

# Climate action: Time for implementation

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I want to focus on the urgent and systemic issue of climate change, which is more than just an environmental problem. Not long ago, the Lancet Countdown report reminded us unequivocally that climate change is already a critical public health issue, one disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable as well as those least responsible for anthropogenic warming. Climate change is the result of our fossil fuel-entangled global economy. This week the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) announced that atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations continue to rise rapidly, and that their rate of growth in 2016 was 50% above the 10-year average before that. Concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> are now 145% of pre-industrial (before 1750) levels, the highest in 800,000 years.

Yet powerful interests continue to resist the transition towards a low-carbon economy, even as the old economic model is dying. Now is the time to accelerate our efforts. Our response today will define our collective future for generations to come . [...]

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However, there are fundamental barriers to overcome. Chief among these is what might be termed the “tragedy of the national horizon”, wherein policies to address climate change are designed primarily, if not exclusively, from a national perspective. But greenhouse gases emitted anywhere in the world have global impact. Narrow national agendas are fundamentally inadequate to deal with global climate disruption. [...]

The tragedy of the time horizon and that of the national horizon are mutually reinforcing. Short-termism and a narrow focus on national interests undermine effective action on emissions and limit the provision of resources to help the poorest and most vulnerable to cope with the climate impacts we already face and which will become increasingly severe. As well as deepening current patterns of poverty and inequality, inaction by the current generation further mortgages the future prospects of our children and grandchildren.

We are in a race against time. Without vision, ambition and resolve, more countries may yet retreat further into their national bunkers. The outcome would be a downwards spiral of increasing human, fiscal, financial and environmental insecurity. We would all suffer in such a bleak scenario.

A far more positive future still lies within our grasp, however. We have the means and the ingenuity to make a decisive transition to an inclusive, low-emissions, climate-resilient development pathway that benefits developed and developing countries alike. We need to combine pro-growth structural reforms with coherent climate policy and ensure that they are aligned with other Sustainable Development Goals.

In the Paris Agreement of December 2015, we have an international legal instrument that could and should help us meet these significant and urgent climate challenges. The Paris Agreement differs fundamentally from previous climate accords in terms of ambition, reach and commitment by the international community. Contributions to emissions reductions beyond 2020 are set out in the so-called nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Already 190 countries have pledged contributions to 2025 or beyond, and these represent more than 96% of global emissions as of 2016. Climate finance commitments by developed countries will play a vital role in facilitating higher levels of mitigation in emerging and developing countries.

The OECD was pleased to have played a positive role in the road that paved the way to Paris, through the OECD-IEA Climate Change Expert Group as well as by providing greater transparency about developed countries' progress in meeting their commitment to mobilise US\$100 billion a year for climate action in developing countries by 2020. And we are committed to continue working to ensure implementation. [...]

While vested interests will continue to resist the drive to combat climate change, the reality is that socio-economic transformation towards a low carbon economy is not only necessary, but inevitable. The only question is whether such transition will happen quickly enough. This change should take place both internationally and within nations. Stranded communities are more important than stranded assets. The risk of both increases if action is delayed. Action on issues such as local air pollution will help align short-term, national incentives with climate action over the next decade or two. And advances in technology will continue to enable and drive the transformation.

But the pace and scale of the transformation required to meet the Paris goals cannot be achieved without the positive feedbacks between strong government policies and the transformative potential of non-state actors. Developed countries also need to ensure that developing countries have access to the financial, technological and other support needed for them to scale up their own actions against climate change. The vast majority of governments are now committed to

both an ambitious global temperature goal and national actions to limit emissions. The Paris Agreement provides new hope that the tragedies of both time and national horizons can be overcome. The agreement provides the necessary dynamism to ensure that the ambition of action increases over time. Now is the time for governments above all, but also cities, businesses and ordinary citizens, to accelerate and scale up our efforts. As one cannot repeat enough, our response will define our collective future for generations to come.

This extract is adapted from OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría's speech "Climate action: Time for implementation", delivered at the Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto, Canada, 1 November 2017. The full 5,000 word speech is available at <http://oe.cd/SGGurriaClim>