

CLIMATE CHANGE GLOBAL LECTURES BRIDGING THE GAP: CLIMATE ADAPTATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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There is no shared future on this planet on fire without climate adaptation.

Let me repeat: No shared future without climate adaptation. That's not bad news.

Climate adaptation is a resilience agenda, a growth agenda, a 'win-win' agenda. In fact, climate adaptation is integral to the world's shared future. To prosperity.

Professor Li, distinguished faculty, ladies and gentlemen, students. My name is Patrick Verkooijen and I am the President and CEO of the Global Center on Adaptation. I am also Chancellor of the University of Nairobi. So I am pleased and honoured to be joining you in this formidable bastion of knowledge. Tsinghua University.

I am pleased to deliver to you today my annual lecture as head of the Global Center on Adaptation, or GCA, as we call it. I thank Professor Li Zheng for your kind introduction. I would also like to acknowledge your service as Secretary-General of the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate. I hope we can formalize the University of Nairobi co-driving that important initiative. May I likewise offer to you my gratitude for this opportunity to address the students of Tsinghua University.

The GCA is the world's leading global organization helping to adapt our world to the climate crisis. I have come to China because China is a founding member of the GCA. Home to one of our key international offices for Asia – right here in Beijing.

I want to recognize the leadership of China and of President Xi Jinping who pledged to build a global community based on our "shared future" and prosperity. I also want to express my deep gratitude, also on behalf of GCA Chairman Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to President Xi for his unprecedented global leadership on adaptation and co-founding the GCA. I would also like to recognize Minister Huang Runqiu who sits on GCA's board. Because I see China's global leadership being absolutely critical to success in climate adaptation globally. I'll return to this point.

But first, I want to frame my lecture for you today in three key parts.

One: the planet on fire. The interconnected global challenges we face: debt, inflation, pandemics, threats to security, trade. The reality on the ground in some of the hardest-hit regions like Africa .

Two: How has the world been responding to climate calamities? What does the scorecard look like? Who is succeeding? Who is falling behind?

And three: Where do we go from here? For those hardest hit. For China. And the world.

Allow me to begin with a story. A story of my own. I am from the Netherlands. Those of you who know us might be aware that 40% of the Netherlands is below sea-level. Extremely prone to flooding. Our very existence is only possible thanks to modern engineering. What you might not know about me is that I was once a climate refugee. When I was a teenager in the Netherlands, we had totally freak rainfall and floods. Worse than anyone's living memory at the time. To this day, I can still picture my late father sitting on the roof of our house as we evacuated. The floodwaters swamped our whole home. The whole town. Much of the country. The start of climate change.

The disaster was also due to a lack of three basic things: Understanding or recognition – not being caught by surprise. Planning – preparing for the new and changing reality. Financing – funds flowing effectively into planned actions. You have to understand that the world has changed. You need to plan for it. And you have to put the down payment to make the plan real.

Now we know. Since then, seas rose further. Floods worsened. Climate change has intensified. The Netherlands has faced far worse. But we manage, for now. Thanks to the right essential building blocks of climate adaptation.

Around the world though, it's a very different picture. According to the United Nations (UN), in 2022 nearly 32 million people were displaced by extreme weather events. According to the UN, four billion people were hurt or made homeless in the 20 years between 1995 and 2015 because of weather-related disasters. That's 200 million people each year affected. We must act.

I'm sure you all know last year was Earth's hottest ever. In fact, the 10 hottest years in our 174-year record all took place in the last decade. Twelve straight months now are the hottest months of all time. We are racing towards the 1.5 degrees limit in the Paris Agreement within the coming decade.

President Xi Jinping rightly asked the bold question: "Where should humanity be heading?"

Well, as UN Secretary-General Guterres warned just last week, we could hit 1.5 degrees in the next five years. He said we are headed down a "highway to climate hell" and we desperately need an "exit ramp" – off that highway. While the world must focus on containing warming, we now do so from inside the eye of the storm. Our world already on fire.

We – at the GCA – are not only concerned. No, we are obsessed about the immediate dangers and determined about the responses that our fast-warming climate imply.

I travel to Africa to meet with African leaders. To see that climate change is taking the food off Africa's table. That's in nobody's interest. Not Africa's, not Europe's, not America's, not China's.

I just came from Bangladesh where I met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Bangladesh is a delta nation like the Netherlands. A quarter of the country is about one meter above sea level. In 2020, extreme flooding put a third of it under water. But they don't have the resources of the Netherlands yet. As the climate crisis accelerates, will Bangladesh be prepared? If not, how does Asia handle a displacement crisis? A low-income nation of 170 million people.

And remember: We do not face a static phenomenon. With climate change, we face dynamic changes. Non-linear developments. As we move to 1.5 degrees Celsius warming from where we are today at 1.2 degrees Celsius, extreme heat spells will actually double. Extreme drought risk may increase by four to eight times.

So we cannot prepare for tomorrow in reference to yesterday or even today. We must project ourselves into a very different future. We have to brace now for massive, fast-paced change.

Here in China, you are no stranger to climate devastation. The BBC famously labelled your 2023 summer: "China's summer of climate destruction." In Xinjiang, one town reported 52.2 degrees Celsius! Right here in Beijing there was a temporary ban on outdoor work in a month of consecutive extreme heat days. In 2011, China reported six to eight serious monthly floods. Last August, that number was 82. And last July, it was 130. Thanks to the flooding and extreme heat, whole regions lost 40% of their staple rice crop.

As you will also know from the global climate breakdown reported on as it hits countries around the world, nobody, anywhere, anymore is spared climate devastation. The Lancet has predicted that Dengue is expected to re-emerge in Europe, which also had the historic "Cerberus" heatwave last summer. Where extreme heatwaves have claimed tens of thousands of lives among the frail and elderly. Cities in America have been torched, flooded, flattened.

Fortunately, of the three key ingredients I mentioned for effective adaptation, the world has made huge strides on recognition and understanding. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The Paris Agreement. The communications of the World Meteorological Organization, science bodies. Organizations like the GCA. Your own Ministry of Environment and other government bodies. This very University. We have all been busy studying, analyzing, publishing, talking, sharing information. We understand climate change like never before. Gaps remain, though, in planning and preparation – but especially in financing.

The cruel injustice of climate change is also that not only are those least responsible usually also the hardest hit. They likewise have the most limited resources and capabilities to respond. The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights said: We risk a "climate apartheid" where the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger and conflict while the rest of the world is left to suffer. In 10 years' time, a key GCA report estimated that an additional 100 million could be living in extreme poverty due to storm damage, drought and poor crop yields alone.

The world's most vulnerable continent is Africa. The IPCC has been very clear on that. It is also home to the largest share of the world's extreme poor. Most of the Least Developed Countries. And more than half the nations with the highest levels of unsustainable debt. Most vulnerable. Least resources. Severe debt. Also battling the worst inflation of any region. And a climate emergency that only escalates year-to-year.

All this is also happening at a time when the world itself is grappling with multiple, unprecedented threats. International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva, a GCA Board Member, call these "successive shocks": The pandemic, war and conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, and a cost-of-living crisis, among others.

Ladies and gentlemen, how then has the world responded to all this climate chaos? A planet beset by multiple crises. At a "historical inflection point" where the rise of Asia and Africa are resetting the global geopolitical landscape.

Let me start right here in China. I would like to congratulate President Xi on an excellent National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2035 published in 2022. The GCA was pleased to be able to offer support on its formulation. It will surely be possible to further strengthen it over time as we learn still more about climate impacts and interactions. But right now, the important thing is: You have the plan. You are prepared. And, I believe, China has been making good on that plan through landmark investments in the projects and activities mandated by the plan.

We have seen it in action ourselves. The GCA is supporting China's coastal city of Weihai, Shandong province, bringing international practices and developing a city-level climate resilient roadmap. We have also seen your deployment of solutions like the extraordinary "sponge cities" like Nanhui where green infrastructure of trees and plant beds, permeable pavements, and rooftop gardens soak up heavy rain, divert water, and avert floods.

This brings me to acknowledging China's full accomplishments on the green path. Thanks to China's efforts to develop

renewable energy, global costs of wind power have been cut by 80%, photovoltaic by 90%. Your installed renewable energy capacity has overtaken that of fossil fuels. You have the fastest carbon intensity reduction in the world. You will move from carbon peaking to carbon neutrality in the shortest time span in history – before 2060. “Green”, by the way was the most used word in Premier Li Qiang’s national “work report” speech of March 5th this year.

But what about elsewhere? Europe, America also have adaptation plans and huge investments are underway underpinning these. The EU, for example, has a comprehensive adaptation strategy and vision to 2050. To become a climate-resilient society. Fully adapted to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. That EU strategy is part of the European Green Deal which aims to mobilize \$1 trillion in investment over the decade. Will it be enough? Only time will tell.

In the Netherlands, we are still doubling down on our coastal protection and water management – like never before. Just recently, the Netherlands invested over \$2.5 billion in interventions at 30 different locations: Flood plains of rivers lowered or deepened, high water channels created. Adaptation as a constant work in progress.

The kicker is that investing in climate adaptation makes good economic and financial sense. As the GCA’s own research has shown, every dollar invested in adaptation generates between two and ten dollars – in return. This is the downpayment for climate security. Pay now, avoid huge losses later. That’s the mathematics of climate adaptation. In fact, it is the economics of adaptation.

Because if you get caught out like we did in the Netherlands, when I was a climate refugee, you are going to wish that you had rather made that one dollar payment – for climate protection instead of letting so much value simply wash away. By one estimate, climate change is linked to wiping out 9% of the value of the world’s housing stock by 2050. That’s \$25 trillion. A huge bill hanging over people’s lives.

But the benefits of adaptation go beyond. They have what we at GCA call a “triple dividend.” Avoided losses, positive economic gains, and enhanced social and environmental benefits. Because those investments in adaptation also bring new jobs – green and resilient jobs. And they protect and promote public health and the environment. That is why climate adaptation is a growth agenda. It’s a sustainable development agenda too.

Because of climate change, the world can no longer have sure development into the future, like before, unless we “climate proof” that development. We won’t achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN unless we get climate adaptation right.

This effort is happening now in China. Thanks to your national adaptation strategy. You are updating your building codes across the country so that your new infrastructure will handle future risks. Your new roads, airports, factories, housing complexes. Engineers will now factor in climates of the future into the designs and builds of today.

Unfortunately, China’s “fighting spirit” that rises in response to risks and challenges like the climate has not been tapped into yet everywhere worldwide. Especially not in countries most exposed to the climate crisis. For reasons of local resource constraints, as mentioned before: Africa, the small island developing states, Southern Asia. But as we aim to build the global community that President Xi Jinping has called for in this age of climate devastation, everyone needs to worry about the success of adaptation. Including far beyond national borders in other regions of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, this brings me to the third section of this lecture: Where do we go from here?

For us, at the GCA, our work began with the Global Commission on Adaptation in 2018, spearheaded by our distinguished chair at the GCA, 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon. China was part of that Commission from the get-go. The Commission found that investing \$1.8 trillion globally in climate adaptation schemes

over this decade could generate \$7.1 trillion in total net benefits. Its key conclusion was also that to “Adapt our World,” the GCA was needed above all to mobilize support worldwide, to help those hardest hit but lacking the resources to effectively respond on their own.

In returning to the three key ingredients of effective climate adaptation. It's indeed finance that's missing the most. Even half of Africa's countries and nearly all the world's most climate vulnerable nations. They already have national adaptation plans and strategies in place. And – of course – they understand climate ramifications. Often more than anyone. Because it's part of their lives: Living within the climate frontlines.

So what did we, the GCA, do? Well, in 2021, we gathered Africa's leaders, together with the African Union and the African Development Bank. And they launched with us what has since become the world's largest single climate adaptation program: The Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program. We call it AAAP. To mobilize \$25 billion of climate-proofed development by 2025. We have already mobilized some \$10 billion working in 35 African countries, shaping more than 40 large-scale projects with more than 50 million beneficiaries, creating over 700,000 new jobs. And what is the model of the AAAP? We climate-proof individual development projects that are financed by multilateral development banks and IFIs.

The GCA acts as a knowledge broker. We mobilize the world's leading expertise. And we determine what is needed in every financed project to climate-proof it for the future. It means the funders have their insurance policy. That the project won't fail. And the communities can reap the benefits all the way down the line.

We have also started to create a AAAP in Asia. Our program began in Bangladesh where we also have a GCA office working on over \$1 billion of investments already. Improving resilience of 10 million people and creating thousands of jobs. And we're currently working on creating a similar program dedicated to small island states – the SIDS.

But remember. The call is to: “Adapt our World.” Even in Africa with the world's largest adaptation program to-date, we haven't covered every financed project or every country. We have to keep scaling up. 100% of development finance to Africa climate-proofed. That's the only target we should have.

So we have to double down. Africa's adaptation finance needs alone are going to be \$50 billion each year come 2030. Current flows of adaptation finance globally are half that amount right now. Climate adaptation is the “poor cousin” of climate mitigation. But we cannot let it be that way. The safety and well-being, right now, of people everywhere has to come first. Because billions of people around the world, their lives are now at stake. We no longer have the luxury to “wait and see.” And fortunately, we also know that if you invest, you save and you prosper.

International adaptation finance is vital to help vulnerable nations build their own capacities, strengthen their own institutions, and develop their own programs to adapt. And ladies and gentlemen, at the Glasgow UN climate COP in 2021, there was an absolutely crucial decision that the developed countries would double their international finance for climate adaptation by 2025. To bring balance to the famous \$100 billion a year of climate finance, which is overwhelmingly still focused on climate mitigation, on cutting emissions. Unfortunately, just a year out from when this target should be met, that target is in serious jeopardy.

So I would really like to take this opportunity to appeal to China. Be the champion of this cause: adaptation. Raise it in your high-level dialogues with the US, and other key fora. Because if the rich nations fail to double down on climate adaptation, the world's poorest and least responsible will suffer. And in the globalized world of today, we all will feel the consequences of that injustice.

There are champions among the developed nations who have been doubling down by committing and working to double their contributions to adaptation finance: Norway, the UK, Denmark, Canada, France, my own country the Netherlands,

amongst others. But we cannot accept failure come next year's COP in Brazil. Far too much is at stake. Rather than growing, adaptation finance may even have shrunk. Global climate finance of all kinds doubled to \$1.3 trillion annually in the last two years, but the share of adaptation finance shrunk from 7% to just 5% of it.

And yet, there are indications that we can move to higher levels of financing. The IMF's crucial Resilience and Sustainability Trust or RSF has unlocked billions of new assistance for resilient development. And the GCA is proud to be a technical advisor to the IMF on the RSF.

I must, of course, further underscore that the \$100 billion is just the tip of the iceberg of the finance needed to truly adapt our world. Developing countries require \$3.3 trillion in adaptation finance by 2035. The task is to move as fast as possible from billions to trillions.

The trillions that will be mobilized in the EU for adaptation, that are being mobilized in China already, need to be mobilized in every economy. Everywhere. Because a climate shock in one location, they are now so severe and increasingly catastrophic, will be felt in every region in the future. If Africa's breadbasket regions are torn apart by extreme drought, global prices of grain will go up. Inflation will be affected. Your own pockets will be hit. That, ladies and gentlemen, is why adaptation all over the planet is essential to our shared future as a global community.

Speaking again of China's own leadership and the importance of that, I would also like to propose to China a further suggestion. President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road initiative has become a hand across continents – the "BRI". Spurring the development of the world. Demonstrating that China's own development is win-win for everyone. There is a lot of momentum about greening BRI and the "Green BRI", which is a great development.

Given climate chaos, there's also a need for "a resilient BRI." GCA will be very pleased to support China to ensure that the BRI investments are resilient to climate change so that your development projects in other countries will have the same climate adaptation built into them as the ones at home – thanks to your national adaptation strategy. That would be win-win for everyone involved. BRI beneficiaries will see the fruits of China's cooperation lasting better and longer. And those projects are your flag-bearers overseas. While China also gets an insurance policy for its investments offshore often in extremely climate vulnerable parts of the world.

With the AAAP, with a resilient BRI, with the doubling of climate adaptation finance by 2025, and scaled-up and balanced international finance after that, we have a shot at adapting our world. And, once more, China's leadership role in rising to this challenge could not be more vital.

Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot conclude without taking this opportunity to directly address the students in this room. You are the future. It is especially your future that hangs in the balance because of the climate crisis. And youth are the largest population in history today: 1.21 billion young people alive. And, as a Chancellor of another major university in Africa: Nairobi, where we have over 40,000 students. Let's ask, what can you do to shape the future? Many things.

It starts by being informed and being wise. You are already ticking that box by being a part of this school, this lecture, and your faculty here. But what really matters is when you leave these halls. I urge you to bring with you into your future workplace the passion to work as engines of change for a resilient future of shared prosperity.

I would also like to share a bit about the GCA's work with youth. We are building a youth adaptation network of over 15,000 young people – in more than 150 countries. I invite you all to join this network. And I strongly encourage your active participation. On the 12th of October this year, we organize a global mobilization of youth on climate adaptation: Youth Climate Adaptation Action Day. To drive youth-led climate adaptation solutions.

In Africa, we are already providing financial support for youth leaders to scale-up the best adaptation solutions. With support packages of up to \$100,000 per youth adaptation pioneer in areas such as agriculture, digital solutions, and nature-based innovations. We would be pleased to also develop such programs with China, in partnership with the government and universities.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to close by saying this: We seek to build a global community. With a shared future. Harmony. Shared Prosperity. Common Progress. But climate change threatens all of that. We need to tap into the “fighting spirit” to respond.

Thank you for being champions of adapting our world. Thank you, China, to demonstrate the bold leadership we need to secure this planet on fire. Thank you all for your attention today. Together, climate adaptation is unstoppable.

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