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Text of speech by Professor Inigo Losada

International Actions to prevent climate changes: How? By who? With what outcomes insofar?

I have decided to structure my assessment by considering different players and sectors in the climate change arena: The scientific community; governments and their role in climate negotiations; the business sector; technology and the newcomers

The scientific community

Over the last few years science has continued to provide substantial and robust evidence on how climate is changing; on the role of humankind on global warming and on the attribution to climate change of many of the impacts and damages that our planet and societies are experiencing.

Several reports have been recently published but I would like to highlight a couple of them today.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5° C was released in October, last year (2018). The report concludes that limiting the global temperature increase below 1.5°C above preindustrial levels will result in our world suffering fewer negative impacts on intensity and frequency of extreme events, on resources, ecosystems, biodiversity, food security, cities, tourism and a less difficult adaptation.

But it is also concluded that keeping global warming to 1.5°C will require rapid and far reaching transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport and cities.

Furthermore, the report provides clear indication that to reach that goal, the global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide need to fall about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050.

Fortunately, the report does also assess the feasibility of mitigation and adaptation options, and the enabling conditions for strengthening and implementing the systemic changes that are needed in the context, for example, of sustainable development and the synergies with the SDGs.

Only a few months ago the World Meteorological Organization has published the "State of Climate in 2018". The main conclusion being that the physical and socio-economic impacts of climate change are accelerating as record greenhouse gas concentrations drive global mean temperatures to increasingly dangerous levels.

In this stocktaking report on climate impacts: 35 million people affected by floods in 2018; an increase of the number of undernourished people to 821 million in 2017, partly due to droughts affecting the agriculture sector; over 2 million people displaced by weather and climate-related disasters; over 1600 deaths associated to heatwaves and wildfires, are some of the direct impacts affecting population. The report also collects detailed information on, equally relevant, climate impacts on the environment.

Two additional, extremely relevant IPCC special reports are to appear this year: The Special Reports on Climate and Land and on The Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate.

This new collective efforts by the international scientific community will be surely adding new evidence to keep the red warning light flashing: *“Hey, we’re pushing our planet to its limits; action is to be taken urgently.”*

Governments: Climate negotiations

I’m sure that we all will all agree on the fact that, due to the number of participants (196 countries) and the force of the commitments, the Paris Agreement, in 2015, has become a landmark event, unprecedented since the early years of climate change negotiations.

The agreement, went into force in November of 2016 and, according to the latest information it has been ratified by 183 nations and the European Union.

There are a number of key points that make the agreement unique: 1) a long-term commitment to keep global warming below 2°C; 2) the existence of certain legally binding rules; 3) fair agreement recognizing that states have common but differentiated responsibilities; 4) a sustainable and dynamic agreement promoting an action agenda, aiming at implementing accelerators to ensure more ambitious progress every 5 years; 5) adaptation becoming a central issue; 6) a transparent agreement facilitating mechanisms to assess nationally determined contributions to climate change mitigation and adaptation and 7) financial ad hoc instruments.

But what has happened since?

Unfortunately, global emissions show no sign of peaking and continue reaching record levels. The intended nationally determined contributions submitted, so far, represent 192 countries covering 96.4% of the global emissions. However, based on recent analysis, if all governments achieved their commitments, the world will likely warm 3°C, what is clearly insufficient.

COP24-(2018) Katowice. At COP24, countries left some notable gaps and unresolved issues.

However, it has to be said that countries agreed on the Rulebook that outlines how they plan, implement and review their climate actions to fulfill the promise of the Paris Agreement.

Key points of the agreement were on regular communication, reporting, review and stock-taking of progress on curbing emissions, adapting to impacts, increasing and aligning investments, and considering loss and damage.

Countries also reaffirmed the timeline agreed in Paris for countries to submit national climate commitments (known as Nationally Determined Contributions or NDCs) by 2020.

Unfortunately, Katowice failed to fully endorse the IPCC Special Report and consequently the importance of keeping global temperature rise to within 1.5° C. The endorsement was blocked by several countries, all major oil producers.

In the very near future, high expectations are set for the coming UN Climate summit to be held in New York, next September. A number of pending issues to catalyze the Paris Agreement and the way toward a full transformation of economies in line with Sustainable Development Goals will need to be addressed under the leadership of the UN Secretary-General.

Technology

The need to reduce the global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050 requires substantial technological efforts.

During the last years rapid advances have been reached in zero-carbon energy related technologies including renewable energy generation, transmission and storage; electric vehicles; batteries; clean fuels and others.

An important part of the solution is expected to be found thanks to the deployment of large amounts of renewable energy, and this is thanks to the exponential cost reductions and efficiency increases achieved over the last few years. This together with the phasing out of old fossil-fuel industries and the new opportunities offered by the energy transition are essential steps to achieve highly ambitious decarbonization goals by 2050.

The business and finance sectors

The implication of the business and finance sectors in climate action has also grown exponentially since the Paris Agreement, mostly motivated by the identification climate risks.

Risks associated to the direct impacts of the acute and chronic physical impacts of climate change on business assets, operations or indirectly through their value chains

and

Risks associated to the transition into a low-carbon economy

has mobilized the private sector into a lot of different initiatives worldwide.

But it is not a matter of risk only. Efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change also produce opportunities for organizations, for example, through resource efficiency and cost savings, the adoption of low-emission energy sources, the development of new products and services, access to new markets, and building resilience along the supply chain.

There are multiple examples of companies that have already taken advantage of said opportunities.

As a concluding remark it can be said that the private sector is increasing its relative weight in the climate change arena, becoming more balanced with governments in the years to come.

Finally, some newcomers

Youth engagement, especially high-school boys and girls under the leadership of Greta Thunberg, who coined the slogan *FridaysforFuture*, has erupted into the climate action arena demanding governments to align with the Paris Agreement. We hope them to stay, grow and push towards more ambitious goals.

Summary

After this summary, good news is that climate actions are moving forward at diverse fronts. Moreover, we know that key components of the solution are already available. So we shall feel optimistic about the future.

Bad news is that we still lack ambition and leadership and concrete actions to do what is needed while the window of opportunity is closing.

Thank you for your attentions