**Saving our future**

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This week, world leaders are gathered in Glasgow to define the next 30 years of our response to the climate crisis.

Science has shown how precipitously close we are to climate catastrophe. Our decisions to secure urgent and accelerated action to limit global temperature rise and tackle the effects of an overheated planet will mean for millions of people either prosperity or misery, even life or death.

Everything we have fought for over the years is on the line, from the Paris Agreement, the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) limit to global warming, to affordable and accessible climate finance. The very survival of island nations such as Fiji’s low-lying neighbours, along with the 30 other small states in the Commonwealth, is at risk.

COP26 must deliver on a number of key points.

Firstly, developed countries must make good on their promise to provide $100bn per year, through to 2025, to support climate action in developing nations. This decade-long pledge must finally be honoured – both to deliver the intended effect on the ground, and also as a fundamental issue of trust. The amount is equivalent to just 0.1 percent of the combined annual gross domestic product (GDP) of advanced economies, or about 5 percent of the $2 trillion the world spends each year on military. Promises should be kept.

Secondly, this funding must recognise the need for us to adapt to the ongoing effects of climate change, as much as it supports efforts to mitigate it. The number of climate-related disasters within the Commonwealth, for instance, has doubled from 431 between 1980 and 1990, to 815 between 2010 and 2020. Over the last decade, these killed 48,000 people, affected 677 million and caused $197bn in damages. We are not dealing with a challenge for the future – the crisis is already here.

Adaptation is a harsh necessity.

Climate finance should also be accessible and affordable, particularly for the most vulnerable. Currently, only 2 percent of international finance available actually reaches small island nations, even as they grapple with the worst of climate change, including sea level rise and increasingly frequent and disastrous weather, with dire socioeconomic consequences. It is utterly unjust that those who contributed the least to the problem are paying the highest price, and yet struggle to access the support intended to help them.

To help address this, the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub supports countries to develop successful funding proposals and build human and institutional capacities – for example, by working closely with the Ministry of Economy in Fiji to create a Project Design Unit for this purpose. But more needs to be done – the share of climate finance for small states must increase. Additionally, there should be a clear commitment locked in on loss and damage, to address damages already suffered.

Finally, we must recognise that the climate crisis is also an ocean crisis and we need to do all we can to stem the damage wreaked on our marine environments. The ocean covers more than 70 percent of the earth’s surface and drives global weather patterns. It is also the world’s greatest “carbon sink”, having absorbed about one-third of all human CO2 emissions since the start of the industrial revolution, and storing more than 90 percent of the excess heat caused by greenhouse gas emissions over the last 50 years.

But the ocean is under serious threat from climate change. An ocean work programme that is progressed through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) processes would help save the essential ecosystems that support life on this planet. Such a programme should align with ground-breaking initiatives such as the Commonwealth Blue Charter.

There is still time to reset our course – but we need to act now and act together to build back from the ashes of the Covid-19 pandemic on greener, bluer, more resilient paths to prosperity. At COP26, we will fight tirelessly to keep the 1.5C target within reach by securing 50 percent reductions in emissions from high-emitting countries by 2030 that would put the world on a path towards net-zero emissions by 2050.

Small states are already in the lead. Fiji recently passed its Climate Change Act that enshrined 2050 net-zero commitments into law. It has mandated the 100 percent sustainable management of its ocean, with 30 percent to be designated as marine protected areas by 2030. Neighbouring Samoa aims to be powered 100 percent by renewable sources within the next few years. Seychelles is pioneering various innovative finance mechanisms such as debt-for-climate swaps and blue bonds to help fund national climate action, and has already protected 30 percent of its ocean.

We all must do our part – including larger, more developed nations. If we cannot come together in the face of this planetary crisis, what hope is there? The only viable option available to us at COP26 is a courageous success – to secure a safe, sustainable future for our children and their grandchildren to come.

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