

John Ashton:

Thank you very much.

State Secretaries, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen, as you've already heard, it's less than three weeks ago that one of, what I believe will come to be seen as the most significant steps forward that have so far been taken in response to climate change, was taken at the spring European Council of the European Union. And I just want to say one word about that, because I think not all of the commentators have understood the full political significance of what was achieved there. And in my view what was achieved was that we have now reached a point in the European Union where we understand that if we want to have a prosperous, competitive economy in Europe, it has to be an economy which is making a rapid transition to low carbon. In other words, the Lisbon Agenda is now the Low Carbon Agenda. And that is a very significant political transition and it's an enormous achievement for the whole of the European Union, but particularly for the German presidency. So I want to begin by applauding the German presidency for what it achieved at that meeting. But also to say that as this gathering itself recognizes, we now need to take a further step if we really are to succeed in responding to climate change at the scale and with the urgency that the problem demands.

A further step is that we need to understand that not only is a successful response to climate change a precondition for prosperity, it's also a precondition for stability and security. We need to make that step because it is objectively true, as we've heard from the contributions so far, and we need to make it, because only if we see this as a security imperative, will we be able to mobilize the responses in our societies, the political capital in our societies, necessary to make that transition to low carbon as quickly as we need to make it. Too much of the discussion about conflict, including the academic discussion, is still routed in a debate about whether this particular driver or that particular driver lies at the heart of conflict - a choice between possible single predominant causes. Is the conflict fundamentally a political problem? Is it the clash of ideologies? To what extent is religion or other cultural drivers dominant? And now more recently we are in the middle of a debate that takes place under the, I think hugely

misleading and dangerous heading of a clash of civilizations. And I think the first thing we need to do if we want to have a sensible, rational debate about the relationship between climate change and security, is to understand that security itself is not something that can be encapsulated in that way. Conflict almost always arises from interplay of different drivers. Some of them human, some of them sometimes related to the environment, related to resources, and sometimes it's the interplay rather than the individual drivers themselves that really provide the triggers that lead to violence, lead to political stress and take societies, if you like, beyond the system conditions within which they can develop peacefully, stably and offer their people a prospect of prosperity. So I think we need to take a much more systemic view of the problem of conflict, and then I think we need to ask a systemic question which is: to what extent will distresses consequent upon a changing climate? To what extent will those stresses, in combination with other stresses that already exist, make conflict more likely or more difficult to prevent? That's the systemic question about climate change and conflict.

You could take any one of dozens of examples that are available at the moment to illustrate that proposition. Let me take one. It's not a particularly original example to quote. At the moment, at this very moment, India is building a fence around Bangladesh. A 4,500 kilometre long barbed wire fence around Bangladesh. I don't know what calculations lead the Indian government to decide to do that, but you don't build fences around countries unless you have a security motivation. And I would suspect that the purpose of the fence is not actually to make Bangladesh more difficult for Indians to visit, if I can put it like that. A few years ago, in the year 2000, there was one of the all too frequent weather related catastrophes in Bangladesh. Fairly low on the scale of some of the catastrophes that have hit that country. But it triggered a migration of several thousand people across the border into India, and immediately as a response to that migration there was violence. The people who migrated came into conflict with the people on the other side of the border who did not welcome their arrival in India. And I think, if you take those two elements together you can see why it's legitimate to be thinking very, very seriously about the security dimensions of climate change when you add to that, again a not very original expectation, that one of the consequences of climate change is likely to be the inundation of a large part of Bangladesh, and therefore

the displacement, both within that country but almost certainly also beyond its borders, of much larger numbers of people than were displaced in that relatively minor incident a few years ago.

And more broadly, we know what we've heard this morning that we can expect as a consequence of climate change scarcity of water in places where water is already scarce. In places where in some cases there is already violence in relation to that scarcity of water. In other places there will be a difficulty of access to energy supplies where access to energy is already restricted and becoming more scarce. In other places there will be problems over food. The world wheat price over the last few years has risen by 40% as a result largely of the drought in Australia. A drought on a thousand year scale, a drought which is very consistent indeed with what the climate models tell you to be expecting in Australia right now. Productive land in places where productive land is scarce, becoming scarcer, we can expect climate change to exacerbate that stress. And one could go on and see that in many places climate change is going to be an additional stress on top of other stresses in situations that are already volatile, and I think as I say that makes this debate not just legitimate but actually very urgent.

And then add to that something else, something which the international conversation about climate change in my view has yet to come to terms with. It's very easy to try and understand the future in terms of the examples that we can draw upon from the past. But climate change is a problem which is telling us more than almost any other: do not expect the past to resemble the future. The stresses that we are already getting from climate change are the front end of the leading edge of a problem that, whatever we do in the immediate future, however successful we are in implementing the decisions that were taken at that European Council the other day, we're going to get much more significant impacts of climate change before we turn the corner. As State Secretary Boomgaarden has said, there is a delay, there is a time lag in the system. Nick Stern, my colleague, in his review of the economics of climate change pointed out that you can expect - on a very conservative reading of the climate models - economic disruption on the scale of the two catastrophic wars that we experienced in the last century and the great depression combined. Put all of that economic destruction together, and you get

something which approximates to what we might expect from unmitigated climate change. There are people who question whether there is a link to be expected between security and climate. But actually, just look back into the 20th century and reflect on that comparison. I think it is very sobering.

Of course, it's one thing to acknowledge that there's a link. But actually, to understand in detail the landscape that we need to negotiate, that we need to get through in order to deal with that link, is another matter. This is a hugely complex problem. There are long chains of cause and effect with large uncertainties at each link in the chain. And I think that one thing that we urgently need to do in response to that is to stimulate an international conversation both at political level and at an analytical level to try and build a shared picture of that landscape. So that we can work out together, not as individual governments or interest groups, but we can work out together what the security dimension of climate change is telling us about what we need to do together, because we will need to do it together. And in that respect I have an announcement that I can make this morning. As many of you know, the UK holds the presidency of the United Nations Security Council next month (we have a rotating presidency one month long in the Security Council). And if you have the presidency you are able to put items on the agenda. And Foreign Secretary Beckett has decided that we would like to convene in the Security Council on the 17th of April a debate about the security dimensions of energy and climate together. Because actually, energy and climate are completely intertwined. This will be the first time ever that the UN Security Council will have debated climate change. The business of the UN Security Council, the core business, is to consider threats to international peace and security, so we are in fact inviting the international community to look together with us at the way in which climate change has implications for international peace and security. And I would strongly encourage everybody in this room and the international community more widely to take a close interest in that debate, and to make sure that not only in the Council chamber in the UN, but in all of the places where we debate our destiny, in governments, in the media, on the internet, wherever we think about the great forces that are shaping the future of humanity, we look more closely and in a spirit of urgency at this issue. Outside in the place, I think where the coffee is, you will find a pile of copies of the concept paper which

the British government has prepared to give a kind of orientation for that debate. You're welcome to help yourself to it and we would welcome reactions to it, comments on it, not only in the debate itself, but in the wider public discussion.

I think we will find, as we explore this issue together, that although it is very hard to think of an analogy to climate change and the challenge which has confronted us on this scale with this urgency, one can learn a little bit at least - and it's particularly poignant to say that here in this city - one can learn a little bit at least from the experience of the cold war. Certainly, as a diplomat (I describe myself as a diplomat who escaped, but was recaptured). As a diplomat, I think the cold war is an instructive metaphor for this problem. In one respect, of course, it's very different. In the case of the cold war there was a single adversary. It was an ideology and a group of people and interests associated with that ideology. In this case, there is no single adversary and actually I think that perhaps I could develop further the idea that State Secretary Boomgaarden shared with us just now, because I think that if you look a little bit further, you see that the adversary is not nature. It's rather dangerous to get into a position where humanity sees nature as an adversary. The adversary is ourselves. We have a problem because of the aggregate of the choices that six billion human beings have, some to a greater extent, some to a lesser extent, because some have footprints that are larger than others, but it's the sum total of all our choices. We are the enemy, in other words. And it's ourselves that we need to confront. This is a Promethean problem, if you like. That's the difference. But the similarity with the cold war is that we didn't fight the cold war with a policy. There is no climate change policy that is going to resolve this for us. The cold war provided a philosophical and political framework that legitimised hundreds of policies. We fought it at the level of culture, at the level of philosophy, at the level of politics, at the level of economics, at the level of institutions, at the level of diplomacy. And we're going to have to do all of those things if we want to build a global low carbon economy as quickly as we need to build it. So I think, just as a kind of metric for the scale of the problem, the cold war is quite an instructive metaphor.

We live now in a world that is characterized more than it ever has been before by interdependence between all the societies that exist on this planet. That is a major shift

in the way the world has been organized. And in the landscape that we need to understand if we as governments are to carry on delivering a prospect of prosperity and security to our citizens. And as State Secretary Kortmann pointed out, we need to see that as much as an opportunity as a threat. We need to learn how to make interdependence work, which is really a question about how to make soft power work - the soft power which is embodied by development ministries, foreign ministries, and in fact all of our ministries going about their business maintaining the boundary conditions that enable us to avoid instability and conflict. We know in the case of climate change that if we don't resolve it, we will face hard power problems on a very significant scale. But in order to avoid those hard power problems, we need to invest - and I think it is right to point out the comparison between the financial resources that we invest in hard power solutions and soft power solutions - we're going to have to learn to invest much more in soft power. And in order to persuade our finance ministries to enable us to do that, we're going to have to understand much more than we do at the moment about how to make soft power work for us, how to ensure that it delivers security and prosperity under conditions of interdependence.

And just if I may to finish, to come back to the European Union, because it has also just passed the 50th anniversary of the beginning of this extraordinary political project. For me the European Union above all is a successful experiment in the application of soft power. And I think we need to reflect very deeply on the success that we have achieved in the EU and how at this moment in history to turn the political debate about Europe from a debate which is essentially inward-looking and institutional, to a debate which is about the role, the constructive role, the outward-looking role that we can play in the world as it struggles to deal with the challenges of interdependence. And to move a debate which is driven in many of our countries by anxiety onto a level which is much more self-confident. We won't deal with interdependence unless we have the confidence and the ambition and the coherence to pose and address the problems that it causes. I hugely welcome this conference as a contribution to that effort. I hope you will all pay a close interest in and engage in the debate which I hope will be triggered by what we do in the Security Council next month.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much.