

**Edinburgh, United Kingdom**

**12 October 2021**

**Deputy Secretary-General's remarks to the TED Countdown [as delivered]**

1           As a girl I walked along the shores of Lake Chad, one of the largest lakes in  
2 Africa. It went on forever, touching four countries: Chad, Niger, Cameroon and  
3 my own country, Nigeria. It seemed like an ocean to me at the time – with 30  
4 million people relying on its bounty.

5           Sadly, today as you fly over Lake Chad you won't see much – it's a fraction of  
6 its original size. Ninety per cent of this fresh-water basin has dried up – and with  
7 it millions and millions of livelihoods: farmers, fisherfolk and our market-  
8 women. Climate change takes yet another victim.

9           Now add another extreme weather event: the Harmattan — what was once  
10 a short three-month season of dust and wind. One farmer told me the dust

11 storms are coming earlier and bigger every year. A single storm can wipe out  
12 an entire year's crop overnight. The human and ecological cost? More jobs lost,  
13 hunger, families displaced. A perfect storm for crushing poverty and, even more  
14 sadly, violence.

15 And so, it may be a challenge to grow food today in the Lake Chad Basin, but  
16 it has also become a fertile ground for extremists to take root, wreaking havoc  
17 on peace.

18 Sadly, touch down anywhere in the world and you'll hear more tragic stories  
19 of climate devastation. Droughts, floods, wildfires – lives and livelihoods in  
20 jeopardy – tipping towards catastrophe.

21 And yet, despite it all, I still have hope in our human family. And you might  
22 ask, why? It's our capacity for human endeavour, to survive against all odds.

23 One that created the extraordinary promise of the UN Paris Agreement, and its  
24 power to drive the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, for people and for  
25 planet.

26 We know that the promise of Paris aims to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees,  
27 to ensure that we survive as a human family. To get there, we know exactly what  
28 we must do. We must decarbonize the global economy by 2050, by way of  
29 halving the emissions in this decade. We must make coal history, with coal  
30 phased out in rich countries by 2030, and in other countries by 2040.

31 The G20 produces 80 percent of all greenhouse gas pollution, and so they  
32 too must - these twenty global leaders - take responsibility and lead. We must  
33 stop spending trillions subsidizing fossil fuels, clogging the lungs of our people,  
34 and destroying forests and oceans. And we must provide the resources that are

35 needed for a just, green and blue transition. We know that these are all essential  
36 ingredients to fulfil the Paris Agreement.

37 Now try to re-imagine with me what this journey to net-zero emissions could  
38 look like, through another lens; one that puts our focus on investing in people  
39 to reach their potentials, while protecting our home – planet Earth.

40 Decarbonization – a powerful vehicle for climate action, but also for  
41 delivering on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Let me give you an  
42 example of what this looks like.

43 The Great Green Wall – an idea born in Africa over a decade ago – at the  
44 edge of the Sahara. It aims to stop desertification and restore a hundred million  
45 hectares of degraded lands, from Senegal in the west to Djibouti in the horn of

46 Africa. It is an ambitious plan to plant a hundred million trees, improve water  
47 harvesting and the use of land.

48 Clearly the climate benefits will be enormous. But it's about much more than  
49 keeping dust in the desert. It's about creating a green economic corridor for  
50 more than half a billion people – men, women, children. One that builds local  
51 value chains, strengthens economies, and fosters a young, fast-growing  
52 workforce. And as an economic opportunity grows, hope for the future becomes  
53 the reality in millions of lives, and the space for terrorism, extremism, recedes.

54 The Great Green Wall inspires me because it is a journey of the human  
55 potential. Potential to amplify the deep knowledge of indigenous people, who  
56 survive and thrive in harmony with nature. Potential to harness technology to  
57 connect, and to bridge the renewable energy divide, especially for women and

58 for girls. The potential to transform food systems in ways which make people  
59 and planet healthier. So what's holding us back? What will it take for this  
60 potential to become a shared lived reality?

61 It would be easy for me to say money – so, let me say it: money, more  
62 money. It's a big part of the solution. We need to make good now on the  
63 handshake that we had at Paris of a hundred billion dollars. And that was  
64 promised annually. Rich countries – let me say here and now – we're looking  
65 at you, for the unfinished business. You must step up. And you must do it  
66 urgently.

67 The other ingredient we need is solidarity. Sometimes that seems to be in  
68 fairly short supply. But we do know it exists. After all, it's solidarity that forged  
69 the Paris Agreement. And it's solidarity that got us the Montreal Protocol, and

70 there you see that the Ozone layer is saved, and our world is healing. But we  
71 need to rekindle that spirit. And we need to do that now.

72 It's not too late, but the window of opportunity is closing, which brings me  
73 back to you. You're the reason that I have hope. Time and time again, we've  
74 seen that when people raise their voices, that chorus becomes too urgent and  
75 too loud for leaders to ignore. That chorus for bold climate action is growing –  
76 but it's in fits and starts. Climate change doesn't pause, and neither must we.

77 Now, last I checked, every single person in this room, and all those  
78 watching online – teachers, presidents, shareholders, chief executives,  
79 scientists, employees, mums and dads – everyone on Earth is a citizen on this  
80 planet.

81           So now is the time to stand up, with the courage of your convictions, raise  
82           your voices yet again and demand our leaders to take action on the promise of  
83           a 1.5-degree world. Friends, it's time to make some serious noise, to transform  
84           our world.

85           Right now, there is another young girl – maybe it's Kolo, maybe it's Aisha,  
86           maybe it's Fatima – walking on the shores of Lake Chad. She's looking out and  
87           wondering what her future may hold. Will it be an ocean of opportunity? It  
88           could be. Or will it be a wasteland of dust as far as the eyes can see? She's  
89           asking that question of all leaders who hold her future in their hands. And  
90           she's also asking it of all of us here today and around the world.

91           The time for real action has come. The choice is ours, individually,  
92           collectively. What will you do?

Thank you.

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