

BARBARA WARD LECTURE

Outstanding women in development

GUEST SPEAKER

Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

DATE

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LOCATION

1 Birdcage Walk, London

Ms. Camilla Toulmin, Director of IIED

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

While it gives me great pleasure to deliver this year's Barbara Ward lecture at the IIED, I will frankly admit that it is daunting to participate in a lecture series named after what Time Magazine called one of the most influential visionaries of the 20th century.

This visionary woman once said: "We live in an epoch in which the solid ground of our preconceived ideas shakes daily under our certain feet." Already in the 1970s, Barbara knew that 'business-as-usual' no longer represented 'solid ground'. Always ahead of her time, she knew that we have to combine our immediate commitment to meeting human needs with our longer term need to protect the Earth as a place suitable for human life now and in the future. She consistently stressed the need to simultaneously address the 'inner limits' of human requirements and the 'outer limits' of what the Earth can sustain. With this, she laid the basis for the Brundtland Commission's eventual definition of sustainable development.

Barbara gave us a firm foundation 50 years ago. The question for us is, what have we built on this foundation? We are all aware of the increasing understanding that has evolved since then. We all know of the advances surrounding sustainable development that have been achieved since 1972, not least the 1992 Rio Summit, the birth of the Rio Conventions of which the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is one, and the work that has been done under each of these.

We are now fast approaching the opening of the Rio+20 conference which will allow the world to take stock of past efforts, as well as look to the future. And with 'business-as-usual' making the ground under our feet shake now more than ever before, with billions of people still in abject poverty and with environmental depletion and greenhouse emissions at an all time high, one cannot help but conclude that this was not what Barbara Ward had in mind.



We, the human race — as the only stewards of this planet — need to double up our efforts! While arriving at the concept of sustainable development was a critical breakthrough in the 1970s and 1980s, and while putting in place the policy frameworks that would drive sustainable development was a laudable achievement in the 1990s and early 2000s — acting to get the world onto a truly sustainable pathway has now become an urgent imperative.

- Still over 3 billion people live on less than \$2.50 per day
- Still over 1 billion people have no access to clean water
- Still some 2.4 billion people have no access to reliable, safe energy
- Still some 1.2 billion people suffer from chronic hunger

All this in the 21st century! Clearly, this situation is morally unacceptable. To make matters worse, we have realised that climate change and its impacts will exacerbate the suffering of the billions of people that make up these painful statistics. In fact, climate change has the potential to undo many of the development gains that have been made, including in the context of the Millennium Development Goals. Yet still greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise.

Ladies and gentlemen, sustainable development now needs a decisive breakthrough — but this time a breakthrough in action. The time for concept development is past. The urgency of action is upon us. We must trigger the sustainability transformation now, and a critical component of that is the energy revolution that needs to both address emissions and power the world's move into a sustainable future.

As the daughter of a revolutionary, I can assure you that I am not calling for an armed revolution. The type of revolution we need is the kind that occurred around information technology in the past 20 years.

The good news is that we are not starting from scratch.

Momentum for both the sustainability and the energy revolutions is building — and this can be seen in emerging policies and in growing investment trends. Key emerging policies include both climate change and renewable energy policies.

- Almost all countries have climate change policies in place that deal with both adaptation to the impacts of climate change, as well as with emission reductions or mitigation. They are there to be built upon.
- All industrialised countries have specific mitigation pledges to 2020.
- 49 Developing countries have mitigation pledges to 2020.
- And 118 countries now have renewable energy policies in place.

In terms of investment trends, the transformation is slowly becoming visible and ... I would like to underline ... is powering ahead despite difficult economic and investment conditions. In Davos earlier this year, I was encouraged to hear the commitment to renewables continues to be strong. Last December, Bloomberg reported that the trillionth dollar of investment in renewable energy had just been spent.

This is occurring for the very good reason that clean and renewable energy solutions are becoming the smart investment of the future because they will thrive in almost any economic scenario.

Next to increasing investments and budding national policies, international climate policy is becoming clearer and is now an important contributing factor to sustainable development and the clean energy revolution.

In that context allow me to give you a quick overview of the Durban Climate Change Conference and its outcomes.

Although media reporting was mixed, I believe that time will show that the Durban Climate Change Conference was the most encompassing and furthest reaching conference in the history of the climate change negotiations.

In terms of mitigation, Durban accomplished three crucial outcomes, with increasing levels of ambition:

1. It achieved a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol, starting January 2013, thereby ensuring the continuity of the legal system and of the Kyoto rules. At the first session in May this year, governments will have to agree on the length of the commitment period - either 5 or 8 years - to enable the process of inscribing quantified emission reductions in the second commitment period. But the Protocol only covers 10-15% of global emissions, and governments know efforts must go way beyond that. So in Durban governments also confirmed their intent to undertake broader and immediate mitigation action outside of the Protocol.
2. Under the Convention Durban cemented mitigation plans of all industrialized nations plus 49 developing countries. The sum of those countries accounts for 80% of global emissions, so a higher level of participation than under the Kyoto Protocol, but this participation will be voluntary (although rigorously measured) from now until 2020.
3. Governments know there must be more certainty than that which is offered by voluntary action, so in Durban they also decided to embark on a future legal framework that will cover all nations of the world, to be negotiated by 2015, and go into effect by 2020. Universal participation in legally grounded mitigation targets is a remarkable departure from the past and is Durban's major gift.

A strategy as ambitious as the above must be effectively supported and responsibly guided. Governments have therefore in Durban further established the infrastructure to support developing countries.

Durban saw the successful launch of the Adaptation Committee, the Green Climate Fund, and the Technology Mechanism.

Last, but perhaps most importantly, in Durban, there was a clear realisation that the level of mitigation ambition needs to be raised beyond that which is on the table. Current emission reduction pledges account for only 60% of what is needed to stabilize temperature rise to below 2C, let alone the 1.5C that is needed to keep vulnerable communities safe. In realization of this shortcoming, countries agreed to an immediate work programme on increasing mitigation levels, now, up to and beyond 2015.

With these results, there is no doubt that Durban delivered beyond expectations.

While much of its outcomes are complex and technical, two things stand out: 1) the universal political will to act on climate change is tangible and 2) even more so than the previous conference in Cancun, Durban was a loud message for the world: the future is unmistakably low-carbon!

So governments have clearly set the direction, but this is not enough. The outcomes from Durban will make a significant contribution towards a more sustainable future - if and only if, all pledges, aspirations and plans are fully implemented.

Considering the scale of the transformation necessary for the sustainability revolution, it is clear that governments cannot deliver on their own. One of the themes that ran through Barbara Ward's life was that of cooperation. To quote: "...cooperation across seas, across frontiers and across cultures - cooperation for human renewal and development."

Meeting the challenge we face will be impossible without an unprecedented level of cooperation between the public, the private and the civil society sectors. This is as true for implementing the Durban outcomes as it is for achieving the sustainability revolution more generally.

Between now and 2015, the climate policy-making process needs encouragement — encouragement through concrete action. Action that moves us closer to the energy revolution that we need. Beyond governments, this concerns business and civil society.

I fully understand the many private sector calls for absolute policy clarity before business can invest with total confidence. But let us remember that even in the absence of policy perfection, the trillionth dollar has just been invested in renewable energy. This market trend is encouraging, and begins to pre-adapt economies to the new low-carbon era.

I am encouraged that some enlightened companies have taken the lead, but this is not enough. The outcomes from Durban will make a significant contribution towards a more sustainable future - if progressive companies take the lead and committed civil society remains engaged. Civil society organizations can be a powerful vocal support that influence consumer behaviour and give policy makers a broader political space in which to act courageously.

And so today I stand before you with a clear request to all of you. Whether you represent government, business or civil society, take the unambiguous low-carbon policy signals from Durban, and help us increase action through new partnerships.

- Help us to ignite action to such a level that it can power and maintain momentum for the sustainability revolution, help alleviate poverty and boost policy-makers' confidence.
- Help us make the revolution real.
- Help us achieve the change we need.

In her book *Only One Earth*, Barbara Ward wrote: "We have forgotten how to be good guests, how to walk lightly on the Earth as its other creatures do." It is my sincere hope that with an accelerated drive for sustainability and climate change action, we can finally learn to be good guests and to tread lightly on the Earth. And it is my sincere hope that through action now on the part of every single one of us, we can begin to live up to the visionary ideas that Barbara Ward planted 50 years ago. Her memory demands our unequivocal action.

Thank you
