

## **Suggested talking points for a speech by the Prime Minister or Alok Sharma (in his role as President of COP26)**

### **Version 2, 22 September 2020**

- The coronavirus crisis may have created the impression that we [the government] are not paying attention to the climate crisis, but this is not so.
- We want the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow to be a great success; a real turning point for the world, setting us on a path to avoid the possibility of runaway climate change.
- That can't happen without a lot of preparation, much of which will be quiet diplomacy and negotiations that won't be hitting the headlines.
- The UK has been ahead of the curve on the climate for decades, with world-leading climate science, Margaret Thatcher's bold speeches, the Climate Change Act, support for getting the Paris Agreement over the line and our legislated commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- So expectations are high that we and our Italian partners will do more than just be good hosts for COP26.
- Back in 2015, the UK was part of the "coalition of high ambition" that got the goal of pursuing efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C into the Paris Agreement.
- In 2018, the IPCC told the world how much worse it will be if we let global warming reach 2°C rather than 1.5°C.
- But let's not forget that the main goal of the Paris Agreement is to stay "well below 2°C".
- That's because, from around 2°C and beyond, the world runs a higher and higher risk of losing control of the climate system, leading to runaway climate change.
- And runaway climate change will almost certainly lead to the collapse of our civilisation, quite possibly in the lifetimes of people alive today.
- And yet, since the Paris Agreement, global carbon emissions have continued to rise, until this year, when the coronavirus has caused them to fall, but for all the wrong reasons.
- When the numbers are in the end of this year, global emissions will probably be down by about 4 or 5 percent compared to 2019. But that will be only about half the decrease the IPCC recommended if we want to be on track for well below 2°C.
- Here in the UK, our emissions have been steadily falling for many years, but as one of the world's leading economies, we need to do more as our fair share<sup>1</sup>.
- That is why we are asking the Committee on Climate Change to advise on what would be a fair reflection of our responsibility and capability commitments under the Paris Agreement.
- We know that this is likely to mean an even more challenging target than net zero by 2050.
- But we can embrace such a target and use it to inform every decision we make as we pursue a green recovery from the coronavirus crisis, while ensuring that the massive employment opportunities this will create will be spread fairly and allow a just transition for communities that currently depend on high carbon industries.
- Other major countries need to do much the same if we are all to approach COP26 in a spirit of fairness.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annexe

- Whether you call it a green new deal, going on to a war footing or a Marshall Plan, this will be a transformation on a scale most of us have not experienced before.
- If the world succeeds in achieving the rapid global emissions reductions that the science says is necessary, this will have profound implications for countries that are major producers of fossil fuels. At worst, some could become failed states, with all that means for their citizens and for regional and global security.
- So the world needs a fair way of controlling the global supply of fossil fuels that gives those producer countries the best chance of making a smooth transition to a future that is not dependent on producing more fossil fuels than the world can afford to burn.
- That is why we are asking the International Energy Agency to work with us and other fossil fuel producer countries to come up with a global fossil carbon budget consistent with the Paris goals and a robust framework to ensure that budget will not be exceeded.
- If successful, this will put a triple lock on the global fossil carbon budget:
  - Countries' Paris Agreement emissions reduction pledges will reduce demand for fossil fuels;
  - a globally effective treaty or other agreement to control the supply of fossil fuels will ensure high prices for what can be legitimately extracted; and
  - disinvestment and sanctions can ensure that there are effective disincentives against opting out of these agreements or breaking them.
- With this triple lock in prospect, we anticipate that countries will look again at their Paris Agreement pledges and come to Glasgow next year with much improved offers.
- Of course, fossil fuels are not the only source of greenhouse gases we need to worry about.
- In particular, we really do need to find effective incentives for people not to want to destroy and degrade forests, and we encourage others to come forward with proposals on this in the run-up to COP26.
- We also need globally effective ways to reward natural climate solutions that can take really significant amounts of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere with the necessary speed.
- We really do believe that 2021 will be the decisive year for the world's climate, and the UK government will be doing its utmost to help the world achieve the great turnaround that it so desperately needs.

*An afterword from the anonymous author:*

*If it seems difficult to imagine such a speech being made, why is that? Which are the points of difficulty, and are they substantive or presentational? Anticipating one potential point of difficulty, the notes include as an annexe the abstract of a key paper that explains why the UK's current 2050 net zero target is inadequate in the context of the Paris Agreement's equity provisions.*

## **Annexe: Abstract of key paper in the journal Climate Policy (published February 2020):**

A factor of two: how the mitigation plans of 'climate progressive' nations fall far short of Paris-compliant pathways

Kevin Anderson, John F. Broderick & Isak Stoddard (universities of Manchester and Uppsala)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14693062.2020.1728209>

### **ABSTRACT**

The Paris Agreement establishes an international covenant to reduce emissions in line with holding the increase in temperature to 'well below 2°C ... and to pursue ... 1.5°C.' Global modelling studies have repeatedly concluded that such commitments can be delivered through technocratic adjustments to contemporary society, principally price mechanisms driving technical change. However, as emissions have continued to rise, so these models have come to increasingly rely on the extensive deployment of highly speculative negative emissions technologies (NETs). Moreover, in determining the mitigation challenges for industrialized nations, scant regard is paid to the language and spirit of equity enshrined in the Paris Agreement. If, instead, the mitigation agenda of 'developed country Parties' is determined without reliance on planetary scale NETs and with genuine regard for equity and 'common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities', the necessary rates of mitigation increase markedly. This is evident even when considering the UK and Sweden, two nations at the forefront of developing 'progressive' climate change legislation and with clear emissions pathways and/or quantitative carbon budgets. In both cases, the carbon budgets underpinning mitigation policy are halved, the immediate mitigation rate is increased to over 10% per annum, and the time to deliver a fully decarbonized energy system is brought forward to 2035-40. Such a challenging mitigation agenda implies profound changes to many facets of industrialized economies. This conclusion is not drawn from political ideology, but rather is a direct consequence of the international community's obligations under the Paris Agreement and the small and rapidly dwindling global carbon budget.

### **Key Policy Insights**

- Without a belief in the successful deployment of planetary scale negative emissions technologies, double-digit annual mitigation rates are required of developed countries, from 2020, if they are to align their policies with the Paris Agreement's temperature commitments and principles of equity.
- Paris-compliant carbon budgets for developed countries imply full decarbonization of energy by 2035-40, necessitating a scale of change in physical infrastructure reminiscent of the post-Second World War Marshall Plan. This brings issues of values, measures of prosperity and socio-economic inequality to the fore.
- The stringency of Paris-compliant pathways severely limits the opportunity for inter-sectoral emissions trading. Consequently aviation, as with all sectors, will need to identify policies to reduce emissions to zero, directly or through the use of zero carbon fuels.
- The UK and Swedish governments' emissions pathways imply a carbon budget of at least a factor of two greater than their fair contribution to delivering on the Paris Agreement's 1.5-2°C commitment.