

Glasgow is the moment and the place to catalyze action and answer those very questions.

Country after country is stepping up.

We are seeing growing ambition from governments. Ambition from the private sector. Ambition in the promise of technology on the cusp of revolutionizing energy itself.

Between Paris and Glasgow, despite a president who denied the science and a pandemic which destroyed lives and decimated economies, we have seen real progress.

In the United States, since rejoining the Paris Agreement, we've committed to reducing our emissions this decade by 50 to 52 percent and heading to net zero, and we've laid out a path to get there. That means millions of new electric vehicles. Charging stations from coast to coast. A carbon free power sector by 2035. Ambitious actions on forests. And new plans for adaptation and resiliency.

A generation ago a Moonshot won the Space Race. Today, the Biden administration's Energy Earthshots could marshal innovation and turbocharge the clean energy revolution. Imagine driving an electric vehicle from here to Glasgow on a single charge and recharging in minutes. Or powering this building on solar for a few cents a kilowatt hour. Believe me, these things will happen.

And key to all of this – we aren't acting alone. When I began in this role, very few of us were on track to meet a 1.5-degree goal. Now, nations representing nearly 65 percent of global GDP will arrive in Glasgow committed to the 1.5 limit with real plans – including more than half of the top 20 economies in the world.

That includes Canada and Japan, who have demonstrated leadership and ingenuity.

And this is critical: countries are coming to the table with more ambition than we've ever seen. Enough ambition that, if joined by other nations, we can keep 1.5 alive.

I just came back from Saudi Arabia, synonymous with the word oil, where for the first time they are working toward net zero.

Indonesia agreed to double their renewable energy portfolio, peak emissions by 2030, and get to net zero.

South Africa has proposed to meet 1.5 by retiring their old, outdated coal plants, and replacing them with renewable energy, all while modeling how to manage a just transition that doesn't leave people behind.

Mexico now has committed to substantial renewable deployment and will raise the ambition of their NDC beginning next year.

India, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest emitter in the world, set a renewable energy goal of 450 GW, which is aligned with 1.5 degrees – and the United States has formed a partnership to help achieve this.

Meanwhile, more than 35 nations have joined the Global Methane Pledge we initiated with the European Union to dramatically reduce emissions of a greenhouse gas far more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>, including 9 of the top 20 emitters. Many more will join by Glasgow.

And around the world there is growing recognition that, even as we strive to keep 1.5 alive, we must adapt to what that warmer world will bring: more frequent storms, droughts, wildfires. We must prepare for and be resilient to those threats. Adaptation saves countless lives and livelihoods. It also makes economic sense. Every dollar spent here can save up to 10 dollars down the road.

In Mexico, they've identified and designated water reserves in river basins to protect drinking water for 45 million residents. In India, after deadly heat waves, they're painting roofs white to reflect more of the sun's heat and cool homes. The Africa Finance Corporation is ensuring ports, roads, bridges, and rail on that continent can withstand the changes and storms to come.

We are committed to working with these nations that did not cause this problem but will suffer some of the worst consequences.

There is another profound reason for optimism – and I know there's suspicion – but more and more businesses are joining this fight.

Around the world, a revolution has taken place in boardrooms. Environment, social, and governance considerations are at the table. Corporate leadership in many places is now requiring investment in the environment. Shareholders are demanding their companies be part of the solution. And those investments are paying off – including in automotive, aviation, and heavy industry.

The highest valued auto company in the world – Tesla – only makes electric vehicles.

The first carbon free steel was just shipped from Sweden.

Volvo built a fossil free steel dump truck, with many more to come.

Air Liquide just announced a new renewable hydrogen plant that would bring zero-emission hydrogen to the West Coast market in the United States.

LinkedIn says jobs in Renewables and Environment will soon outnumber traditional energy jobs on their platform.

Last year, wind and solar accounted for 90 percent of new electric capacity in the world – 90 percent of all the new electricity! Already, renewable energy is the cheapest energy available, and costs continue to fall.

The energy market is the largest the world has ever known. Four and a half to five billion users today, and growing to nine billion users in this century.

But implementing this change requires investment. And understand something clearly: we need to deal in trillions – not billions.

The UN Finance Report says we need to quadruple investment in this transition, from \$2.6 trillion up to \$4 trillion every year in clean energy to meet our goals.

We all understand that no government on earth can fill this gap alone – it can only happen with the full participation of the private sector.

We are making strides in this area as well. On Tuesday, the EU sold its first-ever green bond to investors. They raised some 12 billion Euros – in an offering that was oversubscribed 11-fold.

This year, six leading U.S. banks have committed that they will invest a floor of \$4 trillion in the energy transformation just in this decade. A group of banking alliances will head to Glasgow representing \$85 trillion and prepared to invest heavily in the energy sector.

A key to winning this battle is deploying that money rapidly and effectively. That means new blended finance and derisking as well as capital allocation.

Just think about what a huge economic opportunity this moment is.

As an activist and then as a Senator, the early climate movement I knew was bogged down by private sector resistance, and by all the familiar accusations that the costs of action were prohibitive.

On the doorstep of Glasgow, the private sector has now made a different decision: the real cost no one is willing to pay is the huge cost of inaction.

The IPCC report of 2018, the IEA report this summer, the Financial Stability Board assessment of risk, and the marketplace opportunities for profit are coming together to drive change.

But let's be clear. Despite all the momentum heading into Glasgow we still face a gap. We have to be honest about it.

Everything I have said is why I believe we can overcome that gap – but it will take all of us.

The world must work together to close this gap – but particular responsibility lies with the top 20 economies on earth which are responsible for 80 percent of emissions.

Just this week the UN Emissions Gap Report made clear that many country's NDCs are not specific enough and do not reduce emissions fast enough.

Some countries are still building new, carbon-polluting coal plants, and planning to break ground on more. This, while others have demonstrated that they can meet future energy needs with clean, renewable power.

Many countries are mobilizing to cut methane, which accounts for half of current warming. Others have yet to set a clear target to reduce methane at all.

A host of countries are racing to plant more trees to protect and replace biodiversity. Others continue clear-cutting the rainforest.

At Glasgow, it will all be held up to scrutiny – with transparency and accountability.

And coming out of Glasgow, we will be ready to experience the greatest springboard of all: the combined power of individuals around the world demanding accountability and the power of the marketplace to scale revolutionary technology.

Reaching our goals means decarbonizing the power sector five times faster. Ramping up renewable energy six times faster. More electric vehicles. Less methane.

So, can we do that? The answer is yes. We absolutely can.

It is also important to note: Glasgow is not the end the road – in many ways it is a new beginning of this Decisive Decade.

And the United States has made clear: we stand ready to work with the rest of the world in this endeavor.

That is especially true in the developing and vulnerable world. Again, they did not cause this crisis – but they and their people are on the front lines. We must work with them – to adapt to these changes and to bypass a dirty economy.

That's why President Biden has committed to the collective \$100 billion goal to help developing nations. We will increase U.S. adaptation support six-fold by 2024. That money is real – and it will make an enormous difference.

There is a temptation on this issue to talk too much about GDP and emissions targets – and not enough about human beings. As a young man, I remember being deeply moved by Robert F. Kennedy, who reminded us that gross national product measures many things – from forests to roads to work – but not “the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. ... [I]t measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

We are not just talking about statistics. We are talking about families. Parents and children and neighbors and friends. Their lives matter to us.

This is what we mean when we talk about a “just transition.”

Without equitable, inclusive adaptation plans, by 2030 150 million people a year may need international humanitarian assistance as a result of climate-related disasters. With those plans, we can cut that number to 10 million in 2050.

And ultimately, it all comes back to you: the next generation of global citizens.

I remember being a young activist. I remember having doors slammed in my face. I remember hearing no. I remember being told to wait my turn. I remember being told that those in power were glad to have my input – that they would take it from there. And then they did nothing.

Just the other week I talked to one of the climate activists participating in a hunger strike outside the White House. He told me they are angry, fed up with a system they see as not moving fast enough. Tired of empty words and broken promises. I know many others feel the same way.

I told him he was right to be angry. We all should be angry. But I also believe this momentum we are seeing is real and meaningful.

I know that you and your voices and your actions are making a difference.

Next week in Glasgow, we have the chance to win a victory for the next century of life on this planet.

Then we will have to get up every day and win it again and again until the work of this decisive decade is decidedly done.

The day after Glasgow, we need you to keep this fight going.

So together let's get this done.

Thank you.