

CLIMATE CHANGE & OCEANS PRESERVATION

SPEECH:

We, the voice of a generation, are here for you to understand one thing. We need climate action and we need it now. Last year we consumed more ecological resources and services in 7 months than the planet is able to regenerate in a year. Never before had humanity acquired such a sophisticated understanding of the world. Yet, no other moment in time have we adopted such a self-destructive attitude.

We therefore call upon the COP presidency and all UN member states to make past ‘calls to action’ a reality. We also call upon the European Union to strengthen and implement National Determined Contributions and climate finance. But we, as representatives of Belgian youth, also look at our own government to raise ambition. We hope to see Belgium in a leading position at the international level. We believe that its Climate and Energy Plan for 2030 is a step in the good direction, we are confident that its revised version will reflect a higher commitment.

We are glad to see that an often forgotten subject in climate negotiations is standing in the spotlights today. Seas and oceans cover more than 77% of our planet. Climate change will also have a huge impact on them. By 2100 more than half of our oceans will have a different color compared to today. Just imagine seeing a satellite image of our earth and not recognizing it.

But not only their color will change. Occupying less than one percent of the ocean floor, coral reefs support more than 25 percent of marine life. Yet, the recent IPCC report predicts that despite limiting global warming to 1.5°C, 70% to 90% of coral reefs will be lost in the next decades. Mangroves and seagrass beds are crucial carbon stores. Yet, the destruction of mangrove forests is responsible for about 10% of global CO₂ emissions caused by deforestation.

But we, the Belgian Youth, don’t want to give up quite yet. We have hope. And we invite all of you, dear excellencies, to be part of the future.

For that to happen, we call upon all countries to estimate climate change impact in general, but especially on specific coastal and marine areas and follow a science-based decision-making.

Secondly, we urge the creation of new ocean preservation zones and praise all efforts to ensure strict implementation. We encourage the promotion of the rise of the “Blue Economy”. We understand that this new term must be more than a label. It should represent a fundamental shift in practices, and embrace opportunities to unlock the potential value of ocean-related activities, avoiding actions that are detrimental to the environment.

And thirdly the COP25 and CBD momentums are outstanding opportunities to agree upon ambitious post-2020 marine and coastal conservation targets which will restore and build the resilience of our ocean. We sincerely hope that these encounters will help reach significant progress in all areas mentioned.

Briefly stated, we call upon all UNFCCC Parties to facilitate implementation NDCs through climate finance and technology transfer. Only so will NDCs be credible and will countries project their efforts further. The land use and development strategies decided during and in preparation of COP 25 should be aligned with the Sendai Framework, especially in coastal areas. Monitoring of compliance must also be improved through capacity building. And lastly, don't forget about biodiversity, because the living world, while neglected until now, is key to our survival.

Inspiring and ambitious ocean-related NDCs should become the norm, and SDG14 should definitely be underlined as one of the cornerstones of the COP25. Protecting ocean ecosystems is one of the most powerful ways to combat the devastating effects of climate change and to guarantee the survival of viable ecosystems that benefit people, nature and business. We echo the call of Small Islands and Developing States to ensuring collective commitment and effort towards that goal.

Besides these specific ocean-related demands we also ask of everyone in this room to integrate intergenerational equity as a major guideline in their decision making process at the national and international level.

Governments, private actors and the academic world around the globe must provide quality education that offer skills matching with new green jobs. Concretely that means facilitating access to literature, fostering academic exchanges, give a chance for students to be professionally involved and investing heavily in funding research programs. Knowledge and technology must be steered towards collective progress.

Lastly countries must collectively call for bolder commitment to lower emissions pre-2030 and confront industrial sectors still benefiting from grey areas and loopholes that are destructive to our societies.

We reach out to you, dear excellencies, to work together with us. To protect the future of our generation and generations to come. Be part of the change. Thank you for your attention.

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