



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Speech by Commissioner Hoekstra on the global climate action agenda at the University of Nairobi, Kenya

Nairobi, 7 November 2023

Thank you very much Mister Vice-Chancellor, for your exceptional words of welcome and for the great welcome here at the University.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear faculty, and of course dear students.

It is fantastic to see you and I'm honoured and privileged to be here with you today at your beautiful University.

It is my first time in Nairobi as European Commissioner for Climate Action.

But it is my second visit to Kenya this year.

Back in June, as Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, I already had the pleasure of visiting your beautiful country, visiting your president and many others of your government leaders.

And I have to say that I'm really glad to be back so soon after my previous trip, because it is another opportunity to strengthen the bonds between your country and the European Union.

I'm saying that because Kenya is a key partner for Europe and for the European Union, frankly speaking in many aspects.

We have a strong bilateral relationship, and we will soon expand it when we sign our Economic Partnership Agreement.

You are making amazing progress in your green and digital transitions, inspiring many across the globe, and the EU is very much looking forward to working alongside you, in partnership, in friendship, to make these transition a huge success.

But this is far from all of it.

In its most recent history, Kenya has developed itself into a truly crucial player for regional stability, security and of course prosperity.

In addition to this, I see the European Union and Kenya thinking quite alike in many multilateral issues, including on how we should tackle climate change – which has been the main reason for my visit today.

Dear friends, allow me to be honest.

The geopolitical situation the world is facing, we're all facing, is extremely challenging.

Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine has consequences far beyond European soil.

Democracy and rule of law are forcefully under threat in every corner of the world.

We see rising tensions in the Indo-Pacific.

The latest developments in the Middle East are creating new divisions across the region and the world, with uncertain consequences.

And of course, on the African continent itself, in the Sahel and in the Horn, we're witnessing fragile regimes challenged and sometimes overthrown by military coups and non-state armed groups.

And still, *still* this does not diminish the absolute urgency, the absolute necessity to tackle climate change.

Climate change is actually compounding these urgent challenges.

It is becoming, if you will, more geopolitical.

Populations that are affected by wars and instability also face droughts, they face floods, and they face natural disasters.

Climate change is a truly global crisis.

It affects all of us, all of us in all corners of the world.

And because of that, I feel it transcends political divisions and diverging interests.

We can only solve this when we work together.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear students

As a politician, I am hard-wired to think in terms of interests, which may well be conflicting and require that we make difficult choices.

I deeply believe, I *deeply believe* that the best outcomes for society are found when we work together with as many partners and parties as possible.

Bridge-building, finding compromises; it's second nature, it should be second nature to all of us.

But when it comes to climate change, there is another guiding principle, there should be another guiding principle.

And that principle, I'm sure that is honoured at this University, is science.

To tackle climate change, we have to make sure we are guided by science, we are guided by facts.

And as you will also know, the science is crystal clear.

To keep 1.5°C within reach, global greenhouse gas emissions must peak, and I say it again, must peak by 2025 at the latest – that is two years from now.

Science is also very clear about the next steps.

By 2030, global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 43% less than 2019 levels.

Then by 2035, we need to reach 60%.

And by 2050, we need to have reached net-zero CO₂ emissions, along with deep reductions of other greenhouse gas emissions.

Those are not just numbers, not just abstract things.

That is the only way, we – as a global community – will be able to make a 1.5C future a reality.

Dear friends, in four weeks, the world will gather once again, this time for COP28 in Dubai.

The latest scientific evidence shows that **current pledges and current targets made by countries are not nearly enough to limit global temperature increase to 1.5°C or well below 2°C.**

That situation is *deeply, deeply, deeply worrying.*

Our modelling shows that current global policies are leading us towards a temperature increase of 3°C.

And Africa is the continent that is most affected if we let this happen.

Already, in this region alone, the impact of drought in the Horn of Africa and Kenya has been devastating.

So, in order to tackle climate change, we have to succeed to do many things at the same time, even though that is very difficult.

Above all, we need drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions from all emitters, and especially all major emitters – the 20 countries in the G20 together are responsible for 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

And as the Vice-Chancellor said, if you actually look at Africa, that number is very, very small.

What we also need to do, is we need to marry this with support for communities to adapt and

prepare for the consequences of climate change, including through disaster risk reduction measures, and funding for the loss and damage that can be incurred as a result.

And if we manage, if we make enough progress on mitigation, the Loss and Damage Fund can be launched in Dubai, with the first pledges too.

Because if we don't cut greenhouse gas emissions, no amount of money will be able to pay the damages well.

This, in a nutshell, is the European Union's aim for COP28.

I am going to Dubai, to the COP on behalf of the European Union, with a clear mandate to build momentum for climate ambition, for climate action and implementation across *all* aspects of the climate agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear students,

In addition to implementing climate pledges, the world also needs to find ways to finance the green transition.

The reality that we're facing, is that the huge impact is such that no single institution, no single set of countries, no single set of companies, or even all the public money that we can muster, would be sufficient to address what is needed in terms of climate action. It's simple, that analysis.

To tackle climate change, **we need to mobilise trillions** (rather than billions) and adopt a change of mind-set.

We also require reforming the global financial system to mobilise also private finance to complement public funding.

We have to make sure that all who have the ability to contribute, actually will contribute.

Businesses, sectors, and non-traditional actors.

After all, haven't they also played a role in contributing to climate change?

And therefore, it is fair that they also contribute to the solution. I absolutely think so.

To get funding at the scale that is needed, we also need to explore more on unorthodox solutions.

I have said it here before, and I gladly repeat it here at this University.

Aviation is an avenue a priori of specific interest, because it is one of the things that is undertaxed all across the globe.

If many of us, here or in Europe, or any other part of the world, fill up at a gas station, you would also pay a substantial amount of taxes. In some countries in the European Union, the amount of taxes would amount to 60% of the total sum you're paying.

But if you move then to a plane, and fuel a jumbo jet, there would be paid zero, *absolutely zero* in kerosene taxes.

That is actually off, right?

So what we want to explore is an international kerosene tax, a maritime levy, a fossil fuels tax, even a share of ETS proceeds – no stone, no stone should be left untouched to make sure we do get the money needed to tackle this global challenge.

Then on the energy sector.

The energy sector is one of the largest contributors to global emissions – but it is also a sector where clean solutions do exist, and they are technologically mature and affordable.

And therefore, together with the COP28 President, the EU is building coalitions in support of fast tracking the energy transition.

We are proposing to set out global pledges on renewable energy, on energy efficiency, that would consist in the following:

- For renewables, **we must triple the installed capacity** to reach the amount that we seek for by 2030. And by the way, I can only commend Kenya for doing such an amazing job in its renewable energy percentage.

- For energy efficiency, **we must double the global rate of energy efficiency improvements, already in this decade.**

Your President Ruto is championing this agenda too, and I thank him wholeheartedly for his support in this effort.

Because global initiatives can actually make a difference in our climate action.

What's more, these targets are ambitious. But they are actually achievable.

Let me give you some numbers.

Last year, sales of heat pumps increased by 10% across the world, and 40% in the EU alone.

More generally speaking, 2022 truly was a record year for renewables: global renewable energy capacity went up by an unprecedented 13%.

The world does also make strides in energy efficiency: in the EU alone, we made efficiency gains of 8%.

That might sound small, but you know how statistics work. If you think about what this means in one year, you see how tremendously substantial this is.

Africa has huge potential in the green energy transition.

Whether it's possibilities to develop renewables and green hydrogen, access to critical raw materials, or the availability of a young, skilled workforce.

That is a solid basis to grow and gain a truly global competitive advantage.

As I said, Kenya itself already is a frontrunner on renewables.

You are generating enormous amounts, truly impressive amounts of electricity through renewable sources, with a target to reach a 100% of electricity in 2030.

That truly is a remarkable record, and shows that the African continent offers many solutions to the climate crisis.

But to help these benefits come to fruition we need the right level of investment, a robust policy reform framework and we need technology.

And the EU is a committed partner for Africa's green industrialisation.

Together we have the know-how and industrial capacity to help scale up renewable capacity across your continent.

The EU is the second largest market for renewables, with specific strengths and the manufacturing of electrolysers.

European industry is also leading in geothermal and hydropower technologies – for which there is truly great potential in Africa.

Finally, the EU can also offer digital solutions for grids and technologies for manufacturing solar PVs.

In Kenya, the EU's Global Gateway program already focuses on public and private investments in both the green and digital transformation.

We are investing over EUR 3.47 billion – that's more than 530 billion Kenyan Shilling – in 120 green projects, and around EUR 430 million – equivalent to over 67 billion Kenyan Shilling – on the digital transition.

The existing cooperation between the EU and Kenya is a truly shining example of how our partnership can work in practice.

We are eager to sign and operationalize the Economic Partnership Agreement by the end of this year.

Dear students,

Before I wrap up, allow me to add just a few lines on your own particular situation amidst all of this.

We would truly be nowhere without you, without youth, without young people demanding us to take action.

There is a scholar and writer that I used to read a lot about, Robert van Gulik, and he has one of his main characters saying that 'there is no substitute for youth'.

And just recently, a European climate activist said the best action you can take against climate change is to get organized.

I would like to underline that: the decisions that governments make this decade are crucial, for all our future, but particularly for your future.

The difference between 1.5- and a 3-degree temperature increase sounds small but is actually impressive, and it will be driven a lot in the lifetime that you have ahead of you.

The European Green Deal itself was a response to a call for action from millions of young Europeans.

Young people are also major innovators in climate change and they hold answers to many of our most pressing issues.

We have seen this through your immense engagement at the recent Africa Climate Summit and especially during its Youth Assembly.

I am truly happy that we support the participation of 24 youth delegates from our Youth Sounding Boards across Africa to attend this Summit.

So I would like to encourage you to keep pushing for action, help politicians, help decision-makers and find the solutions that work for all of our society.

It won't always work, but remember: failing and falling is actually part of life.

When you fall, you get up, and move forward. You try again.

That is relevant not only at a very personal scale, but also on global scale.

Coming from such a young continent, the voice of African youth is a crucial one on action, and particularly on international climate action.

Yes, the bar for COP28 is high and rightly so.

Because this is what next generations expect from all of us.

Thank you.

Link to full speech [here](#).

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