

ASG Hart's Remarks to the Global Engagement Summit

Distinguished colleagues and friends.

Welcome to the United Nations.

I want to start by thanking UNA-USA for inviting me to the largest annual gathering of UN supporters in the United States.

Your important work of bringing together community leaders, students, lawmakers, and experts from across the country is needed now more than ever. Just last week, the Secretary-General outlined the complex and inter linked challenges facing our world – growing geo-political divides, deepening inequalities within and between nations, lingering economic effects from the pandemic, conflict, violence, war, and of course the climate crisis.

Solving these complex challenges requires international cooperation and collaboration, and a strong United Nations. So your support is invaluable.

Friends,

We are at a critical moment in our fight against the climate crisis. Every indicator on climate is heading in the wrong direction. Carbon pollution is at its highest level in human history and continues to rise. The last eight years have been the hottest in recorded history. From storms to floods, droughts to wildfires, we are witnessing climate chaos on every continent, in every region, and every country, including the United States. The 1.5-degree goal of the Paris Agreement is barely alive.

Friends,

In an appeal to the conscience of your nation, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said: "This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism".

These words uttered 6 decades ago, in a vastly different context, speak directly to what is required by our generation now to confront the climate crisis.

We must act now. The time for excuses, delayed action and incrementalism is over.

We have simply run out of time.

The good news is that we know what to do and we have the financial and technological tools to get the job done and to save lives.

But this will require urgent action on four critical fronts:

First, we must end our addiction to fossil fuels and drastically reduce carbon pollution.

Global emissions must be cut by half this decade if we are to have a fighting chance of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees. That means far more ambitious carbon pollution cuts from G20 countries now and over the course of this decade. The twenty largest economies account for around 80% of global emissions. We cannot close the global emissions gap without their leadership.

And let me be clear.

Clean fossil fuels do not exist. Less dirty is still dirty. Brown, grey, blue -- nothing is truly clean unless it is fully green.

The current scramble we are seeing around the world to expand fossil fuel production primarily driven by the greed of the fossil fuel industry and their enablers is - as the Secretary-General has said - inconsistent with human survival. We cannot continue to allow the fossil fuel industry, their financial enablers, and political protectors to hold us and the global economy to ransom.

This must be the decade of renewables. Wind and solar are now far cheaper than fossil fuels in most parts of the world. The world is set to add as much renewable power in the next five years as it did in the past 20 years. But we need to move much further and faster.

Let's not forget - this is a monumental economic opportunity for the United States and every economy to power a new era of clean air, decent jobs, better health, and energy security. There will be no real relief from the cost-of-living crisis while the fossil fuels remain on top of the energy mix. All nations now face a stark choice: join the renewables revolution or be left behind.

Second, we must urgently protect those on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

One of the great injustices of the climate emergency is that those who have contributed the least to the problem are already paying the highest price - even in rich countries like the US. Today, persons living in one of global hotspots for the climate crisis – namely Africa, Central and South America, South Asia or on a Small Island Developing State – are 15 times more likely to die from a climate impact. In the last 50 years, close to 70% of all deaths from climate-related disasters have occurred in the 46 poorest countries.

For those of you sitting in the General Assembly Hall, you are likely sitting behind or next to the nameplate of one of those countries. We owe these countries and their peoples climate justice. We have a moral obligation to help those who have not caused this crisis but are being devastated by it.

Globally, it is estimated that vulnerable developing nations will need around \$340 billion a year by 2030 to adapt and build resilience to the climate crisis. But today, a mere \$20 billion a year is going to support these countries. Last year, the annual reported profits of Exxon Mobil, Chevron, BP, Shell, and Total - of nearly \$200 billion - was 10 times higher.

We continue to fail those on the frontlines. The Secretary-General has called on governments to tax the windfall profits of the fossil fuel industry to pay for increasing losses and damages from the climate crisis. The Secretary-General also continues to call for half of all climate finance to go towards protecting the most vulnerable.

Many of these nations also lack access to early warning systems - the most basic yet proven and effective tool to protect human lives and minimize damage ahead of a climate disaster. Six out of every ten Africans are not covered by early warning systems. Last year, the Secretary-General launched an initiative to provide early warning systems to every person on earth in the next five years. Join us in making this a reality.

Third, we must ensure that public and private finance flows at pace and scale towards the activities needed to address the climate crisis such as renewables and adaptation, and to the places that need it most – the emerging and vulnerable developing countries.

There is no absence of capital or liquidity in the global financial system. But finance is either sitting on the sidelines or invested in carbon pollution. Last year, a record \$1.4 trillion was invested in renewables and clean energy. But, the world needs to mobilize at least \$4 trillion a year by 2030 in renewables and clean energy investments to get on that 1.5-degree pathway.

While we need more public money, most of this new investment will have to come from the private sector. To attract the volume of private finance needed and make investments in developing countries more attractive, we need the MDBs, like the World Bank, to step up.

They will need to overhaul their business models and become more creative and risk-taking. The MDBs are owned by governments, and the largest and most powerful shareholder is the United States. We need them to wield their influence as such. Incrementalism cannot be the name of the game.

Fourth and finally, we need to strengthen international cooperation and create a culture of transparency, accountability and credibility.

One country alone cannot solve the climate crisis. Climate action should be an area for cooperation and collaboration – not competition, conflict, or confrontation.

The Secretary-General has championed new models of cooperation like the Just Energy Transition Partnerships - organized around the leadership of South Africa, Indonesia, and Viet Nam - to accelerate their transition away from coal to renewables. He has also called on the G20 to unite around a Climate Solidarity Pact in which they make a collective efforts in the 2020s to keep the 1.5-degree target alive.

Under this pact, developed countries would provide financial and technical assistance to help major emerging economies accelerate their renewable energy transition. But we also need the leadership and commitment of the private sector.

Friends,

Over the past few years, more and more businesses have made net-zero commitments.

But unfortunately, some were simply public relations stunts and exercises in corporate greenwashing. This prompted the Secretary-General to set up an Expert Group which recently issued a how-to guide for making credible, accountable net-zero pledges.

I urge you to support the Secretary-General's call for all corporate leaders to act on this important report.

He has asked them to put forward credible and transparent transition plans for achieving net-zero before his Climate Ambition Summit in September this year.

The transition to net-zero must be grounded in real emissions cuts – companies must not rely on low integrity carbon credits and shadow markets. We need all hands-on deck, not new loopholes that allow companies to keep polluting.

Friends,

Dr. King also warned us that there is such a thing as being too late. Let us heed this warning.

I have a very special message to the many young people gathered here today. You inspire us, but I'll be frank. My generation has failed you. I urge you to continue to hold us and attendees to account. And never give up the fight. The UN will always be on your side.

Friends,

The power of change is in your hands as citizens, students, consumers, investors, employers or employees. Act locally but think globally. Use your voice to be advocates for urgent and ambitious climate action at home and abroad.

To whom much is given, much is required. We need you to speak up – to your political leaders, business leaders, your friends, family and your schools, houses of worship and communities. Every voice and every action matters. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work. Together we can get the job done, save lives and create a prosperous future.

I thank you.