

DG-CLIMA CAMPAIGN LAUNCH SPEECH - FINAL

THEME: "VISIONS FOR A WORLD YOU LIKE"

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Thank you, Commissioner.

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the launch of 'Visions for a World You Like'. At WWF, we talk about the change we seek to influence in the world around us in terms of building a world with a future, in which people and nature thrive. It's a vision of a healthy world, rich in natural beauty and wonder. But also of a thriving world where people lead fulfilling, healthy lives. Most of all, it's a vision that requires people to work *with* nature, for a better future. So, I very much welcome this initiative, and indeed your passion and determination to engage people positively in a vision of a better future.

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And so, ladies and gentlemen, today you are being encouraged to share your 'Visions for a World You Like'. This title reminds me of the 'outcome document' from the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Brazil in June this year: "The Future We Want".

I attended the Rio+20 conference as part of the UK delegation. As I'm sure you will be aware, the outcome from the conference – the culmination of preparatory negotiations and interventions from nearly two hundred countries and other stakeholders – was hardly celebrated at the time.

And this, at a time when the evidence around us suggests that we have a lot of work to do to build a future we might all like.

Recent news reports alone illustrate the sorts of changes to our natural world that climate change predicts – droughts and wildfires in the US, the lowest ever minimum extent of Arctic sea ice recorded¹, and closer to home, the World Glacier Monitoring Service reported that climate impacts are not only causing glacial retreat, but are also the cause of increased incidence of rock falls and avalanches in the Alps².

¹ US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) showed the extent to be as little as 3.5 million square kilometres (the previous minimum, in 2007 was 4.17 m km²).

² World Glacier Monitoring Service, 2012. News stories focused on the exposure (due to retreating glaciers) of World War I relics (explosives) in the Dolomites.

But these changes to our natural world also have a negative impact on our more immediate lives.

Last week, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's Food Prices Index rose due to increased costs for dairy and meat, blamed on higher costs for cereals following poor yields from drought-hit central and southeastern Europe. And there is concern that the impact on maize production of this summer's US drought will further drive up cereal prices back towards the highs of 2011.

And what is most alarming to me is that many of the indications of a changing climate are happening sooner, and more rapidly, than forecast – scenarios that some labelled as 'alarmist' just a few years ago are now looking conservative.

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Since the financial crash of 2008 and the economic crisis it precipitated, it can often feel like the economy is the only priority for our politicians. And in many respects, it should be – while people in countries across Europe are suffering record levels of unemployment, cuts in services and rising costs for food and energy, of course it is right that politicians should look to alleviate the hardships of citizens through trying to stimulate economic growth.

You will, perhaps, be familiar with the saying that “the definition of insanity is to repeat the same thing over and over again and to expect to get different results”. Though the origins of this adage are disputed – it's been attributed to Albert Einstein and Benjamin Franklin, among others – it's difficult to argue against its logic.

What I take it to mean in the current economic context, and when I hear the calls for the 'rebuilding of our economies', is that we cannot repeat the same mistakes that not only resulted in the crisis, but which have also resulted in unsustainable impacts on the natural world on which we all depend for our prosperity.

But is it possible to redesign, and reformulate the capitalist economic system? I'm sure there are some that would suggest that *this* is the definition of insanity!

After all, a predominant capitalist market system has yielded remarkable benefits - millions have been lifted out of poverty, and most people enjoy better opportunities as well as healthier and longer lives than ever before. But there are still more than a billion people without access to the basic resources they need to lead a decent life.

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Returning to Rio+20, the Green Economy – one that not only looks to deliver prosperity, but does so without ruining the planet in the process – was one of the main agenda items under discussion. It proved to be a challenging concept in Rio, for a number of reasons.

But what was most striking about Rio – and what I am sure the campaign being launched here today will also find – is that there is change happening on the ground.

Rio+20 was rather like the Edinburgh festival – the annual arts festival held in the Scottish capital, which you may have heard of. There is the official event, but also the fringe; a much larger, freer and more colourful programme happening separately from the main event, but in some way symbiotically dependent on it. And, similar to the Edinburgh Festival, it was in the fringe of Rio that the more imaginative and ambitious discussions and agreements took place.

Numbering hundreds of commitments³ and agreements between businesses, governments (particularly at the state, regional and city level), NGOs and communities – more than half⁴ of which relate to renewable energy – Rio demonstrated a global, cooperative and determined drive to deliver the green economy, in many respects overshadowing the official outcome document.

For example:

- Microsoft committed to offset its carbon emissions as well as to step up its use of renewable energy with a view to becoming ‘carbon neutral’ by mid-2014⁵;
- Eight multilateral development banks will provide more than \$175 billion in loans and grants for sustainable transport systems in developing countries over the next 10 years⁶.
- Philips committed to improving the energy efficiency of its entire product range by 50% in 2015, compared to 2009, and to advance solar-LED lighting⁷;
- And a Natural Capital Declaration initiative commits several banks and other financial institutions to take full account of natural capital in their assessment of firms’ lending policies⁸.

Change *is* happening.

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³ The official ‘Cloud of Commitments’ site currently records 248 separate commitments. The UN Sustainable Development Conference 2012 site talks about “over 700 voluntary commitments” amounting to mobilizing “more than US\$500 billion” in action towards sustainable development.

⁴ 57% of the c.248 commitments on the ‘Cloud of Commitments’ site.

⁵ <http://business.un.org/en/commitments/1662>

⁶ <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/news/statement-commitment-sustainable-transport.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.sustainableenergyforall.org/actions-commitments/commitments>

⁸ www.naturalcapitaldeclaration.org

We often hear rhetoric – including from our politicians – that economic growth and environmental protection are mutually exclusive in an economic downturn; we’re told that protecting the environment is a luxury for the economic ‘good times’, than can be set aside when the going is tough. As if we cannot have growth and be green.

But this is a false dichotomy. And, like Rio, the evidence for *why* is not in some aspirational ‘vision for the future’ – again, it’s in the here and now:

- It’s in data from the UN Environment Agency from earlier this year, that shows that global renewable energy investment hit a record US\$257 billion in 2011, accounting for 44% of new power capacity worldwide⁹.
- It’s in the EU’s renewable energy target, which will have helped to double the amount of clean energy in Europe by 2020 compared to what was projected before the legislation was put in place¹⁰.
- And it’s in a report by the Confederation of British Industry, also from earlier this year, which showed that “the UK’s low-carbon and environmental goods and services market is worth more than £120 billion per year”, or more than 8% of GDP¹¹. Growth rates of around 5% in this sector “accounted for more than a third of all UK growth” in 2010/11¹². At a time when growth in many other sectors of the economy are sluggish.

Indeed, the CBI’s Director-General, John Cridland, has said that “the choice between going green and going for growth is a false choice”¹³ and the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, said in their “Changing Pace” report: “In the long run, an economy cannot succeed in a society that fails on top of ruined ecosystems. The realignment is both challenging and urgent”¹⁴.

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So, the race is on between efforts to build green economies. The challenge that remains is that the pace of change is currently too small and too slow.

Urgent action to embrace the green economy is needed now – not only to begin to reduce the impacts we are having on our environment, but to seize the opportunities for *green* to deliver *growth*. And let us not forget what the Stern Review told us – the longer we delay the transition, the more costly and challenging the adjustment will be in future¹⁵.

⁹ UNEP/Renewable energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (2012) “Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment 2012”, Fifth Edition, based on data from Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

¹⁰ The ‘EU energy outlook to 2030’ published in 2007 projected 10% RE share of primary energy in 2020; National Renewable Energy Action Plans confirm likely achievement of 20%- though this is not yet certain.

¹¹ CBI’s “The Colour of Growth: Maximising the potential of green business” (2012)

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ <http://www.wbcsd.org/changingpace.aspx>

¹⁵ Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (2007) http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/Summary_of_Conclusions.pdf (see background notes)

But my point is that building the green economy can avoid locking future generations into the stranded assets of a broken 20th Century business model that is over-invested in polluting energy systems – every time we build a new fossil fuelled power plant, we are locking ourselves into a high-emission energy system for decades when the science tells us we should be phasing them out now.

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I must also emphasise the crucial role politicians need to play in supporting the transition to green economies. I hope that the positive stories and messages of change – from businesses, communities and individuals that will be evident through this campaign – will highlight to politicians their responsibility to support the transition to green economies in three areas:

Firstly, politicians need to accept the scale of the challenge – and let's not underestimate it – commit to ambitious action, and stick to it. In the UK, we are fortunate in having the Climate Change Act – a legally-binding framework, born out of cross-party political support for the need to address the problem, that will guide the direction of policy towards a low-carbon economy. And, I commend the Commission on the climate and energy roadmaps which are prompting exactly the sorts of discussions, at the national level, about how economies can be transformed – with the active participation of the corporate sector, and through engaging people – to low-carbon, green economies.

Secondly, with frameworks like the Climate Change Act to guide them, politicians can also therefore support the transition through providing clear policy signals to business and industry that represent a clear direction of travel. There is a lot of debate about subsidies for energy; we can read about it most weeks in the British press. We can probably all agree that subsidies should only be needed to help new technologies get off the ground. So, providing clear signals that build on ambitious policy frameworks will give those who want to invest in the green economy future the certainty they need, providing the investment at scale that will reduce the costs of capital to make the need for subsidies redundant.

And finally, we need politicians to hold firm against those who wish to maintain the status quo – not for the prosperity of future generations, and certainly not in the interests of the environment, but for their own short-term interests. For while there are businesses who are embracing the change, there are also those, particularly in the fossil fuel lobby, who are polluting the debate as much as they are polluting the atmosphere.

Might I suggest that when taking bold, and difficult, decisions about the future direction of our economies, our politicians listen to what polling consistently tells us – polling from October 2011 suggests that, even in the midst of the financial crisis, Europeans ranked

climate change as a more pressing global problem than the economic situation, and 78% agreed that tackling climate change could boost jobs and the economy¹⁶.

People want renewable energy more than they want polluting fossil fuel-fired power stations; they want clean water and air and to have space for nature – they want a healthy, clean, and prosperous future.

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So, in conclusion, I have one final point to emphasise – for which I hope you will excuse one last perspective from Rio+20.

When travelling on the delegation bus from the conference centre back to the hotel one evening – when it had already become apparent that the final text was closed, and would not be strengthened any further – one of the UK’s senior negotiators asked me why environmental NGOs like WWF were not more positive about the result.

After all, he argued, he and his team had worked hard for many weeks to reach agreement with their counterparts from other countries. Surely, we should recognise that the negotiators had fought to make the text as strong as possible: it wasn’t as strong as they would have liked, but it was an agreement – why couldn’t the NGOs welcome that?

The reason, I suggested, for why the NGOs were less than effusive about the Rio outcome was because we were measuring success from a different standpoints. He was measuring the outcome by what had been politically possible in the circumstances. I was measuring the text by what is scientifically-necessary. And so, in your discussions later today – and, indeed throughout the course of the Commissioner’s campaign as it tours around European member states – I would urge you to keep in mind what is scientifically-necessary when considering the future we would all like.

Thank you.

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¹⁶ Eurobarometer Special on “Climate Change” (No. 372), October 2011. See background documents for more info.