

Paris, France

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# Full transcript of Secretary-General's press conference at COP21

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be with you.

We have just begun the High Level segment of COP21.

Here in Paris, we have a unique opportunity to redefine our future.

We are on the verge of one of the most important peace agreements of our times – making peace with our planet.

Outside these negotiating halls, there is a rising global tide of support for a strong, universal climate agreement.

From Lagos to Los Angeles, from Berlin to Beijing, people are asking for clean air and a peaceful, prosperous future for their children and succeeding generations, and also for a healthy planet..

Civil society came to Paris in large numbers.

They may not have been able to march through the streets, but their voices have filled these conference rooms.

Last Monday, world leaders showed strong political commitment to a robust climate change agreement.

150 Heads of State and Government participated, as you have witnessed.

During my nine years as Secretary-General, I have never seen so many world leaders gathered at one time.

That showed strong political will.

Today, I asked negotiators and ministers to follow their lead.

I asked for compromise and constructive engagement so we may achieve consensus.

Every country's national interest is, can and will be best served by working for the common good.

Climate change carries no passport. It does not respect national boundaries.

We have to have global vision, and show global solidarity.

The global thermostat is rising.

This year has been the warmest in recorded history.

There is no time to lose.

Science tells us the window could soon close on our ability to prevent severe and irreversible climate impacts.

I thank the Government of France, particularly President Francois Hollande and Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, for their efforts to make this conference the success we know it needs to be.

I am encouraged by progress so far, and I have full confidence in COP21 president Fabius and the 14 co-facilitators.

There is strong momentum.

One hundred and eighty-six countries, representing close to 100 per cent of global emissions, have submitted their national climate plans. This is quite encouraging.

The business community is here in unprecedented numbers.

And I met many mayors who have come from around the world.

They are asking for a clear signal from governments that the low-emission economy is inevitable.

With that signal they can accelerate the innovations and initiatives that are already changing our world.

The climate action announcements made here in Paris demonstrate growing commitment by all actors.

We need to scale up climate action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The national climate plans are a welcome start, but they fall short of our goal to limit global temperature rise to less than 2 degrees Celsius.

We must go much farther and much faster.

That is why we need action, now, here in Paris.

We cannot afford half measures or delay.

Our goal must be transformation.

We have less than four days of negotiations left.

Some tough issues remain.

A political moment like this may not come again.

I urge the Ministers and negotiators gathered here not to squander it.

I am confident that Paris can be a decisive turning point to a cleaner, healthier more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

Thank you.

Q: Thanks very much, Secretary-General. I was wondering if you could tell us, is the text that was handed to Ministers on Saturday, is that what you would like to be starting the second week of the talks from, and what do you think are going to be the trickiest gaps to bridge over the coming week?

SG: As you are already aware, the text that has been distributed comprising all the views, and there are still many brackets, but it is regarded by far as the best effort so far. But we will have to make decisions.

Member States have expressed their concerns, their aspirations and their views loud and clear – all the developed and developing countries, particularly small island and developing States, a

vulnerable group of countries – and the views of civil society and business communities have all been compiled.

They have been working very hard since the Peru summit meeting. I really applaud their commitment and hard work. Now there are still many brackets. It is a matter of choice now. I am asking them to expedite their negotiations. They should have a global vision. I believe they have been expressing their views based on a global vision, but in some cases there were a lot of national perspectives. Now we have to go beyond national perspectives. We have to agree on global visions.

I am sure that under the leadership of the French presidency, and also with the help of facilitators, Member States will be able to agree on a clean text. I was told by the President of COP that by Wednesday, there will be a new text released. Then there will be a review of the final text by Thursday. And by Friday, hopefully, we should have an agreement – ambitious, universal and strong – so that this will cover all of the concerns and aspirations.

But frankly speaking, you should know that I am urging the negotiators, particularly, that sometimes perfection may be our enemy. We are not living in a world of perfection. We see so many troubles – wars, poverty and disease. We are not living in an ideal world. We can always aim for an ideal and perfect agreement. But there will be a five-year review. There will be a monitoring mechanism and verification mechanism and a reporting mechanism.

Therefore, we can always strengthen [this] and we can have higher ambitions. All INDCs submitted by this time by 186 countries will have to be further strengthened. Thank you.

Q: Before we came to Paris, China has made many proposals in various statements about how to implement the principles of the Convention, and in COP21, we also made a lot of intense work. I think, Mr. Ban, you have talked to many delegates and many countries here. So what is their reflection? Do you think China's proposal is helpful to push forward negotiations here? Thank you.

SG: First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation and commend the vision and commitment of Chinese leadership, starting from President Xi Jinping, and all negotiators and ministers.

As you know, China has become the largest emitter, but they have also become one of the two richest countries, fastest moving economies. In that regard, Chinese commitment to address their own environmental issues and also contribute to this ongoing negotiation to make this world healthier and better – I think that is highly commendable. Particularly this joint statement issued between Xi Jinping and President [Barack] Obama of the United States – that was a turning point and that is very much appreciated.

Another very important statement was issued between President Xi Jinping and President Hollande of France, just in the month of October – that is highly commendable. I have met many delegations, ministers and leaders, that when we address many difficult issues, unresolved issues, like differentiation, ambition levels, then this Sino-American and Sino-French agreement can be used or emulated in a more harmonious and agreeable way. I sincerely hope that many countries will really emulate this Chinese example. That is what I am sure [of]. Now China's delegation members are very much committed to working closely with other Member States. Thank you.

Q: I know you said that perfection is the enemy, but I have been hearing from a lot of countries that are very worried about the level of ambition they are seeing. What would you say to those who believe that a weak agreement, an agreement lacking in ambition, is not worth having at all?

SG: I cannot predict what kind of level of agreement Member State parties will agree by the end of Friday, so it is, if I may say, in principle, we will be able to have an ambitious level of agreement.

And that is going to be the first time in the history of the United Nations, a universal agreement, a very much committed, strong agreement.

There is no doubt that all of the parties, they are aware of what kind of a situation, environmentally, we are living in.

We are living in a world where this climate change has been impacting all throughout the world, regardless of where you are coming from. Now, even the very richest countries, they cannot handle unexpected extreme weather patterns. That is all caused by the climate change phenomenon.

Now, we are learning from hard lessons. That is why all the countries of the United Nations, they are committed to address this issue. Therefore, there must be a universal, first of all, very robust and strong agreement. There are many brackets and many useful expressions. I hope they will make a wise decision.

There is some level of ambition. Are these INDCs sufficient? I don't think they are sufficient. They are standing, if we calculate altogether, an aggregate calculation suggests that we may be standing somewhere around 3 degrees centigrade, but we have to go down, [further] down [to a] minimum 2 degrees and [even] way below 2 degrees, 1.5 degrees. Maybe even 1.5 degrees, for many countries like small island developing countries, it may have serious consequences.

But that does not mean that we should not take any action. We must take first action. This will be the first ever agreement in our history. How many years have we been discussing and talking? So, it is again a deadline that Member States have set, by 2015.

There is another very important dimension which you should see in a broader, bigger picture.

This year, 2015, Member States have shown their very strong visions, universal visions, for development, sustainable development. Starting from March in Sendai, Japan, we have agreed on a very ambitious global framework for disaster risk reduction – how to prevent all these disasters, then how to minimise the impact of disasters [caused] by climate change or natural disasters.

Second, in September, as a successor but much a broader, much more comprehensive development vision, Member States have agreed [on] the sustainable development agenda with 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Now, what is very important is that climate change is one of the 17 goals – number 13, this is climate change.

But without addressing the climate change phenomenon properly, immediately, we will have a lot of difficulties in implementing the remaining 16 development goals. There is not a single goal which is not related, tightly connected with climate change.

Therefore, if we really want to put an end to global poverty, if we really want to make this world healthier and also planet Earth environmentally sustainable, we have to first address this climate change issue. Then we will be able to much better and effectively address global poverty, agriculture, safe drinking water, disease controls, the marine environment.

Therefore, we must have this climate change agreement. Thank you.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General. You said earlier in your speech that you support a tighter schedule for the revision of the INDCs, and that the first one should happen before 2020. Do you still believe it is possible to reach an agreement here with the schedule that would put the INDCs on track for the 2 degree ceiling before 2020?

SG: I think so, I think so – we can agree. There is an emerging consensus on this matter. As I said already, there was a joint agreement between China and the French President. French President is the leader of this COP process now. It has given a very huge impact to the parties. How to formulate language or mechanisms, that is being discussed now, but, overall, the idea of having this mechanism is widely supported.

Q: You said just now that you look forward to an agreement that is universal, ambitious and strong. The President of the COP often adds 'binding' to that list of adjectives. Is that a vision that you share, and in what way could you see this agreement as being binding?

SG: In principle, this will be a binding agreement. But, as you know, these INDCs, as it is written – 'Intended Nationally Determined', so there are intended determinations by the Member States, so this will be under review, even though it is not going to be binding internationally, but it is going to be binding nationally. So I am sure that these will be followed up and reviewed by each and every Member State who have submitted [them]. So it is up to them. But at the same time, this will be reviewed internationally every five years if they agree on the review mechanisms. The first review will take place before 2020, and thereafter every five years.

Then, this agreement, which will be, the main part should be a binding one, but there may be some elements which may not necessarily be binding. I think this is what we understand at this time. Therefore, basically it is binding, but depending upon the elements, there will be some voluntary and binding ones.

Q: Thank you. Mr. Secretary-General, you have referred more than once to faith leaders, and indeed, we have seen a lot of statements out of the faith communities, not least Laudato Si from His Holiness, the Pope. There are also Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim statements. I wonder if you have been presented with these officially, and if not, if you would like to receive them. And is it true, some people claim, that you could not accept a statement from Buddhist leaders, because one of the 40 signatures is or is reported to be the Dalai Lama?

SG: First of all, in general, I am very grateful to the religious, the faith leaders, including His Holiness Pope Francis, who has [spoken with] such a clear, moral voice, loud and clear, in June through his Encyclical. He made it quite clear, and asked world leaders to show moral and political leadership. And I have been discussing this matter with the Pope several times already, and I am much grateful. He issued another such statement just two days ago.

Then we should know that this climate change has nothing to do with religion, whether Muslim, Buddhist, Christianity. It is something about our nature and our humanity. Human beings, they believe in something greater, but climate change does not believe in any such things. [It] just acts in its own way. Therefore, we have to show our wisdom. It's simple wisdom – it's not just wisdom, it's common sense, that we have to live harmoniously with our nature. Nature does not negotiate with human beings, nature does not wait until we do something. It just goes on its own way. It is us, human beings, who have to adjust to this climate change phenomenon.

That is why the IPCC is very important – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. We have to do what science tells us. [The IPCC has] been making repeatedly [the point], through their five assessment reports until last year, that climate change has been and is caused by human behaviour. Then the answer is only natural that human beings should change [their] behaviour to address this climate change. This has nothing to do with religion, but religious leaders moral voice is helpful to understand and to convince those people who are still sceptical, but now you don't hear much about sceptics.

I really count on all the leaders, regardless of the difference of professions, of beliefs. We should be one, we should be united in addressing this climate change phenomenon. I thank you very much.

Q: I would like to know how the draft document and the agreement will deal with the fossil fuel addiction of the countries and fossil fuel interests of other countries? Thank you.

SG: If you allow me, I have been monopolizing this session, maybe I will give the floor to you.

Christiana Figueres: Thank you, Secretary-General. The draft agreement that is on the table and that will be finalized throughout this week will point toward the process of decarbonizing the global

economy, which, by definition, means moving certainly the energy sector but also the deforestation sector toward, the energy sector toward less carbon content and the deforestation sector actually to protecting the forest cover. So together, and those are the two major causes of climate change together, they will be moving us over time, not immediately, but there will be an orderly transition and the ambition of the agreement is actually going to be judged on whether we can move toward that decarbonization in time to still stay below the 2-degree window and that remains to be seen.

Q: I wanted to ask about Article 22 which says that you strive for consensus with the fall back of 75 per cent. It's now in brackets. Do you expect those brackets to be removed and if so, is that something you might even be following in other articles throughout the document so that in the end you don't end up with a watered down document?

SG: I'm sure that these old brackets will have to be cleared in the course of three or four days' negotiations. These are the result of many years of discussions and consultations, negotiations – simply, they have not been able to make a decision. My expectation and my urging has always been that, please make a decision before it is too late. Then, I am sure that under the leadership of these facilitators, as well as the President of COP, they will be able to clear and make wiser choices among all of these options. All the options are now printed, they are on the table, and by Wednesday, I am sure that there will be a much cleaner text for final review of the Member States. I am urging [them] again to take this opportunity – they should demonstrate their leadership and they should act for humanity on which we can really build our world better and healthier and sustainable for us and for our succeeding generations and for the planet Earth.

I have often been saying that we have only one earth. The way we have been abusing nature may suggest that we have another place to live, but we have only have one planet. We don't have plan B because we don't have planet B – that's my final urging. Thank you very much.